



**AGROECOLOGY
FUND**



AGROECOLOGICAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP STARTS HERE

Shifting Food Systems in Africa from
Extraction to Regeneration

Members of Goli Mori Agri Enterprise
receiving an okra milling machine handed
over to them by ESAFF-Uganda.

We are especially grateful to the grantee organizations and their members, whose work forms the foundation of this report. We also recognize and thank the authors of the case studies featured in this report.

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Women cocoa producers in Makénéne in the West Region of Cameroon - SALID, Jean Kana (2025).

Executive Summary

Most food systems in Africa these days extract wealth from people, local economies, and landscapes, depleting the soil and sending the profits to global companies. This report, however, is about something different. It describes initiatives where local enterprises contribute toward building regenerative agroecological food systems that restore the health of the land and keep wealth in the community.

Agroecology Fund (AEF) has contributed to these initiatives by providing Business Planning Grants (BPGs) of US\$10,000 each to 15 grassroots organizations. Their goal is to support farming as a way of life while at the same time helping farmers build a healthy economy in the context of a vibrant African agroecology movement. Several examples of the work being done by grantee organizations show that using local food is not just a small project; rather, it contributes importantly to a country being able to build economic independence and food sovereignty.

One of the grantees, Nous Sommes la Solution (NSS), for instance, has shown the economic opportunity inherent in replacing an imported food item with an African-produced alternative. Every year, West African cooks spend US\$375 million on bouillon cubes, most of which comes from outside Africa. Women in Senegal's AJAC cooperative (Association des Jeunes Agriculteurs de Casamance, or Association of Young Farmers of Casamance), however, have begun to offer a healthy alternative

in the form of the Sum Pak brand, which they make from local fermented locust beans. This earns money for local women, keeps profits in the country, and supports Senegalese farmers.

In another example from among the 15 grantees, Cameroon-based SAILD (Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement, or Local Development Initiatives Support Service) is addressing the country's reliance on imported wheat, which is expensive but also risky because of global price fluctuations. SAILD is working on replacing 20 percent of this imported wheat with local tuber flour, which could save the country CFA11.6 billion (US\$19 million) annually.

Many local food businesses cannot find the money they need to grow. They are stuck in what is often called the "missing middle": too big for microfinance and too small for larger financing. Microfinance loans usually stop at US\$5,000, while larger lenders such as the Council on Smallholder Agricultural Finance (CSAF) give loans that average US\$1.2 million. The latter is too large for most local agroecological enterprises, which need investment of between US\$10,000 and \$250,000. Commercial banks also require return of capital alongside 10 to 47 percent annual interest rates, and they begin those charges before the farmers harvest their crops. As collateral, they demand land or buildings that farmers do not have.

This report shows that we need new financial tools that fit the timing of the farm cycle, the size of the business, and the types of market where products are sold.

Area of focus

The 3 main areas of focus among the 15 organizations were: adding value to products through improved processing, upgrading seed systems, and improving farmers' linkages with markets.

01 | Processing and value addition

The focus here was on turning raw crops into products that last longer and sell for more. In Mali, the COFERSA network (Convergence des Femmes Rurales pour la Souveraineté Alimentaire, or Convergence of Rural Women for Food Sovereignty) helps seven cooperatives package shea butter, rice, and peanut butter. In Togo, the INADES-Formation (Institut Africain pour le Développement Économique et Social-Formation, or African Institute for Economic and Social Development-Formation) promotes the revival of fonio, a local grain that is nutritious and grows well in dry areas. Demand for fonio in the capital city is rising, but the women cultivating it need to be able to finance better machines to meet that demand.

02 | Seed Systems

Projects in this area of focus are aimed at ensuring that farmers can get traditional seeds that are better adapted to their region. In Kenya, the Seed Savers Network has built a mobile app that enables farmers to trade the seedlings and seeds of climate resilient crops. In Ethiopia, the Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (MELCA) is working with the Endelibe Farmers Cooperative to restore local wheat and lentil varieties that handle drought better than do industrial seeds.

03 | Direct Markets

The focus here is on linking farmers to buyers, removing intermediaries who often take too much profit. Surveys by the Kenyan Peasants League (KPL), which runs seven food cooperatives, show that 94 percent of urban shoppers would buy from these local groups if given the opportunity, and the Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF) Uganda works with a network of 765,560 farmers to help their farms move from a subsistence level of operation to being successful agroecological businesses.

The planning process

Five main requirements for success were revealed in the planning process. There was a clear need for farmers to have: good data on which to base decisions, awareness and knowledge of the relevant laws, astute business plans, sufficient and appropriate capital, and a supportive business and policy environment.

1) Data is essential: Farmers often do not know what shoppers want and thus can benefit from a good information flow that informs them that, for example, urban consumers have expressed a preference for healthy local food.

2) Farmers need to know the law: Laws often present farmers with hurdles and obstacles and they benefit from help in navigating them. Many farmers, for example, do not know the rules for business licenses or for acquiring the necessary permits, and can be prevented from selling traditional seeds by their lack of familiarity with international protocols such as UPOV91 and national seed laws.

3) Giving sufficient attention to planning builds confidence: Writing a business plan helps farmers see themselves as entrepreneurs and businesspeople. This shift in mindset is key to the success of agroecological enterprises.

4) Capital must be patient and should be appropriate for the borrower and the business:

Building an agroecologically based enterprise takes time and understanding; for example, investors must offer terms that match the cycle of the crops, and early-stage enterprises need grants to build their foundations well.

5) Supportive public policies are key: Policies that create an enabling environment for agroecological initiatives are a central requirement for success. While each individual business faces unique financing needs, well-designed and well-implemented public policies can increase the vibrancy of the agroecology business community and network.

Looking ahead

These Business Planning Grants have shown themselves to be very useful first steps. By August 2025, 8 of the 15 groups had used their business plans to raise more funding and had procured new Agroecology Fund grants ranging from US\$80,000 to US\$120,000. In Cameroon, for example, Concertation Nationale des Organisations Paysannes au Cameroun (National Consultation of Peasant Organizations in Cameroon, or CNOP-CAM) is now using US\$24,600 to support 10 businesses through a revolving credit fund, and SAILD is using US\$120,000 to help artisanal bakeries use local flours.

To scale this work, there is a need to move away from applying only traditional metrics such as yield and income. Measurement of success must include community health, soil quality, and local food diversification; it must also include the strengthening of public policies, which requires advocacy capacity and the power to win. Those in the “missing middle” that lack financing do not lack talent or opportunity; rather, they lack the right kind of investment in their individual businesses and in the networks that incubate them. By providing flexible capital and technical support, African farmers and entrepreneurs can build food systems that are both resilient and truly their own.



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This report is a reflection of the agroecology movement's vision, resilience, and commitment to building more just, and sovereign food systems.

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List of Acronyms

AAE	African Agroecological Entrepreneurship
ACDIC	Association Citoyenne de Défense des Intérêts Collectifs (Citizens' Association for the Defense of Collective Interests)
ACE	Agroecology Check for Enterprises
AEF	Agroecology Fund
AFSA	Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa
AJAC	Association des Jeunes Agriculteurs de Casamance (Casamance Young Farmers Association)
B-ACT	Business Agroecology Criteria Tool
BPG	Business Planning Grant
CEFROHT	Center for Food and Adequate Living Rights
CFA	West African franc where "CFA" stands for Communauté Financière Africaine, or African Financial Community
CNOP-CAM	Concertation Nationale des Organisations Paysannes au Cameroun (National Consultation of Peasant Organizations in Cameroon)
COFERSA	Convergence des Femmes Rurales pour la Souveraineté Alimentaire (Convergence of Rural Women for Food Sovereignty)
CSAF	Council on Smallholder Agricultural Finance
ESAFF	Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers' Forum
HLPE	High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition
INADES-Formation	Institut Africain pour le Développement Économique et Social-Formation (African Institute for Economic and Social Development-Formation)
KEBS	Kenya Bureau of Standards
KPL	Kenyan Peasants League
MELCA	Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action
NSS	Nous Sommes la Solution (We Are the Solution)
PAFO	Pan-African Farmers Organization
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PGS	Participatory Guarantee System
SAILD	Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement (Local Development Initiatives Support Service)
SME	Small and medium enterprises
TM	Territorial markets

Introduction

West African ceebu jën is a tasty dish of succulent fish and vegetables atop tomato-infused jollof rice. Few would imagine that the enticing flavor and aroma of Senegal's national dish is enhanced by imported bouillon cubes, which cost West African cooks US\$375 million a year (Nous Sommes la Solution 2023). Twenty years ago, however, in a bold innovation, a cooperative of rural women from the Casamance reinvented their foremothers' flavorful spice blend to replace these commercially processed bouillon cubes. Under the brand name Sum Pak, the Association des Jeunes Agriculteurs de Casamance (Casamance Young Farmers Association, or AJAC) has been producing and selling this product in increasing quantities. Basing it on traditional fermented locust bean paste (soubala), women of the AJAC Cooperative (who are members of Nous Sommes la Solution, or We Are the Solution) source all-natural ingredients from local women and produce a healthy, low-sodium product with no chemical additives. Chefs and consumers alike sing its praises. This homegrown business meets the triple bottom line of social, environmental, and economic goals ("people, profit, and planet") and yet it lacks formal finance or strong backers. Imagine what they could achieve with proper support and investment!

This story of the AJAC Cooperative and Sum Pak is not unique. Across Africa, smallholder farmers, processors, and cooperatives are building successful agroecological businesses that strengthen local food systems, improve nutrition, and nurture biodiversity. They operate against immense odds, however, and are largely excluded from the financial and policy support that fuels conventional industrial agribusiness.

1.1 The investment problem: A system stacked against agroecology

Shifting investment toward agroecology in Africa requires a fundamental rethink of the current finance landscape. For agroecology to scale, governments, policymakers and donors must work with smallholder farmers, processors, aggregators, distributors and retailers to address two critical issues: the lack of appropriate finance and the need for new principles that are focused on ecosystem health and on shared prosperity for people.

The gap is stark. Funding for agroecology is growing, but too slowly. The Global Alliance for the Future of Food estimates a need for a tenfold increase in investment (Global Alliance for the Future of Food 2023). Over the last 30 years, there has also been a tepid amount of “social investment” in Global South smallholders overall (that is, not necessarily agroecology farmers). Lenders such as Root Capital have tended to focus on businesses within export-oriented value chains, which account for about 30 percent of African agricultural production (Brennan 2024).¹ The diverse locally marketed and consumed crops remain starved of attention and capital.

The infamous “missing middle” is a major issue in agricultural finance, in that microcredit loans are too small for meaningful growth, while lenders such as the Council on Smallholder Agricultural Finance (CSAF) have an average active loan size of US\$1.2 million (CSAF 2025: 88), which is far beyond the reach of most smallholder farmers and agroecological entrepreneurs. Furthermore, existing finance schemes such as the One Acre Fund often promote in-kind loans of

chemical fertilizers and imported seeds, while African banks and credit institutions demand a combination of collateral and interest rates of 10 to 47 percent, which are prohibitive for smallholders (Aceli Africa 2020; Making Finance Work for Africa n.d.). AGRA (formerly Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa) focuses its support on agro-dealer networks (local shops selling fertilizer, seeds, pesticides) and input subsidy programs featuring subsidized fertilizer and hybrid maize or other improved seeds. Generally speaking, loans from banks and credit institutions are also not aligned with agricultural cycles and capital flows; for example, they often charge interest before products are harvested, which further penalizes smallholders. Loans tend to favor financing chemical inputs rather than, for example, local manufacture of bioinputs and techniques to build healthy soils. Efforts to address this gap face significant challenges. A recent report on catalytic capital for African small and medium enterprises (SMEs) noted restrictive business impact definitions, a lack of patient capital, limited non-financial support, high collateral demands, and extended, tedious underwriting processes (Open Capital 2022).

By ignoring agroecology, we also overlook the damaging externalities of the industrial food system including decreased biodiversity, reduced soil health, toxic exposure to chemicals, and polluted water. The hidden costs of these are estimated to be at least US\$12 trillion annually (FAO 2023).

¹ Figures are based on data from five African countries, collected between 2020 and 2023.

1.2 The investment gap in agroecology: The need for broader metrics

Agroecology encompasses a broad range of activities which may not always be associated with agricultural finance; these include fisheries, agroforestry, and wild-harvested products such as nuts, fruits, and honey. Such activities are practiced by local communities using agroecological principles; besides economic well-being, they bring benefits related to health, nutrition, clean water, biodiversity, and local resiliency.

Social investment funds in agricultural development mainly consider established businesses that use conventional practices, and they often prioritize those with an export focus. With agroecology's 13 principles and multiple outcomes, many funding bodies cannot imagine it as the focus of an investment strategy; instead, they stick to themes and metrics with which they are familiar and which are more widely known, such as sustainable agriculture and conservation agriculture. In Africa, climate-smart agriculture is widely used, which ticks the "healthier environment" box. A growing body of evidence demonstrates, however, that by ignoring agroecology we overlook the externalities that both farming communities and scientists say are

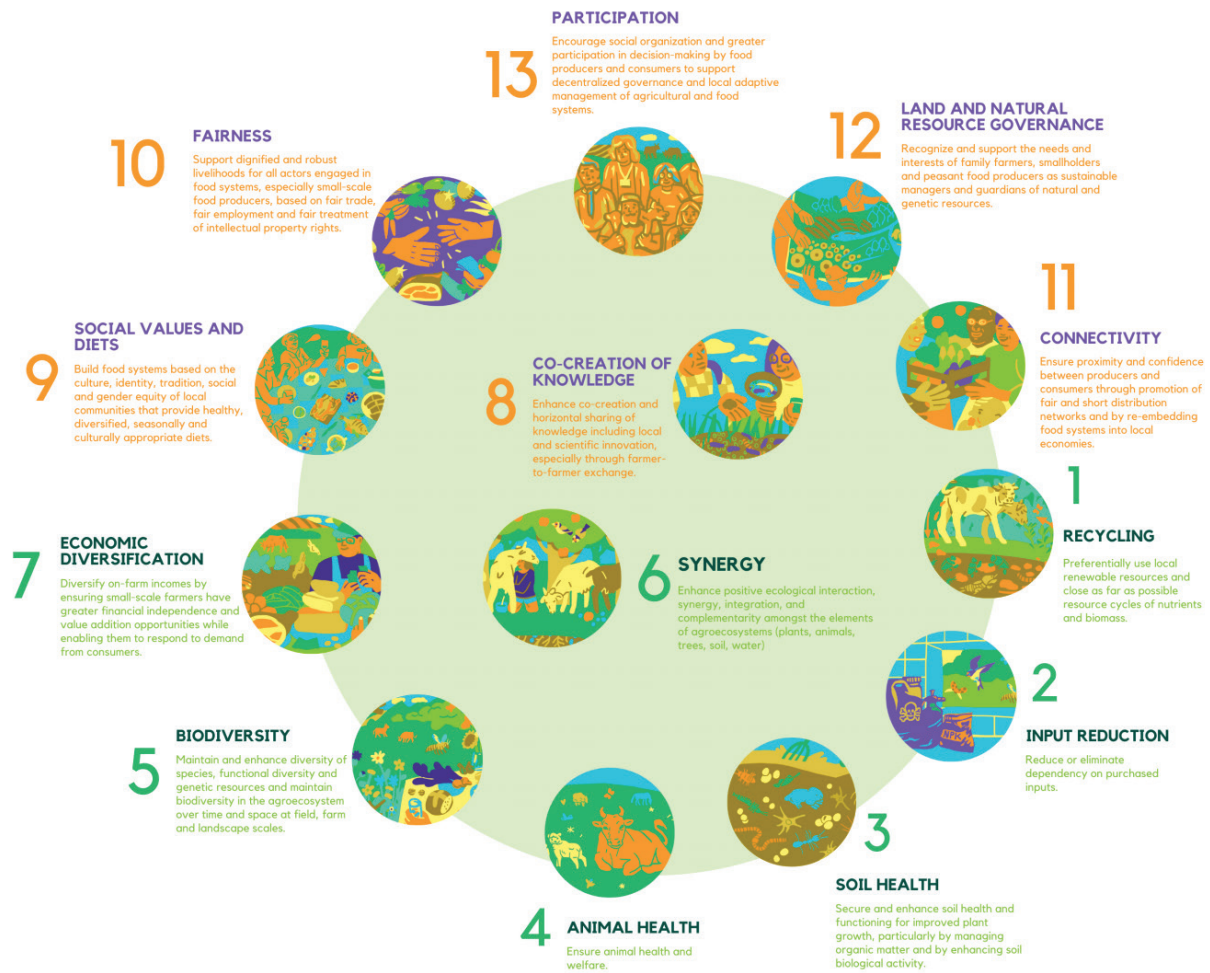
threatening the well-being of their farm ecologies and the planet's biodiversity (IPES-Food 2022a, 2022b; Vikas 2024). Recent investment analyses, however, have incorporated the 13 principles and the multidimensionality of agroecology using spider graphs and other holistic approaches. The Agroecology Infopool, for example, includes diverse tools such as the Business Agroecology Criteria Tool (B-ACT), the Agroecology Investment Guide, and the Agroecology Check for Enterprises (ACE) (Agroecology Infopool n.d.a).²

The Transformational Investing in Food Systems initiative (TIFS) has published reports evaluating food systems investing in East Africa which include an agroecological analysis of investment funds (Van den Eeckhout et al. 2023). Finally, the Agroecology Coalition has spearheaded the Agroecology Finance Assessment and Tracking Tool (Agroecology Coalition 2026a). It is designed to assess the agroecological dimensions of development projects and to track funding in agroecology across development agencies and philanthropic projects.



² Agroecology Infopool is a resource for entrepreneurs, farmers organizations, investors, donors, and others that is meant to help make the business case for agroecology.

Box 1: The 13 principles of agroecology



TRANSFORMATIONAL

INCREMENTAL

LEVEL 5

Build a new global food system based on participation, localness, fairness and justice

LEVEL 4

Reconnect consumers and producers through the development of alternative food networks

LEVEL 3

Redesign agroecosystems

LEVEL 2

Substitute conventional inputs and practices with agroecological alternatives

LEVEL 1

Increase efficiency of input use and reduce use of costly, scarce or environmentally damaging inputs

FOOD SYSTEM

AGROECOSYSTEM

The High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition (HLPE) is a science-policy interface of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS); it was commissioned in 2009 by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In 2019, it published the 13 principles of agroecology (HLPE 2019). These 13 principles are increasingly accepted as a road map for holistic food systems transformation, including by the Agroecology Fund, and they form the foundation of the Agroecology Coalition’s Finance Assessment and Tracking Tool (for a guide to the 13 principles, see Agroecology Fund 2024; Agroecology Coalition 2026b).

Source: Agroecology Europe (Gliessman, 2007; HLPE, 2019) modified

ILLUSTRATIONS: DOROTTYA POÓR

Box 2: Types of agricultural finance

01 | Debt finance (loans and credit)

Globally, this is the most common form of agricultural finance. There are two types: short-term loans/working capital credit which is used for seeds, labor and inputs, and medium- to long-term loans that are used to finance larger purchases such as machinery and irrigation systems.

02 | Capital expenditure (CapEx) financing

This refers to financing for infrastructure and durable assets that improve long-term productivity; included here are such purchases as tractors, processing equipment, storage facilities, and solar pumps.

03 | Revenue-based finance (RBF)/ cash-flow-linked repayment

This refers to an innovative structure where repayment is linked to revenues instead of to fixed interest schedules.

04 | Equity finance (ownership stakes)

Less common in smallholder farming, equity financing is more relevant for agribusinesses, cooperatives, and farmer-owned enterprises where: 1) private equity/venture capital or other types of outside investors take an ownership stake in the business for a return of future sales; 2) farmer cooperative members contribute to funding collective infrastructure; or 3) impact investors seek to provide equity for those with social or environmental goals.

05 | Value chain/trade finance

Here, farmers access finance via contracts or relationships within supply chains. Examples are when seed and fertilizer companies provide inputs on credit and deduct the payment from harvest proceeds, or when buyers (exporters, processors) advance funds to secure supply, or when farmers store crops and use receipts as collateral to borrow before sale.

06 | Insurance-linked finance

This blends risk management with financing; for example, index-based crop insurance allows lenders to reduce risk and extend credit.

07 | Blended and innovative finance

This comprises newer mechanisms for overcoming agricultural finance barriers; it includes blended finance, integrated capital, impact bonds, venture studios, carbon credit revenues, and digital/fintech lending. Launching a business often involves a mix of grants, subsidized capital, technical assistance, incubation, and creative finance.

08 | Grants and subsidies

This offers more flexible agricultural finance options and is often used to de-risk investments and attract private capital.

1.3 What is different about AEF's approach?

For the past 35 years, in contrast to the Green Revolution's technology transfer, African civil society and farmers organizations have accelerated agroecology with a strong focus on facilitating learning. In the process, limited access to credit and markets has emerged as a major barrier to scaling.

From 2020 to 2022, the Agroecology Fund (AEF) partnered with the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) to conduct research on agroecological entrepreneurship. This research ([documented in AFSA and AEF Reports and Case Studies](#)) confirmed the vitality of African entrepreneurs and territorial markets despite significant challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a pivotal moment for agroecology globally, with grassroots organizations responding to pandemic food shortages by strengthening local markets and solidarity economics such as barter and mutual aid. AEF's Emergency COVID-19 Response grants saw disbursements of funds to agroecology initiatives in 45 countries, while AFSA launched its "My Food is African" campaign in October 2022 at its 4th Biennial Food Systems Conference in Yaoundé, Cameroon. In May of 2022, a few months before the conference, AFSA joined with AEF in launching its complementary African Agroecological Entrepreneurship (AAE) and Territorial Markets (TM) initiative. Both are supported by AEF and fall under AFSA's Citizens Working Group. The campaign is about building awareness of, and demand for,

African foods, diets and cuisines, while the AAE initiative is particularly about advancing enterprises that can respond to this increased demand. In 2025, AFSA's AAE program produced the "Re-Shaping Food Systems" storybook, which captures 15 transformative entrepreneur stories (AFSA 2025).

The AFSA/AEF research highlighted a critical capital mismatch, revealing that there was a largely unmet need for capital among smallholders practicing agroecology. It suggested that this need, which ranged from US\$10,000 to US\$250,000, was not being met because of:

Unavailability of financing due to a lack of appropriately sized loans, high collateral demands, and no crop insurance;

Ill-informed investors with a limited understanding of agroecology and its potential;

Poor business skills among entrepreneurs, leaving them in need of bankable plans, better market intelligence, and better management skills; and

An unsupportive policy/infrastructure ecosystem.

1.4 The Business Planning Grant initiative

AEF's 2023 decision to launch its Business Planning Grant (BPG) initiative was directly informed by research findings, especially with regard to the capital gap and the need for stronger business skills. These gaps were also noted in AEF's five-year strategic plan, which included actions to support investment in agroecological businesses.

AEF consulted with 15 partners, all of whom reported promoting small businesses through technical services, marketing, and cooperative support. They highlighted three key bottlenecks:

Access to finance and credit,

Access to markets and marketing services (or business development services), and

Access to infrastructure for value addition.

AEF also recognized a gap between our desire to attract investment to agroecology and our partners' capacity to develop strong proposals to draw in the right kind of capital. The BPG project was designed with the aim of strengthening entrepreneurial capacities and thereby

helping to bridge this gap. AEF then invited and received applications from 22 African partners who were connected to agroecology businesses and were seeking to create robust business plans that were rooted in their strengths.

AEF anticipated that these US\$10,000 BPGs would support their partners in taking the first steps in evaluating their businesses and planning for larger initiatives. AEF anticipated that some of these groups would receive follow-on grant funding of US\$50,000 to US\$120,000 in 2024/2025.

The 15 awardee organizations explored 3 main areas:

supporting women-led microenterprises,

assessing specific value chains,

and creating plans for particular crops.

A priority was how to help small businesses within the network obtain access to affordable credit and technical assistance. The businesses focused on a diversity of products including cultivated crops such as fonio and peanuts, wild-harvested goods such as shea butter and soubala, bioinputs, and value-added products such as bouillon, peanut butter, and tuber flours.

Box 3: Organizations awarded Business Planning Grants

Cameroon

Concertation Nationale des Organisations Paysannes au Cameroun (CNOP-CAM)

Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement (SAILD)

Tanzania

Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (MVIWATA)

Ethiopia

Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (MELCA)

Togo

Institut Africain pour le Développement Économique et Social-Formation (INADES-Formation)

Kenya

Kenyan Peasants League (KPL)

Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM Kenya)
Seed Savers Network

Uganda

Center for Food and Adequate Living Rights (CEFROHT)

Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF Uganda)

Mali

Convergence des Femmes Rurales pour la Souveraineté Alimentaire (COFERSA)

Zimbabwe

Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM Zimbabwe)

Senegal

Fahamu/Nous Sommes la Solution (NSS)

Multi-country

Groundswell International, Inc., Mali, Senegal

Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI), Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa

1.5 The significance of this report

This report is based on detailed descriptions that bear witness to real life experiences of farmers organizations implementing Business Planning Grants. It highlights lessons from these grassroots initiatives that can and should be shared with a wider audience of donors, investors, and policymakers.

The findings are significant in that they strengthen two main arguments:

- 01** *A meaningful transition toward agroecology and food sovereignty requires investment in agroecological enterprises; and*
- 02** *Business Planning Grants are a tool that enables grassroots enterprises themselves to do the groundwork needed to create viable businesses; in cases where a network is incubating numerous small businesses, BPGs can support that network of complementary businesses.*

These findings should be valuable to those practitioners advancing agroecology as a solution, as well as to investors, donors, and policymakers.

The report is structured as follows: Section 2 presents a more detailed picture of six initiatives supported by Business Planning Grants; Section 3 provides summaries of the remaining initiatives supported by BPGs; Section 4 presents our findings and analysis of the key lessons learned, and Section 5 offers recommendations for supporting the untapped potential of agroecological entrepreneurship; Section 6 presents our conclusions.



Fonio harvest in the field,
INADES-Formation Togo
(Felix, 2024)

Highlighted grassroots initiatives

AEF's partners advance agroecology by organizing farmers, fisheries communities, forest gatherers, pastoralists and allies, and by strengthening producer networks and creating pathways to markets. Out of the 15 BPG grantees, we chose 6 initiatives that illustrate the impact of these grant funds and highlight the diversity and depth of the partners' activities and approaches. We deliberately included initiatives that represented a variety of production and transformation sectors, a number of different geographies and ecosystems, and a range of strategies for improving marketing and enhancing financial return to agroecological producers.

The six initiatives show how partners turned challenges into opportunities, offered technical training to entrepreneurs, generated and analyzed market data, and applied visionary thinking with regard to linking farmers with viable markets. Together, they provide practical entry points for learning and a rich source of grounded insights on how business planning can strengthen agroecological entrepreneurship.



2.1 Cameroon: From village savings to value chains

Concertation Nationale des Organisations Paysannes au Cameroun—CNOP-CAM (https://www.facebook.com/cnopcam/?locale=en_GB)

2.1.1 Background

Founded by peasant leaders in 2000, CNOP-CAM is a national umbrella organization encompassing 5,000 local organizations. It was founded in the wake of the “Ebolowa Declaration”, drafted by peasant leaders in response to the government’s withdrawal from the agriculture sector in the 1990s, which was characterized by structural adjustment policies and the collapse of the Council of Peasant Federations of Cameroon.

CNOP-CAM comprises peasant organizations (cooperatives, community interest groups or GICs, associations, federations), groups representing societal sectors (women, youth, universities, minorities), and specialized peasant institutions (technical and extension, rural financing, and marketing organizations). On average, each organization comprises 75 family farms.

This approximately 400,000-member network is composed of 56 percent women and 30 percent youth. It works with agro-silvopastoral and fisheries producers and craftspeople, with a special focus on women, youth, and minorities. It promotes family farming as a pathway to food and nutritional security and sovereignty; it also supports sustainable natural resource management, environmental preservation, and biodiversity conservation, while enhancing rural communities. It is a founding member of the Plateforme Sous-Régionale des Organisations Paysannes d’Afrique Centrale (Regional Coalition of Peasant Organizations, or PROPAC) and, in this capacity, it is also a member of the Pan-African Farmers Organisation (PAFO). The Programme Femmes et Jeunes dans l’Agroécologie au Cameroun (Women and Youth in Agroecology Program, or PROFEJA) is a CNOP-CAM program dedicated to empowering women and youth in agroecology.

Grant title: *Women and Youth in Agroecology Program (PROFEJA): Planning project for institutional capacity building, development, and consolidation of small agroecological businesses for rural women and youth members of CNOP-CAM*

Country: Cameroon

Goals

PROFEJA aims to build the capacity of its cooperative members to identify, develop, finance and manage small agroecological businesses. Using a set of collaborative processes including market analysis, business and financial training, and training in agroecological production techniques, CNOP-CAM aims to bolster the cooperatives' food and nutritional well-being and their income sources. This will enhance CNOP-CAM's capacity to provide institutional and organizational support to its members, with a view to creating sustainable jobs and income sources based on local foods, thereby strengthening local food sovereignty and enhancing the status of women and youth in Cameroon.

Context

In Cameroon, the farming and forestry sectors employ 60 percent of the workforce, while women contribute 70 percent of the agricultural workforce. Despite this, rural people have experienced minimal income improvement and limited access to opportunities. This has prompted CNOP-CAM to strive to develop market outlets for agroecological producers.

In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, CNOP-CAM launched an AEF-supported initiative to help rural women and youth in the Centre Region of Cameroon process and market agroecological products and implement a revolving credit fund. As part of this effort, five committees opened a warehouse and a point of sale for the purchase and marketing of agroecological products sourced from women and youth. This initiative involves a collective of 20 women leaders involved in group sales and procurement of agroecological products. CNOP-CAM also purchased a vehicle to facilitate the transportation of products to market.



Fonio harvest in the field, IN-ADES-Formation Togo (Felix, 2024)

Two years later, in 2023, CNOP-CAM received additional support from AEF to help 6 groups of 250 women and youth start 9 business enterprises through a revolving credit fund. PROFEJA gave loans ranging from US\$500 to US\$3,100 to a number of cooperatives engaged in various businesses, including fish farming, banana and African pistachio intercropping, farming of sweet potatoes, sesame and cassava, raising of broiler chickens, and managing of community grain storage facilities. They set up a governance body and provided nine loans to six women-led groups. The loans varied from CFA250,000 (about US\$410) to CFA1,750,000 (about US\$2,900). CNOP-CAM was able to set up and monitor these projects which enabled better coordination, more effective advocacy, engagement with financial institutions, and increased visibility among decisionmakers and partners. Women and youth also began to develop an interest in a locally controlled revolving fund with a minimum monthly savings of CFA2,000 (about US\$3.25) per member. Although the cooperatives were able to launch and successfully complete numerous production cycles, they faced many challenges; these included harsh and unpredictable weather conditions, insufficient credit, and an inadequate capacity to manage inventory. Several skills gaps were identified, including lack of managerial experience in agroecological entrepreneurship, finance, and savings; inadequate technical skills in agroecology; and absence of climate-adapted farming methods. Awareness of these gaps heightened group members' interest in receiving additional training and support.

2.1.2 Business Planning Grant Activities

In order to take advantage of the experience acquired and perform a more in-depth analysis of the prospects for developing lucrative markets in each of the six cooperatives, CNOP-CAM embarked on a participatory planning process aimed at developing business plans that were suited to the specific context of each cooperative. It defined the following objectives:

Organize and hold launch and planning meetings so that all the communities are informed and can participate in the assessment of agroecological market access and in program design;

Organize and hold discussions with each of the six cooperatives, conduct a participatory assessment of needs and challenges, and design solutions for small business market access;

Develop a plan of action for the "Women and Youth in Agroecology" program (PROFEJA).

Assess the capacity of CNOP-CAM to support small agroecological businesses by offering them appropriate technical support;

Assess the financial needs of a market access program for small agroecological businesses; and

2.1.3 Background

The market access assessment process enabled CNOP-CAM to work with cooperative members to identify specific value chains that were offering high potential for food and nutritional security and sovereignty, as well as job and income creation. The members chose cassava, yam, potatoes, sweet bananas, sesame, beans and other legumes, fruits and vegetables, agroecological chicken farming, aquaculture, beekeeping, small ruminants, conventional livestock production, and fruit trees.

Thanks to the Business Planning Grant, CNOP-CAM, in collaboration with members of its cooperative, produced a planning document and a two-year proposal that clearly set out its strategy and approach to developing agroecological value chains.

2.1.4 Learnings

- *Participatory processes that involve women and youth in the development of cooperatives are powerful organizing tools;*
- *Cooperatives enable women and youth to gain access to new and profitable markets; applying cooperative principles necessitates continuous training of, and commitment from, rural women and youth to strengthen the collaborative marketing of agroecological products and joint logistics management, thus opening access to new and profitable markets;*
- *Adequate financial resources are essential for starting and sustaining businesses; groups need capital to maintain inventory, pay upfront for the women's products, and purchase essential goods;*
- *Financial education is essential; continuous training of producers on the importance of savings and access to credit is essential to sustained and consistent market supply and for ensuring adherence to contracts between women farmers, stores, and consumers; and*
- *Agroecological training is needed to equip producers with the skills to cope with drought and unpredictable weather conditions; groups engaged in local value chains must continue to use adaptive agroecological practices to address the effects of climate change.*

2.1.5 Next steps

During the next phase, CNOP-CAM will reach 5,000 members with the support of a complementary grant from AEF that is aimed at strengthening women- and youth-run agroecological businesses. A series of activities is jointly planned with the service provider organizations; these include technical support for business structuring, training in value chain awareness and planning, increasing access to credit, and planning and introducing transportation services for the distribution of key products.

In addition, a revolving credit fund of FCFA15 million (about US\$24,600) will be established to support 10 businesses in consolidating and accelerating their growth. The program will also promote women's and youth involvement in leadership, networking, land rights education, and agroecology for business and economic development.

A key component of this next phase is CNOP-CAM's plan to build their internal capacity to support member cooperatives; this includes:

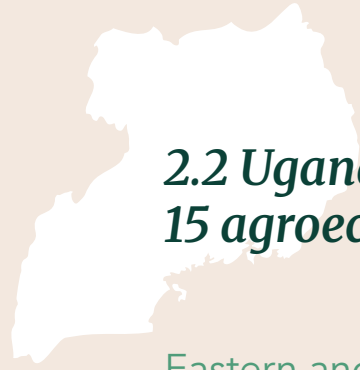
Implementing a multipartite committee in charge of project management;

Providing means of transportation to agroecological businesses; and

Establishing a credit management committee for a credit fund;

Establishing a communication system to facilitate marketing of agroecological products.





2.2 Uganda: The mindset shift—launching 15 agroecological businesses

Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers' Forum—ESAFF (<https://www.esaffuganda.org/>)

2.2.1 Background

Uganda's Eastern and Southern Africa Small-Scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF) is a membership-based organization dedicated to supporting small-scale farmers, who form the majority of Uganda's food producers. ESAFF Uganda was launched in 2002 and is the largest farmer-led movement in the country, with 12,588 community groups across 54 districts. It represents over 765,560 farmers, 67 percent of whom are women. ESAFF Uganda aims to empower small-scale farmers to engage in development processes and is part of a 15-country regional ESAFF network and of La Via Campesina, the global peasant movement.

Recognizing that over 64 percent of Uganda's population is not part of the regulated, state-recognized and taxed economy, ESAFF Uganda launched its Agroecology Business Hub (ABH) in February 2023. The Hub was created to address a critical gap identified by farmers, that is, the need for support in building profitable and resilient businesses. ESAFF Uganda aims to achieve a mindset shift, moving farmers from viewing agroecology solely as a practice to appreciating it as a viable business. This grant builds on that work, focusing on creating entrepreneurs and demonstrating that farmers can and should "come out to the market".

Grant title: *Upscaling small-scale farmer-led agroecological enterprises for improved livelihoods*

Geographical scope: *Uganda, with activities in the districts of Masaka, Mubende, Apac, Amuria, Mayuge, Adjumani, Gulu, Kasese, and Nebbi*



Members of Goli Mori Agri Enterprise showing their okra seed during the assessment and support visit



Small-scale farmers during group discussion at the Business Development Workshop

Goals

The primary goal of the business planning exercise was to leverage the US\$10,000 grant to expand the work of the Agroecology Business Hub. It aimed to tackle the primary bottlenecks hindering small-scale farmers; these included: limited access to business information and skills, restricted access to finance, and unfavorable market access. By providing targeted business support, ESAFF intended to showcase agroecology as a profitable and commercially viable sector.

Context

In Uganda, more than 80 percent of food producers are small-scale farmers, with average farm size ranging from 0.5 to 2 acres; as such, they comprise the highest proportion of the population living below the poverty line. Farm-level profitability is constrained by four critical gaps: 1) weak capabilities in various areas including supply chain knowledge and business management; 2) limited capital/financing; 3) weak relationships with markets, as in, for example, poor buyer access and regulatory compliance; and 4) inadequate capacity to deal with climate change and climate variability. The Business Planning Grant addresses these bottlenecks by strengthening planning, improving compliance and market entry, and linking farmers to finance and buyers; together, these enable farmer-led enterprises to compete and grow.

2.2.2 Business Planning Grant activities

The grant supported a multifaceted approach centered on practical training, market exposure, and direct business support³. Key activities included:

Market exposure

Supporting 12 small-scale farmers to participate in the Harvest Money Expo 2024 in Kampala and showcasing products at the Agricultural Education Show;

Financial support

Extending direct credit support toward procurement of value-addition equipment (a groundnut grinding machine and an okra grinding machine) for two women-led enterprises;

Capacity building

Conducting 2 business support webinars and a 2-day business development workshop for 15 enterprise leaders, focusing on marketing, financial literacy, and policy advocacy;

Technical assistance

Conducting assessment visits and providing technical backstopping to at least 12 distinct farmer enterprises across Uganda; and

Formalization

Assisting five business initiatives to formalize their operations through registration with the Uganda Registration Services Bureau (URSB);

Digital marketing

Utilizing the KilimoMart online marketplace (<https://www.esaffuganda.org/category/all-products>) to promote and sell products from the supported enterprises.

³ See this blog from December 2024 on ESAFF's Business Planning Hub: <https://www.esaffuganda.org/post/the-agroecology-business-hub-boosting-market-access-for-agroecologically-grown-products>.

2.2.3 Outcomes

- **Improved business operations:** Supported business initiatives demonstrated immediate application of their learnings. St. Mauritz Women's Enterprise expanded its customer base into local supermarkets, KGCA Agro Enterprise launched a YouTube marketing channel, and Mumbuzi Agroecology School Enterprise diversified cassava packaging for different customers. Several groups streamlined and strengthened their leadership structures.
- **Increased initiative and entrepreneurship:** Farmers showed increased agency. Within two months of receiving a processing machine, one group independently developed its own packaging solution without waiting for additional support, demonstrating that they were "seeking income" and ready to "run fast". application of their learnings. St. Mauritz Women's Enterprise expanded its customer base into local supermarkets, KGCA Agro Enterprise launched a YouTube marketing channel, and Mumbuzi Agroecology School Enterprise diversified cassava packaging for different customers. Several groups streamlined and strengthened their leadership structures.
- **Wider impact:** The business planning initiative generated a desire among other local farmers to engage in agroecology as a business, and the group ownership model fostered a stronger sense of community among members.

2.2.4 Learnings

The implementation process revealed several learnings for ESAFF and the broader funding community. These included:

- **Certification is a major barrier:** The biggest challenge identified is that formal certification and standardization processes are significant hurdles for small-scale farmers. The high financial costs and complex procedures often discourage farmers from pursuing organic certification, leaving them at a competitive disadvantage in markets where demand for certified products is growing. The Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) being developed by ESAFF will address this barrier.⁴

⁴ For a booklet on the PGS that was already developed in 2022, see https://6627cfd7-dfbf-4bc7-9649-fd8b77f01c06.filesusr.com/ugd/8c8c7c_0466db977ef84788983ed31324121c85.pdf.

- **Group approaches are transformative:** Working with farmer groups, cooperatives, and associations is the most beneficial approach. It enhances bargaining power, improves market access, provides a platform for collective credit, and strengthens community resilience. As one enterprise noted, selling as a group strengthens bargaining power, secures better prices, and guarantees a more reliable market.
- **Demand outstrips available resources:** The Agroecology Business Hub receives high interest and requests for support from many farmer groups; however, a lack of sufficient resources and capacity to meet these needs means that the Hub can only serve a few farmers. This highlights the need for additional support to help the Hub meet growing demand.

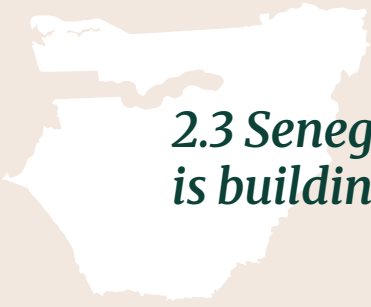
2.2.5 Next steps

The success of this planning grant has informed ESAFF's vision for a more robust, long-term program to support agroecological entrepreneurship. The organization is actively exploring how to build on this momentum by:



⁵ The Parish Development Model (PDM) in Uganda is a government strategy aimed at organizing and delivering public and private sector interventions to create wealth and generate employment at the parish level, which is the lowest economic planning unit. It serves as a “last mile” approach for service delivery, focusing on increasing household incomes and improving the overall welfare of Ugandans; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parish_Development_Model.

⁶ Black soldier fly (BSF) technology refers to the use of BSF larvae to process organic waste into valuable products such as animal feed and fertilizer. This innovative approach offers a sustainable solution for waste management and resource recovery, converting materials that would otherwise be discarded into valuable resources; see <https://flybox.bio/black-soldier-fly-farming-how-it-works/>.



2.3 Senegal: How local bouillon is building a healthier economy

Nous Sommes la Solution- NSS / Fahamu
(<https://wasafrika.org/en/>)

2.3.1 Background

We Are the Solution (Nous Sommes la Solution, or NSS) is a Pan-African movement of organizations that brings together more than 500 rural women's associations and 175,000 members across West Africa. Launched in 2011 by 12 rural women's organizations, this women's rights movement is part of the global campaign for food sovereignty. NSS operates in 8 countries and comprises 14 Rural Women's Associations (RWAs). It promotes good agricultural practices rooted in local knowledge, family farming based on agroecology, and good agricultural governance.

Fahamu, a Pan-African organization, supports NSS by providing technical assistance for implementing projects. In this case, Fahamu supported the awarding of a grant to an NSS member organization, Senegal's Association des Jeunes Agriculteurs de Casamance (AJAC). AJAC has 2,500 members of which 1,750 are women, and is dedicated to strengthening the economic and social activities and leadership skills of farmers, particularly rural women, in Senegal's southern Casamance region.

Grant title: *Project to improve the production and marketing of Sum Pak natural broth*

Geographical scope: *Senegal, Ziguinchor region, village of Niaguis*



Goals

- 01 Improving production conditions:** This involves providing the Niaguis Center's local processing unit with adequate equipment for processing, packaging, and storing Sum Pak products;
- 02 Enhancing Sum Pak's marketing and distribution:** Producing and distributing Sum Pak without restrictions using the FRA (manufacturing and distribution authorization) and barcodes on packaging for improved traceability and better access to various markets for Sum Pak products; and
- 03 Promoting and disseminating Sum Pak production within the NSS network,** that is, positioning Sum Pak as a healthy alternative to industrial broths within the NSS network, while promoting local production of ingredients such as soumbala, made by fermenting the seeds of the African locust bean tree.



Context

Since 2015, AJAC, a leading member of the NSS movement, has been promoting the Sum Pak natural broth brand as a local alternative to the industrial broths that are commonly used in the preparation and seasoning of dishes.

Multinational brands of industrial broths or “broth cubes” are omnipresent in Senegalese homes and dominate in the markets. They are often imported and the profits flow out of the country to large multinational companies; they also contain large amounts of salt. The Sum Pak natural bouillon produced by the women of AJAC/NSS, in contrast, uses all-natural plant and fish-based ingredients and contains less salt, and their flavors are rooted in local culture and traditions. Production is led by local communities, with benefits accruing to those communities and to local farmers.

Building on the success of the women members who developed the Sum Pak recipe and production technique and trained other women on the same, AJAC leaders sought to expand Sum Pak’s market share beyond their home region of Casamance, Senegal.

AEF and other donors have supported their efforts for many years, notably through helping with various recipe-development processes, testing of the original Sum Pak recipe, and gauging consumer interest. Despite widespread enthusiasm and acceptance among consumers, AJAC leaders faced challenges in scaling production, developing a comprehensive marketing plan, and complying with food regulations.

2.3.2 Business Planning Grant Activities

The new AEF grant to promote an agroecological transition will enable a significant improvement in the quantity and quality of Sum Pak natural broth at the Niaguis production center. It will support the following activities:



Sum Pak will be produced throughout the year and in sufficient quantities to meet the increasingly high demand, thereby contributing to the self-sufficiency of NSS member communities in natural broth.

2.3.3 Outcomes

- AJAC and NSS were able to overcome key challenges, which opened new avenues for action and advocacy for the Sum Pak product. The following results were thus achieved:
- *The Niaguis unit was upgraded with high-quality machinery for producing and storing Sum Pak;*
- *The marketing and distribution of Sum Pak was strengthened through FRA certification and barcoding; and*
- *Sum Pak was registered with the Senegalese copyright office to secure its intellectual property rights.*

2.3.4 Learnings

- **Local sourcing of inputs benefits the company and the community.** AJAC/NSS leaders are committed to sourcing as many Sum Pak ingredients as possible from member family farms. The business planning process enabled them to identify the farming communities and main shrimp-producing communities in Casamance whose members had the capacity to produce large quantities of healthy, high-quality ingredients. They plan to collaborate with local authorities to promote sustainable use of fishery resources through mangrove reforestation and rational shrimp farming.
- **Help in identifying the equipment and materials needed to improve Sum Pak production was an important benefit.** It significantly eased the process of assessing prices for each piece of equipment and material. The provision of data on equipment and material types enabled AJAC/NSS officials to secure commitments for acquisition of labor- and time-saving equipment. They also identified appropriate jars and packaging for the product, generating new ideas for enhancing Sum Pak's aesthetic appearance, shelf life, and visibility.
- **Engaging an expert consultant can improve the speed and efficiency of obtaining permissions.** After several unsuccessful attempts, AJAC finally obtained FRA authorization to manufacture and distribute Sum Pak throughout Senegal, with support from an expert consultant—a new strategy for them. The authorization includes the four types of broth: Sum Pak Salt, Sum Pak No Salt, Sum Pak Shrimp, and Sum Pak Nététou. AJAC also secured an annual subscription for barcodes to be placed on Sum Pak product packaging. They obtained nearly 50 barcodes to strengthen the identification of Sum Pak broth, enable traceability, and provide additional information to consumers.
- **Understanding and planning for weaknesses in the supply chain is critical to growing their market.** To ensure a steady supply to the Niaguis central unit, the project coordination team plans to set up secondary raw material collection units in the various production areas. Potential collection areas have been identified for the multiple products and basic ingredients used in the Sum Pak production process.

2.3.5 Next steps

AJAC and NSS have proposed follow-up activities that build on the lessons learned from the business planning process. These activities aim to strengthen local and regional markets as well as the Sum Pak supply chain in Casamance. The projected growth in production and sales is based on solid evidence and on information gathered during the BPG process, positioning them to strategically grow the local market.

AEF is currently supporting the implementation of AJAC's business plan, with a focus on improving the production and marketing of Sum Pak through the following actions:

Purchase of the processing, packaging, and storage equipment necessary to meet food safety standards and ensure market growth;

Installation of processing equipment at the Niaguis central unit; and

Training sessions for 14 rural women's associations in 8 countries on improved Sum Pak production, which will enhance productivity, build skills, and diversify income; and Pak production, which will enhance productivity, build skills, and diversify income;

Registration of the Sum Pak bouillon with the Senegalese Copyright Office (Bureau Sénégalais de Droit d'Auteur, or BSDA).



Manual seed processing, Nous Somme la Solution, Senegal

2.4 Kenya's food coops: Where solidarity is the business plan

Kenyan Peasants League—KPL
(<https://kenyanpeasantsleague.org/>)

2.4.1 Background

The Kenyan Peasants League (KPL) is a social movement of Kenyan peasant farmers, fishers, pastoralists, and consumers whose main aim is to promote peasant agroecology for food sovereignty by fighting the neoliberal tendencies that kill local agriculture. It was established in 2016 in an act of resistance to the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference. KPL, a member of La Via Campesina, has as its core mission a transition to peasant-led agroecology for food sovereignty and climate justice through three interconnected pillars: peasant agroecology, the fight for food sovereignty, and a commitment to peasant feminism. This project builds on progress from a previous AEF grant that helped establish the KPL Food Coop, a solidarity-based initiative to link agroecological producers directly with consumers, particularly the more vulnerable consumers that emerged during the COVID pandemic.⁷

Grant title: *Transforming local markets through KPL Food Coop business*

Geographical scope: *The work is centered on 11 localized KPL food coops across 5 counties: Migori, Siaya, Nairobi, Baringo, and Machakos*

Goals

The grant's primary goal was to create a comprehensive business plan to support the development and formalization of the KPL food coops. This involved establishing a data observatory for crops and markets, organizing community groups into a unified trading block, building both physical and digital market infrastructure, and enhancing member capacity through "Food Coop Schools".

⁷ For more details on how the KPL food coops work, see this short film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZkQKaDoj8Y>.

Context

KPL's work focuses on creating local food systems that are responsive to community nutritional needs, not just profit. KPL food coops are a powerful example of a solidarity economy in action. KPL works with 180 farmer members, grouped among 11 cooperatives and supplying 1,015 consumer members. They have created a system that incorporates many nuanced relationships. By creating a direct link between producers and consumers, the coops bypass typical market channels, allowing farmers to receive better prices and enabling consumers to access fresh, agroecological food. This direct model proved especially resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling trade to continue when conventional markets were disrupted. Uniquely, KPL's model is not only transactional; it is also built on solidarity; however, the coops operate in a difficult regulatory environment where policies such as UPOV91 can restrict farmer-managed seed systems, posing a legal challenge to their core activities.

2.4.2 Business Planning Grant activities

With its US\$10,000 AEF Business Planning Grant, KPL conducted extensive baseline surveys to map production potential and consumer demand. This business planning exercise targeted 2 of KPL's 11 established food coops. One of the two, the Mariwa Food Coop in Migori County, was chosen because it is in a food producing area; it is comprised of 100 food producers of which 48 are women and 32 are youth. The other is the Kangemi Food Coop in Nairobi County; it has 88 consumers of which 56 are women and 56 are youth. KPL used the two food coops for pilot testing in order to generate data for developing a KPL Food Coop Business Plan. Several surveys done in the course of the project targeted members from all the KPL food coops because they are all connected to one another under the KPL umbrella. Key activities included:

Documenting the quantity, variety, and prices of 24 indigenous seeds, food crops, and organic inputs;

Assessing the traditional agricultural skills and knowledge of community elders, as well as their health status; and

Surveying urban consumers to understand their needs, habits, and willingness to engage with the coop model;

Conducting participatory planning sessions and validation workshops to ensure community ownership of the business plans.

2.4.3 Outcomes

The planning process produced critical data that validated the food coop model; for example, 90 to 94 percent of surveyed consumers expressed willingness to be supplied by KPL food coops, confirming strong market demand. The research also revealed that the primary market access barrier for farmers was lack of data about consumer needs and habits; it also found that producers and consumers lack adequate information on market policies and licensing requirements, which limits their access to credit and finance. The marketing study also identified a new and unexpected market for backyard garden produce, as 11 consumers were shown to have linked directly with producers without actually going through the food coop. This offered an unexpected perspective on the coop's role going forward. Overall, the project directly contributed to a 30 percent increase in food production in the pilot coops.



2.4.4 Learnings


- **Data is the bridge** The core learning was that the primary barrier to market access is not a lack of production but a lack of information flow between producers and consumers. Creating a system to manage this data is paramount.
- **Solidarity is viable** The direct producer-to-consumer solidarity model is not only effective but actively desired by the community; it provides a strong foundation for a non-extractive local economy.
- **Infrastructure is the bottleneck** To scale the solidarity model, building physical and digital infrastructure (storage, distribution points, online platforms) is the most critical next step.
- **Legal and policy information is missing** TFood producers and consumers lack information on market policies and laws, taxation regimes, price trends, sanitary requirements, and licensing. Their ability to expand is dependent on navigating the legal landscape of business licensing and permits
- **Empowerment occurs beyond documents** The business planning process itself proved to be a powerful tool for community empowerment; it contributed to building confidence, skills, and networks that extended far beyond the formal planning documents.



Order Collection at Nyamagagana Food Coop, Kenyan Peasants League

2.4.5 Next steps

The business plan confirmed the viability of the food coop model and identified clear priorities for implementation. The immediate focus is on building the necessary infrastructure to effectively connect producers and consumers. This includes establishing physical food collection and distribution points and community food banks, as well as developing a food coop website with secure payment and delivery services. To achieve this, KPL is seeking further funding to address the identified bottlenecks. A key need is for capital for an internal food coop credit fund to support members. They will collaborate with the Civil Society Reference Group Kenya to transform their groups into trading and market groups that enable trade between them. KPL will also acquire legal documents (including licenses) and will continue its Food Coop Schools in order to build member capacity in both peasant agroecology and business management; the latter will include addressing other legal and policy requirements for formalizing their market activities.



2.5 Kenya: Two paths to market— saving seeds and processing vegetables

Seed Savers Network Kenya—
SSN-K (<https://seedsaverskenya.org/>)

2.5.1 Background

Seed Savers is a farmer-centered Civil Society Organization that promotes agricultural biodiversity by strengthening community seed systems. The organization is building sustainable enterprises that connect rural women farmers, local communities, and youth entrepreneurs to markets. In this vein, they are also currently incubating two social enterprises: Nyakazi Organics Ltd, which processes and markets solar-dried traditional leafy vegetables, and the Seed Exchange App, a mobile platform for selling indigenous seedlings and seeds.

Both enterprises were born from identified needs within the Seed Savers' network. Nyakazi Organics was established to provide a reliable market for smallholder women farmers and address significant postharvest losses of nutritious traditional vegetables. The Seed Exchange App was created to upgrade a pre-existing website in order to provide a more efficient and scalable platform for farmers to sell indigenous seedlings and seeds. The work with the two enterprises grew out of a previous AEF grant in which Seed Savers worked with three other Kenyan organizations to improve access to local fruit seedlings. Before this BPG, both enterprises operated with clear missions but lacked the formal strategic plans needed to attract investment and scale effectively.

Grant title: *Upscaling commercialization of neglected and underutilized crop species in Kenya*

Geographical scope: *The initiative is being implemented with agricultural communities across multiple counties in Kenya, including Nakuru, Baringo, Makueni, Kakamega, and Lamu.*



Indigenous women at seed market, Seed Savers Network, Kenya



Produce at seed market, Seed Savers Network, Kenya

Goals

The primary goal of the BPG was to bridge critical gaps in market access for rural women and local communities and to create sustainable employment for young people. The project aimed to develop comprehensive, actionable business plans for Nyakazi Organics and the Seed Exchange App in order to position them for long-term growth, investment, and impact.

Context

Both enterprises operate in a difficult regulatory environment in Kenya, one that favors large-scale commercial producers. The Seed Exchange App, for example, is establishing itself in an environment where seed laws and policies are based on adherence to UPOV91, which restricts farmers from selling seeds unless they have gone through a strict registration process. This registration system⁸ directly hampers the development of businesses selling indigenous seed varieties, which are often not available in commercial markets but are needed by farmers who seek climate resilient crops and who want to produce local vegetables and grains for traditional meals.⁹



Seed market, Seed Savers Network, Kenya

⁸ The High Court in Kenya declared that the Seed and Plant Varieties Act is unconstitutional because it violates a number of articles in Kenya's constitution (see <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/12/kenyas-seed-sharing-ruling-milestone-peasants-rights-and-food-security-un>).

⁹ Learn more about seed laws in Kenya through KPL's Grassroots Evidence of Agroecology: <https://evidence4agroecology.org/cases/22>.

2.5.2 Business Planning Grant activities

Seed Savers implemented a participatory, nine-month planning process structured in four phases:

Business gap analysis

An expert consultant was hired to conduct a thorough analysis of both enterprises that involved market research, financial assessments, and stakeholder consultations;

Exchange learning

A two-day learning visit to successful enterprises in Nakuru provided 15 farmer participants with practical peer-to-peer insights into value addition, quality certification, and hygiene standards; and

Participatory planning

Seed Savers convened a workshop with farmers, youth, and market experts to co-create business plans, ensuring that the strategies were grounded in community reality; focus group discussions were also held at the village level with 123 community members, mainly women and youth; women-led enterprises;

Validation and refinement

The process concluded with a validation workshop where stakeholders collaboratively reviewed and refined the draft business plans, fostering community ownership.

2.5.3 Outcomes

Primarily, the grant successfully supported the development of comprehensive business plans for both enterprises; some unexpected outcomes were also observed, however, such as the spontaneous formation of informal farmer cooperatives. As farmers participated in the market analysis workshops, they began to see the benefit of leveraging collective bargaining power for better prices and market access, which prompted self-organized collective action. The initiative also resulted in direct job creation with over 50 youths becoming casually employed, and these jobs sparked communitywide interest in agroecological practices and seed conservation.



2.5.4 Learnings

- **Data-driven planning is crucial:** The key lesson was the critical importance of grounding business plans in real operational data. The contrast between the operational Nyakazi Organics and the pre-commercial Seed Exchange App demonstrated that different enterprise stages require fundamentally different planning approaches.
- **Business planning is a catalyst for movement building:** The participatory methodology acted as a catalyst for community organizing, demonstrating that process-based funding can yield social outcomes such as confidence building and networking, which are the building blocks of a movement. It was clear that these positive results extended beyond the specific outcome of the exercise, which was in this case the planning document.
- **Regulatory navigation is a core competency:** The challenges in securing Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) certification revealed a critical gap. Small agroecological enterprises face systemic barriers, and future support must include technical assistance for navigating complex regulatory environments.
- **Phased and tailored support is crucial:** The different stages of the two enterprises highlight that a one-size-fits-all approach to enterprise support is not appropriate. Funders should consider tailored support that distinguishes between pre-commercial ventures needing market validation and operational businesses that are ready to scale.




2.5.5 Next steps

Seed Savers concluded the planning grant with clear, strategic roadmaps that positioned both enterprises for their next stage of growth. The next phase is defined by a need to implement the new plans and secure targeted funding to address the identified gaps. The immediate priority is to execute the business plans. For Nyakazi Organics, the focus is on achieving KEBS certification to unlock premium markets and expand its infrastructure (specifically with cold storage) to handle more produce.

For the Seed Exchange App, the primary focus is on a dedicated marketing campaign to build a critical mass of active users and generate the first on-platform transactions. To achieve this, the enterprise requires targeted follow-up funding. The planning process clarified that they would benefit most at this early stage from further grant funding rather than credit. This new capital would be used for developing markets, improving supply chain infrastructure, and continuing capacity building in financial literacy for the beneficiaries. Seed Savers will continue to provide mentorship and incubation space, guiding the enterprises within their network as they refine their operations and scale their impact.





2.6 Cameroon's flour power: Baking a new economy with local tubers

Service d'appui aux initiatives locales de développement
—SAILD (<https://www.saild.org/en/home/>)

2.6.1 Background

Support Service for Grassroots Development Initiatives (SAILD) is a Cameroonian NGO that has been working on rural development for over 30 years, with an emphasis on promoting sustainable agricultural practices to strengthen food security and preserve natural resources. It implements this through three programs: managing natural resources, improving food security and nutrition, and enhancing rural communication.

Grant title: *Strengthening community-based enterprises through incorporating local flour into bread and pastry-making*

Geographical scope: *Centre Region of Cameroon, Divisions of Mfoundi, Lekié, Mefou Akono, Mbam and Kim, Nyong and So'o, Nyong and Kelle, as well as Nyong and Mfoumou*

Goals

SAILD aims to improve food sovereignty in Cameroon through supporting small businesses to incorporate cassava and sweet potato flour into the manufacture of bread and other pastry products in the bakery sector. By substituting 20 percent of imported wheat flour with locally grown tuber flour, this initiative aims to enhance the nutritional content of bread and pastries, create a local market for farmers' production, and decrease Cameroon's dependence on imported wheat from Russia, which has spiked in price since the Russia–Ukraine conflict.



Nathalie Ladem, GIC Ardenat Coordinator, in her field on the outskirts of Yaoundé, SALID, Cameroon, Jean Kana, (February 2025)

Context

Considering Cameroon's significant dependence on wheat imports, the Cameroon Food Sovereignty Coalition (of which SAILD is a member) has conducted campaigns for wheat substitution, targeting decisionmakers and consumers in an effort to achieve greater food sovereignty and national economic productivity. As part of the "zero imported food products" campaign in 2010, the organizations' projections estimated that the incorporation of 20 percent of local flour into bread and bakery products would result in an annual savings of around CFA11.6 billion (about US\$19 million) for the Cameroonian economy, as well as the creation of tens of thousands of jobs.

Studies were carried out to identify suitable tubers for flour production and workshops were organized to develop an effective strategy for promoting the consumption of bread made with local flour.

Ultimately, the BPG initiative sought to strengthen the capacities of, and provide support to, enterprises that incorporate locally made flour into the bread and pastry value chain. The local flour project also aims to enhance food sovereignty in Cameroon, empower producers and consumers, and promote the preservation of traditional knowledge. Local producers, flour millers, and bakers are interested in developing this market.



Meeting with the Bagyéli Indigenous peoples of southern Cameroon on the sidelines of the SAILD agroecology approach workshop, Jean Kana, (February 2025)



Photo of participants at the reflection workshop, SAILD, Cameroon, Jean Kana (December 2023)

2.6.2 Business Planning Grant activities

The project set out to identify key actors' strengths and weaknesses with respect to promoting root and tuber crop cultivation through agroecological practices and enhancing local flour production and distribution to the bread and pastry industry.

Their three main activities were:

Mapping initiatives and interviewing actors involved in the incorporation of local flour for making bread and pastries, including an analysis of the macroeconomic context;

Holding a regional workshop to present the study results and develop a plan to support actors in using local flour to make bread and pastries; and,

Meeting with microfinance institutions to discuss how they could support this transition.

2.6.3 Outcomes

SAILD partnered with the Association Citoyenne de Défense des Intérêts Collectifs (Citizens' Association for the Defense of Collective Interests, or ACDIC) in this collaborative, participatory research project. They documented their research in three reports.

In their Study Report for Mapping of Stakeholders Involved in the Incorporation of Local Flours in the Manufacture of Bread and Pastries, they detail findings from interviews with 50 producers, processors, and bakers involved in the local flour value chain. The study report details the enormous challenges faced by the local flour sector, including lack of product certification, failure to comply with flour quality standards, high cost of equipment, lack of access to credit, low consumer awareness, lack of infrastructure, lack of training, competition from imported wheat flour, and limited promotion of local products.

To address these issues, the study recommends:

- *Introducing incentives to boost local manufacture of processing equipment;*
- *Developing a sustainable financing mechanism for local flour processing units;*
- *Sensitizing local administrators on the importance of policy support for the incorporation of a certain percentage of local flour into all bakery and pastry products;*
- *Enhancing bakers' skills in flour-mixing for bread-making;*
- *Subsidizing bakery and pastry products made with local flour for two years, to encourage consumer adoption; and*
- *Gradually abolishing the fiscal and tax incentives granted to importers of durum wheat and/or wheat flour, as well as milling equipment.*

SAILD and ACDIC also produced two other reports to supplement the study report. The second report was entitled, Strategic Support Plan for Entrepreneurs Using Local Flours to Make Bread and Pastries in the Centre Region of Cameroon.



Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement (SAILD), Cameroon

- *Training in bread and pastry-making techniques using local flour;*
- *Dissemination of local flour standards to flour producers;*
- *Training in packaging, acquisition, and rational use of appropriate equipment;*
- *Organizing tasting sessions for products made with local flour; and*
- *Organizing stakeholders into cooperatives or legal groups to increase access to financing.*

The strength of this value chain study is its comprehensive approach to data collection. It included interviews with small-scale flour millers and their suppliers, as well as efforts to understand and analyze the current context of those who use local flour. The study also identified challenges and opportunities for expansion, and aligned this analysis with the current policies, legislation, and institutional procedures that encourage the promotion of local flour in Cameroon.

The third document was a Workshop Report. In order to identify a strategic way forward, this report captured the proceedings from disseminating the study report among 29 local flour producers, processors, and microfinance institutions. Two action points were concretized: 1) creation of a networking group of producers and processors to facilitate the follow-up of the solutions to be implemented, and 2) a plan to sensitize decisionmakers on the value of local flour products and implore them to establish a minimum incorporation rate of 20 percent local flour in bakery products.

2.6.4 Learnings

The BPG grant is enabling SAILD to create new and robust networks that are working on policy change for the local flour sector. The expertise they gained from the study report enabled them to take a lead on programs to promote healthy diets based on local markets, as well as to sensitize key decisionmakers on policy changes that are centered on food sovereignty and a healthy local economy.

- **Engaging with a wide range of actors enabled SAILD to identify systemic solutions to address market resistance.** *Their surveys with flour producers, millers, and users (bakeries) helped them to identify key bottlenecks and challenges to local flour adoption and food sovereignty; in addition, their dialogue with credit organizations and government officials enabled them to identify solutions to perverse economic incentives that hamper local food economies.*
- **By prioritizing local producers within the local food chain, SAILD underscores the key role of policy change in developing markets based on food sovereignty.**
- **SAILD's analysis demonstrates why local food sovereignty is often disadvantaged by an import-driven food economy,** *in that local flours are more expensive than imported flour due to technological, commercial, and economic issues in terms of production equipment, and taxation of imported equipment.*
- **Participatory approaches to data verification allowed them to deepen their understanding of how to reach consumers.** *Many of their recommendations encompass the need to mainstream new recipes and baked goods through various outreach methods such as tasting fairs and exhibitions, in order to share their nutritional and economic advantages as well as increase acceptance of a new flavor profile.*



Service d'Appui aux Initiatives Locales de Développement (SAILD), Cameroon

2.6.5 Next steps

The Agroecology Fund awarded a new grant to SAILD to empower local artisanal bakeries to incorporate local flour and support the aligned flour producers and millers in the Centre Region of Cameroon (including Yaoundé). They are piloting this market development in one specific geography and market and plan to:



As a result of their activities, SAILD anticipates that a minimum of three additional local bakeries will incorporate local flours into their production and that a reliable local flour supply chain will be established that draws on 5 producer cooperatives of 50 members each. Distribution contracts for bakery products made with local flours will be established with at least five major bakeries and supermarkets in the Centre Region.


These outcomes rely on SAILD's ability to effectively boost production for local bakeries, create market linkages through consumer access, and develop campaigns for consumer awareness to increase demand for local flours. Ultimately, this will increase local markets for agroecological products, boost farmer incomes, enhance public health through nutritionally superior baked goods, and increase food sovereignty.

Summaries of funded initiatives


To illustrate the breadth of the activities being undertaken by AEF's partners beyond the more detailed write-ups above, this report includes summaries of the other nine organizations receiving Business Planning Grants, namely:



Uganda: Center for Food and Adequate Living Rights (CEFROHT)



Tanzania: Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (MVIWATA)



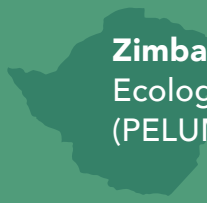
Mali: Convergence des Femmes Rurales pour la Souveraineté Alimentaire (COFERSA)



Kenya: Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM Kenya)




Mali, Senegal: Groundswell International, Inc.



Zimbabwe: Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM Zimbabwe)



Togo: Institut Africain pour le Développement Économique et Social-Formation (INADES-Formation)



Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa: Seed Knowledge Initiative (SKI)



Ethiopia: Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (MELCA)

3.1 Center for Food and Adequate Living Rights (CEFROHT), Uganda

To address the production and market barriers facing women and youth farmers in Uganda, CEFROHT undertook a participatory planning process involving 228 farmers, marketers, and local officials. This resulted in an agroecology production sustainability plan, a marketing strategy, and four agroecological production centers.

In the course of the consultations, farmers identified a strategic location for their Earth Market and decided to focus production on four high-demand vegetables to ensure

consistent supply. A significant unexpected outcome was the commitment from local government leaders to link farmers to government credit and irrigation programs. The process created renewed focus and energy, creating a production plan where there had been none. The next steps involve piloting the developed plans and mobilizing resources to implement them. One key lesson from this initiative is that local government buy-in can drive integration of agroecology initiatives into local government development plans, creating a pathway for scaling.



Centre for Food and Adequate Living Rights (CEFROHT), Uganda



Centre for Food and Adequate Living Rights (CEFROHT), Uganda

3.2 *Convergence des Femmes Rurales pour la Souveraineté Alimentaire (COFERSA), Mali*

Rural women's cooperatives in Mali add value to a variety of products through processing; they are similarly committed to aggregating their production in order to gain access to more regular and lucrative regional markets. Thanks to the development of a business plan for territorial marketing, COFERSA envisages a network of cooperatives building their capacity to package and market their production. To that end, they will work to obtain the necessary equipment and supplies and establish a working capital fund. By bringing the cooperatives together, COFERSA has been able to identify their priority products, main gaps, and training needs, and to identify the supplies and production capacity of each cooperative.

The assessment performed as part of this business planning exercise identified the main processed products as shea butter, soumbala, parboiled rice, and peanut (groundnut) butter. The other products identified are fresh mango and

zaban (*Saba senegalensis*), dried fruits and vegetables, and soap. COFERSA believes that, with appropriate assistance, seven cooperatives have the potential to exponentially increase the volume they produce and sell. To realize this vision, they must overcome challenges related to packaging, storage, transportation, market fluctuations, members' commitment to the vision, the need for a revolving credit fund, and capacity building. COFERSA believes all of these challenges to be surmountable. Thanks to this business plan—which has been tailored to the needs of each cooperative and to COFERSA's collaborative approach—the women cooperative members are on a path to autonomy and financial power, enabling them to cover their essential household health and education expenses.

COFERSA subsequently obtained a follow-up grant from the Agroecology Fund to help three cooperatives implement their business plans.

3.3 Sahel Eco (Mali), and Agrecol Afrique (Senegal), both partners of Groundswell International, Inc.

In Senegal and Mali, women transform and commercialize most of their agroecological produce but face limited access to credit, material resources, markets, and business skills. This constrains their ability to meet the demand for agroecological produce and to obtain fair remuneration.

Groundswell and its partners carried out a participatory study of 107 women's cooperatives in Mali and Senegal in order to identify the obstacles hindering women's efforts to scale their enterprises and identify solutions. This included a survey of their main products, activities, savings and credit groups, as well as a review of their access to credit and other issues. The findings highlighted a number of obstacles encountered by women's agroecological microenterprises; these included lack of access to financing and capital, limited management capacity, insufficient infrastructure, and inadequate marketing of products. Microenterprises struggled with several key management problems related to computing costs, inability to negotiate favorable terms for raw materials, and document management.

The study recommended:

- 01 *Facilitating access to appropriate small-scale technologies,*
- 02 *Strengthening micro-business marketing and commercialization capabilities,*
- 03 *Developing and implementing a training and capacity-building plan for entrepreneurial management,*
- 04 *Establishing an alternative financing mechanism,*
- 05 *Raising consumer awareness on the benefits of agroecological produce, and*
- 06 *Strengthening legislators' knowledge on the challenges of women's agroecological cooperatives and on their overlooked economic potential.*



Based on the study findings, a business development plan for the growth of women-led agroecological microenterprises was developed which included an implementation strategy and a pilot action plan. The action plan explored the modalities for setting up a revolving support fund for women-led agroecological microenterprises and pilot actions.

3.4 INADES-Formation, Togo

For several years, INADES-Formation Togo has been promoting the production and consumption of local indigenous foods with strong nutritional and commercial potential, including a local grain called fonio. With the support of the BPG, INADES-Formation Togo studied how to support three communities involved in producing and processing fonio, tomatoes, and groundnuts. The grant enabled them to assess the assets and constraints related to the development of the three value chains. This involved creating strategic plans for each commodity, mapping out territorial markets for the three products, and collecting data for developing local business plans in the three communities.

Lacking market studies and data, the participatory methodology enabled them not only to compile data from a wide array of stakeholders but also to obtain informative responses from farmers. INADES-Formation was aware that it was too ambitious to study three value chains

with the BPG, since this would deter the in-depth inquiry necessary to achieve convincing results. They concluded that additional market studies were essential to help better understand the potential gamut of opportunities.

INADES-Formation Togo recommended:

- 01 *Improving the fonio processing unit,*
- 02 *Offering a wider range of products,*
- 03 *Increasing the customer base,*
- 04 *Expanding their use of agroecological production techniques, and*
- 05 *Continuing research on tomatoes and groundnuts to develop more robust market access plans.*



Fonio sieve, Felix (October 2024)

Box 4: Fonio the superfood: Building a value chain for a neglected crop

Fonio is a nutritious small-seed cereal that is native to West Africa. It has been part of the diet of millions of West African families for centuries and is important for food security. There are two species: white fonio (*Digitaria exilis*) and black fonio (*Digitaria iburua*). Recent research confirms its nutritional potential (Adelabu 2025), something that has long been known by rural African communities. It has amino acids not found in wheat, rice, or maize, which makes it one of the most nutritious of all grains. It is also adapted to arid conditions and low-fertility soils.

Over the past seven years, relying mainly on grants, INADES-Formation Togo has been supporting fonio farmers and a women's cooperative that manages the production of precooked fonio. The consolidation and scaling up of this initiative require access to credit to cover running costs, improve the processing unit, and expand working capital. Because fonio is an underutilized species that has received little commercial support, it can benefit significantly from research to improve seed production and access, processing protocols, and equipment.

In 2018, INADES-Formation Côte d'Ivoire carried out pilot actions to promote recipes and gauge the culinary interest of chefs and consumers (INADES-Formation 2018). In 2019, INADES-Formation Togo promoted an exhibition of fonio during the National Forum of Togolese Farmers, which also hosted a panel on the fonio sector (INADES-Formation 2019).



Woman with the processed
Fonio, INADES-Formation Togo

According to data analysis presented by INADES-Formation in the business planning report, fonio ranks fifth among cereals in Togo, after corn, sorghum, millet, and rice. Data for the period 2018 to 2022 indicates that national production increased from 3,666 metric tons in 2018 to 4,471 tons in 2022. In 2023, the Togo government adopted an Investment Action Plan for the Fonio Sector (2024–2028), the overall objective of which is to, “double current production to at least 10,000 tonnes of quality paddy fonio, to meet both local and external demand by 2028”.

With past support from AEF and other donors, in 2021 INADES-Formation Togo started up a production unit managed by women in Hihéatro, in Amou district. At the time of the cooperative’s creation, each member contributed CFA5,000 (about US\$10) to a capital fund to purchase fonio seed. In the five years of its operation, the production unit has generated demand for precooked fonio both locally and in the capital, Lomé. Current demand for precooked fonio is expected to reach 1,500 kg/month, or 18 tons per year, which corresponds to 7.5 tons of processed fonio paddy seed.

The current production unit is unable to meet demand due to limited storage, poor machinery, a lack of financial resources, and fonio’s seasonality. Feasibility studies conducted within the scope of the business plan initiative indicate that the consolidation of the existing production unit depends on a variety of technical and financial supports.



Fonio at the Hihéatro territorial market, INADES Formation, Togo



3.5 Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (MELCA), Ethiopia

Policies and extension services favoring monoculture crops have displaced many Ethiopian farmers and limited their access to quality local seed varieties. In response, Ethiopia's Movement for Ecological Learning and Community Action (MELCA) undertook an assessment of market demand for these seeds and of the ability of the Endelibe Farmers Cooperative to offer adequate supplies of quality seeds. Their aim was to restore local seed varieties that are climate resilient and respond better to organic fertilizers; these include varieties of wheat, teff, barley, beans, peas, and lentils.

The study included mapping out the market, identifying competitors in the region, and developing a plan for pricing seeds to meet consumer demand. MELCA focused on increasing income for farmers, improving food production, and enhancing nutritional security and agroecological inputs to the region.

Through consultative meetings, MELCA discussed the business plan, assessed the existing community seed bank, and recognized the importance of increasing the number of seed producers to meet targets.

Several challenges were encountered, including political instability, the need to recruit more farmers to produce seed, lack of access to credit, and ongoing government and private sector pressure to adopt hybrid seeds and fertilizers. MELCA observed a high community demand for affordable, quality seeds and noted that there are local seed varieties that are ready for replication; they also saw that the local expertise exists to support quality seed production. The potential for accessing the market was observed to be strong, however to start up and grow businesses the community would need to build their administrative and financial capacity to overcome institutional constraints.

3.6 Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (MVIWATA), Tanzania

Based on a participatory process involving 2,439 stakeholders across three regions of Tanzania, MVIWATA used its Business Planning Grant to develop a comprehensive, multi-value-chain agroecology business strategy. They held 10 meetings with farmers and other stakeholders. The plan highlights opportunities in local vegetables, spices, avocado, honey, and forest products.


A central outcome was a strategic shift from supporting individual farmers to strengthening group efforts for collective marketing, leveraging economies of scale, and building a shared brand with PGS certification. An unexpected but critical finding was the threat of urbanization to wild-harvested indigenous vegetables in Dodoma. This led to a recommendation for the domestication of these species through community seed banks.

The resulting business plan is built on:

Ecological considerations: This includes encouraging diverse agroecological farming systems, promoting the use of biopesticides for biodiversity protection, and avoiding the use of external inputs;

Economic viability: This aspect of the plan is built on demand-driven production, local market orientation, and collective marketing to favor economies of scale; and

Financial visibility: This refers to costs (from production, aggregation and logistics, processing and packaging, quality and certification, PGS, traceability, sales and administration), access to finance, break-even analysis, and digital solutions.



The plan provides a good foundation for MVIWATA to seek the further investment needed to operationalize the strategy through aggregation centers, market coordination systems, and pilot seed domestication programs.



3.7 Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM Kenya)

The BPG empowered PELUM Kenya and the Organic Agriculture Center of Kenya (OACK) to catalyze two community-led, agroecological enterprises in Kiambu and Murang'a—counties dominated by male-controlled tea and coffee industries. The initiative focused on developing viable business plans for locally produced bioinputs (organic fertilizer) and commercial herbs and spices, creating diversified income opportunities, particularly for women and youth.

Through a participatory process of market analysis, strategic stakeholder engagement, and business planning, the grant delivered the first-ever formal business plans for both ventures. This

foundational work successfully forged critical market linkages with buyers, deepened collaborations with county governments and private actors, and established innovative financial partnerships with local institutions to improve farmers' access to the new products and markets. The initiative engaged over 500 stakeholders, which was more than double its target. These results demonstrate how targeted support for planning, strategy development, and partnership-building can be tools toward rural economic growth, accelerated transition toward resilient local food systems, and community-owned agroecological economies.

3.8 Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM Zimbabwe)

PELUM Zimbabwe employed Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology to explore and address a range of business challenges facing Zimbabwean agroecology enterprises. Working intensively with nine agroecological enterprises at different stages of development, the process provided personalized technical assistance to identify specific capacity gaps in business planning, marketing, and financial access. Unfortunately, the volatile economy made it difficult for some participants to dedicate time to the PAR process.

The primary outcome was the development of seven comprehensive, investment-ready business plans with detailed capital requirements ranging from US\$23,600 to US\$126,800. These plans now form the basis for future fundraising and inform PELUM's strategic directions for the 2025 to 2030 period.

One key learning was that agroecological enterprises valued the embedding of social "Ubuntu principles" alongside sales and profit goals.



PELUM, Zimbabwe

3.9 Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI), Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa

AEF support enabled SKI to carry out two foundational studies:

a mapping of agroecology enterprises in the communities in which SKI partners work across Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, and

a literature review situating SKI's experience within African and global contexts.

A total of 241 small enterprises were identified across the 3 countries; 64 percent were in Zambia, 30 percent in Zimbabwe, and 6 percent in Malawi. The majority (79 percent) were family-run or household enterprises, and the remainder were small cooperatives and registered entities. These businesses represented more than 80 product types, including grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, livestock, honey, tree nurseries, and a wide range of value-added products such as herbal teas, peanut butter, oils, and biofertilizers. Most operated in local markets (about 70 percent), with a smaller

number (17 percent) having limited access to district markets, and only 12 percent having access to urban markets. While this local focus strengthened community economies and short value chains, it also led to seasonal gluts and price volatility, with about 42 percent of enterprises reporting supply gaps linked to rainfall cycles and harvest seasons.

Both the mapping and literature review showed that more than 60 percent of enterprises intentionally applied agroecological principles such as biodiversity enhancement, soil fertility management, and crop diversification. The social and cultural dimensions of agroecology remained far less emphasized, however, featuring strongly in only about 13 percent of enterprises; these included collective learning, traditional governance, and equitable participation.

The BPG from the Agroecology Fund led SKI to define its work on agroecology entrepreneurship markets as a core pillar for its 2026 to 2030 strategy, linking community-driven enterprises to wider food system transformation in Southern Africa.



Women display their seeds, Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI)

Findings



Women fonio processors at the POUT-Fonio unit, INADES Togo

4.1 Lessons for organizations

The lessons can be distilled into a number of high-level themes that are useful for donors, investors, and budding enterprises. These themes, broadly speaking, include: the power and value of participatory planning; the critical barrier to market access that can be rooted in lack of information; how a complex and hostile regulatory environment can constitute a major obstacle to success; the importance of capital investment being appropriate to the needs of agroecology entrepreneurs; the transformative nature of Business Planning Grants; and how shifting consumer patterns toward agroecology can be a powerful lever of change.



4.1.1 The power of participatory planning

A core finding across nearly all grantees was that the process of business planning was often as valuable as the final plan itself. The participatory methodologies proved to be powerful tools for community empowerment. They included engaging farmers, processors, consumers, elders, and policymakers in workshops, surveys, and validation meetings.

- **Building agency and confidence:** *As evidenced by ESAFF Uganda and CEFROHT, the participatory process built farmers' confidence and sense of agency. Farmers moved from seeing themselves only as producers to recognizing their potential as entrepreneurs ready to engage actively with markets.*
- **Catalyzing collective action:** *The planning process has the potential to stimulate collective action; for example, the Seed Savers Network noted the formation of informal cooperatives as farmers saw the power of collective bargaining. This aligns with ESAFF's learning that group approaches are transformative for enhancing bargaining power and market access. MVIWATA worked to develop a shared brand with PGS certification for collective marketing across three regions, a powerful tool.*
- **Ensuring community ownership:** *Organizations like KPL and CNOP-CAM emphasized that co-creating plans with communities ensured that the plans were grounded in local reality. This fostered a sense of ownership that is critical for long-term sustainability. The business plan became a shared tool for the community.*
- **Engaging with policymakers and credit institutions:** *SAILD, in Cameroon, brought to the attention of government and finance institutions the need of local entrepreneurs for subsidies and credit to enable the purchase of flour production equipment; ESAFF Uganda is linking farmers with state-supported agri-financing programs; and CNOP-CAM is dialoguing with local credit providers regarding how to support cooperatives.*

4.1.2 Information as the critical bridge to markets

A consistent learning was that the primary barrier to market access is often not a lack of production, but a critical lack of information.

- **Connecting supply and demand:** KPL's research, for example, revealed that 90 to 94 percent of urban consumers were willing to buy from their food coops, confirming market demand; the key bottleneck was a lack of information flow between producers and consumers about needs, habits, and prices. MELCA's study documented unmet rural demand for local seed varieties. Diversification of product lines to be sold to consumers was another strategic insight produced by the business plans (INADES-Formation Togo, and Nous Sommes la Solution). Finally, some partners identified markets with unmet demand, thereby enabling farmers to diversify their income through bioinputs and herb and spice production (PELUM Kenya).
- **Informing strategic decisions:** SAILD's meticulous mapping of the local flour value chain provided data on bottlenecks (including certification and equipment costs), enabling them to advocate, with evidence, for policy change. INADES-Formation Togo analyzed the national markets for fonio, tomato, and peanut value chains, which is essential for effective business positioning. The results offer insights that go beyond single initiatives and encourage planning at the country level in relation to food security and dependence on imports.
- **Demystifying the market:** For many small enterprises, the market is an abstract, intimidating force. The BPGs enabled grantees to replace uncertainty with data through conducting baseline surveys (KPL), analyzing value chains (SAILD, CNOP-CAM), understanding consumer preferences (NSS), and creating defined business plans (PELUM Kenya, PELUM Zimbabwe); in this way, the market was made more tangible and navigable.

4.1.3 Regulatory barriers and certification

A significant and systemic challenge identified by multiple grantees was the hostile and complex regulatory environment, which disproportionately disadvantages small-scale agroecological enterprises.

- **Certification is a major block:** Two aspects of certification are challenging: certifying products as agroecological and ensuring compliance with food safety regulations. ESAFF Uganda clearly identified formal organic certification as a major barrier due to high costs and complex procedures that leave farmers at a competitive disadvantage. As demonstrated by ESAFF, MVIWATA, and SKI, Participatory Guarantee Systems are more appropriate for agroecological production that serves local markets. To create pathways for local certification, groups may need to address regulation policies; in other cases, however, formal certification, while costly, can open profitable markets.
- **Initiatives that involve food processing bring food safety regulations into play.** The planning process has the potential to stimulate collective action; for example, the Seed Savers Network noted the formation of informal cooperatives as farmers saw the power of collective bargaining. This aligns with ESAFF's learning that group approaches are transformative for enhancing bargaining power and market access. MVIWATA worked to develop a shared brand with PGS certification for collective marketing across three regions, a powerful tool.
- **Policies favor industrial agriculture:** KPL and Seed Savers operate in an environment that is shaped by policies such as UPOV91, which criminalize or restrict the sale of indigenous seeds, the very foundation of their businesses. This creates a legal risk that deters formal investment and scaling.
- **Legal literacy is necessary:** KPL identified a major risk to be lack of knowledge regarding business licensing and permits. This highlights a critical capacity gap: navigating legal and policy frameworks is a core competency that agroecological enterprises need support to develop. This highlights how important and necessary it is to have a regulatory framework that is conducive to the development of agroecology entrepreneurship so that successful cases can be replicated on a larger scale.

4.1.4 The need for tailored and patient capital

The experience of business planning has confirmed the existence of the “missing middle” in finance and provides input on what appropriate investment might look like for agroecological enterprises.

- **Stage-appropriate support and a role for grants:** *Seed Savers’ experience with its two enterprises, one operational and one pre-commercial, demonstrated that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective, and CNOP-CAM’s experience with its revolving fund shows that the amounts needed at early stages of small-scale initiatives are often small (about US\$500). Early-stage ventures need grant funding for market validation and building infrastructure, not debt.*
- **Community infrastructure:** *The next steps for several grantees involve building physical and digital infrastructure; this includes, for example, developing collection points (KPL), installing cold storage (Seed Savers), purchasing and installing processing equipment (ESAFF Uganda, NSS, and COFERSA), and improving transport (CNOP-CAM). These require capital that is patient and flexible and understands that returns should be measured in community resilience and market creation, not just quarterly profit.*



Small-scale Farmers visiting one of the stalls at the harvest money expo at Kololo., ESAFF, Uganda

- **Credit as a tool within a broader support system:** CNOP-CAM's experience showed that while a revolving credit fund is valuable, to be effective it must be coupled with continuous financial literacy training, agroecological skills development, and business support. Similarly, Groundswell's survey of over 100 women's cooperatives demonstrated the need for affordable credit coupled with business entrepreneurship training and support.

4.1.5 Business Planning Grants as a pathway for transformation

- **Organizations recognize market development as a key strategy:** BPGs did not just enable the organizations to address capital gaps and business skills; they also contributed to their rethinking of their own marketing work and fundraising strategies. SKI recognized the fundamental value of markets and the central importance of sales and/or barter; they also recognized the value of their grassroots partners' work and embraced the core role of markets in improving food security and sovereignty.

4.1.6 Shifting consumer demand

- **Shifting consumption patterns toward agroecology is a powerful lever of change:** Consulting with consumers to understand their preferences and needs is critical to developing markets for agroecological products. Both NSS and SAILD examined how to meet consumer buying and use habits.
- **Advocacy campaigns centered on local foods, recipes, culture, and nutrition are powerful levers of behavior change.** The "My Food is African" campaign launched in 2023 by AFSA has now evolved into multiple national and regional campaigns such as "We eat Cameroonian!" These campaigns use the power of local traditional recipes, cultural pride, nutritional benefits, star chefs, and restaurants to create demand for overlooked crops and foodstuffs.

4.2 Lessons for Agroecology Fund

One of our goals for the BPG initiative was to support partners in developing strong implementable business proposals. As of August 2025, AEF has supported five BPG awardees with follow-up implementation grants of US\$120,000, thus meeting our goal of incorporating this work into our overall grant-making portfolio. AEF plans to support additional initiatives in 2026.

We also learned—alongside our partners—about the value of funding business studies for agroecology, something that is new to many who are developing their first business plans. Few partners had received any previous grant support for business planning.

The following lessons are based on our partners' experience and are informed by our five years' work partnering with colleagues at AFSA, Biovision Foundation, TIFS, and Shona (hosting the Neycha Accelerator and Fund).

4.2.1 Business plans multiply opportunities

Across a range of geographies and settings, farmers organizations are selling products to consumers and thereby creating income for agroecological producers. They require a range of support, from grants and business support services, to low-interest loans and creative finance. The BPGs enhanced the potential and maturity of these businesses.

- **Local value chain solutions:** *Farmers organizations are well placed to engage with multiple partners to solve complex value chain challenges; this was evidenced by SAILD's research into tuber flours as a solution to high wheat prices and CNOP-CAM's engagement with multiple agencies to map the business opportunities for women's collectives.*
- **Quality market and consumer data** *enables KPL to expand food coops' offerings to consumers to include backyard garden supplies, which are highly prized by peri-urban consumers.*
- **Identifying appropriate food-processing machinery** *will enable NSS to meet growing consumer demand using methods that are less labor intensive, thereby improving their profitability and ensuring regular production for the market.*

4.2.2 Donors and investors overlook agroecology

- **Appropriate capital support is missing.** There is an opportunity for AEF to work with donors and investors to develop suitable grant and investment products to meet farmers organizations and businesses where they are. The Neycha Accelerator and Fund, for example, supports small and growing businesses within a specific geography through a combination of business training, grants, and low-interest loans. The Agroecology Fund is currently conducting a feasibility study for an Agroecology Investment Fund of Funds.
- **Access to affordable capital is limited.** Donors and investors understand that economic opportunity is constrained by farmers' and entrepreneurs' inability to access affordable and appropriate amounts of grant and investment capital. BPGs make explicit the needs of agroecology entrepreneurs and the market opportunities available to them (NSS, SAILD).
- **Business planning needs vary.** Donors and investors can respond to potential high impact investment opportunities along a developmental range from pilot businesses to existing revenue generating businesses. While some grassroots partners focus on building existing businesses and activities (Seed Savers Network Kenya, NSS), others support emerging efforts (ESAFF, SAILD). Impact potential does not correlate with developmental stage.

4.2.3 Lack of knowledge and information undermines action

- **Business and agroecology are new concepts for many.** To engage meaningfully with the work, AEF partners and donors require additional opportunities to learn concepts, exchange information, and understand context. While implementing partners request support in the form of business planning training and enterprise development tools, donors need to better understand how to support businesses with appropriate capital.
- **Lack of market data on local food and territorial markets.** Few reference studies exist but, as we have seen in this report, territorial organizations can obtain this information through participatory research. Lack of information restricts farmers' ability to develop strong business plans and access the critical resources necessary to build a profitable business.

- **Poor planning and financial outcomes exist.** Due to the newness of the field, some business planning processes are incomplete and not well executed. Plans may describe a low- to no- profit enterprise, which is a perennial challenge in this undervalued sector. Partners need to seek out learning and training opportunities and exchange visits in order to ensure that enterprises with poor profit margins are supported in looking for alternative pathways to profitability. In some cases, this may mean recognizing a sector or product as a public or social good; for example, replication and distribution of indigenous seeds may require creating a non-profit business model that is free from market constraints.

4.2.4 Participatory methodologies deepen businesses' alignment with agroecology

- **Farmer participation strengthens business plans.** Every group noted how participatory methodologies that engaged farmers in surveys, focus groups, and feedback loops reinforced agroecological principles such as fairness, connectivity, and participation.
- **Women and youth gain more from agroecology markets.** Many groups (KPL, CNOP-CAM) reported that women and youth gain more from the aggregation of and the development of value-added agroecology products, as their consumers are local and differ from those of male-controlled export markets.
- **Strong governance structures build trust.** Several groups noted the importance of strong governance and accountability structures to the development of cooperatives and associations that are aggregating produce for the first time.

4.2.5 Continental networks strengthen local businesses

- **Networking helps businesses flourish.** Business support networks, such as those launched by AFSA and many of its country-level affiliates, can promote entrepreneurship that features local crops and culturally relevant diets, and can advocate for favorable public policies and programs. AFSA's continental network helps dispersed but united constituencies build support for local agroecological businesses through enhanced learning, alliance-building, and advocacy. AEF is a long-term partner with AFSA and has been able to provide core funding for this deeper engagement.

Recommendations

At the grassroots level, a vast untapped capacity exists for business development and investment in agroecology. Local producers can identify, strengthen, and improve their relationship to the market through investing in their own knowledge and capacity to build local resilient food economies. These capacities are much enhanced by affiliation with broader regional and continental networks; however, this requires a shift in our paradigm of what is needed to create those new circuits of change. The amplification of agroecology will require investment in equitable access to profitable markets for smallholders, based on surplus food production.

5.1 Re-envision food and agriculture metrics: It's not just about income!

Recentering local consumers and territorial markets as the most proximate and reliable buyers of agroecological products is a smart market diversification strategy; it also shifts investors' thinking about the outcomes of food and agriculture economies. Impact metrics are no longer reduced to income, profit margins and yields of conventional (chemical) products; instead, they include the presence of local indigenous foods in the market, the reduction of food loss and wastage, and enhanced biodiversity at the farm level.

New tools such as the Business Agroecology Criteria Tool (B-ACT) and the Agroecology Finance Assessment and Tracking Tool enhance the collective frame of reference and reinforce a focus on the varied benefits of agroecological food production and on the true costs of other production systems¹⁰. NSS demonstrates how the local production of natural bouillon provides income, jobs, and cultural pride, and constitutes a healthy alternative to industrially produced imports. SKI shares the key elements of its strategy and agroecology entrepreneurship markets in Box 5 and Table 1.

¹⁰ See the True Cost Accounting initiative at the Global Alliance for the Future of Food (<https://tcaaccelerator.org/>), and TEEBAgriFood, a project housed at the United Nations Environment Programme and led by The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) office (<https://www.unep.org/topics/teeb>).

Members of St. Mauritz Womens' Enterprise receiving a paste grinding Machine Handed over to them by ESAFF Uganda



Box 5. Key elements of the Seed and Knowledge Initiative's strategy to develop agroecology entrepreneurship

- 01 *Farmers are price makers, not price takers*
- 02 *Markets are local, dignified, and community owned*
- 03 *Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGSs) ensure trust, quality, and solidarity*
- 04 *Financial literacy and savings groups underpin viable enterprises*
- 05 *Supportive policies, infrastructure, and consumer awareness connect production to fair and resilient economies*

Seedfairs and festival, SKI phase 3



Table 1: The Seed and Knowledge Initiative's (SKI) key elements of agroecology entrepreneurship markets as compared with capitalist markets

Agroecology Entrepreneurship Markets	Capitalist Markets
Rooted in local traditions and cultures	Rooted in global western culture
Based on agroecological farming practices	Based on industrial production practices
Local by preference Global when necessary	Global by default Struggles to integrate local suppliers
Family and community owned	Corporate owned
Reinforces social tissue and relationships	Erodes social tissue and relationships
Deepens ecological connectivity	Drives separation and disconnects stakeholders from meaningful connection to agro-ecosystems
Healthy food is about nutrient dense, poison free food that isn't highly processed	Healthy food is about following legislated food safety standards and hygiene protocols
Trust is established through personal relationships first, and ethical certification schemes second. Traceability is first and foremost about knowing and trusting the people you buy from.	Trust established through branding, food safety regulations and 3rd party certification. Traceability is achieved through detailed record keeping along the supply chain.
Success is measured according to social capital, ecological well-being, spiritual dimensions and financial metrics.	Success is measured almost exclusively according to financial metrics. Social and environmental sustainability is considered only in relation to financial sustainability
Favors small family farms	Favors industrial agriculture Largely incompatible with small-scale farms

5.2 Policy matters: Support farmers organizations, civil society, and governments to address policy and regulatory barriers

The “My Food Is African” campaign has highlighted the extraordinary power and desire of Africans to eat local traditional foods with healthy nutritional profiles; however, markets favor large commercial producers and importers that are focused on a few food staples with existing infrastructure and market access. Farmers organizations are working with multistakeholder coalitions and their local governments to reshape agricultural and other economic policies, to support local production reaching markets in an equitable way.

SAILD’s clever innovation of incorporating locally produced tuber flours into commonly eaten foods such as bread and pastries is an example of working within changed dietary habits. It requires revising subsidies and market regulations that reinforce and favor an import-dependent bread and pastry market that was established at the time of national independence and has been reinforced since then.

5.3 Right-size the support: Provide the appropriate resources for the enterprise stage

Grants for business planning and pre-feasibility studies stimulate the research and planning processes that are critical to identifying profitable markets and solving the production, aggregation, and processing challenges that limit agroecological markets. Affordable, patient investment capital can lead to enhanced operations, lower cost of production, and better access to regular, profitable markets. The capital mix needs to be appropriate to the business’s size and stage of development.

ESAFF provided periodic business support and incubation to small associations of farmers enabling them to grow; for example, one women’s association took an initial grant for a peanut butter grinding machine and then developed its own packaging to sell to both rural and urban markets.

5.4 Create applied learning experiences for farmers organizations: Meet farmers where they are

AEF partners identified three improvements to the BPG initiative:

- 01 *Provide online training for business planning and for establishing the components of a strong business plan;*
- 02 *Fund exchange visits with, and among, successful agroecological businesses; and*
- 03 *Document and share accounts of successful agroecological businesses through write-ups and narratives.*



5.5 Strengthen networks: Farmers organizations need more access to support and expertise

Farmers organizations need communities of practice such as the one created by Transformational Investing in Food Systems (TIFS) and Biovision Foundation called Community of Practice for Agroecological Entrepreneurship in East Africa (CoP)¹¹. They also need networks to help them more quickly access the peer support and expertise they need. By funding this cohort of BPGs, AEF helped create a network of farmers organizations that learn from each others' business experiences while at the same time working with networks of agroecological farmer producers to build experience and learnings for the broader field.

Agroecology businesses and entrepreneurs need the broader agriculture sector to train business consultants in agroecological principles and to connect them to producers and territorial markets.

AFSA, a long-term partner of AEF, is creating peer networks of agroecological entrepreneurs and territorial markets on a countrywide level; their aim is to build the capacity, knowledge, and networks that will shift the field.

¹¹ The CoP has two working groups: 1) one aimed at growing African Agroecological Entrepreneurships (AAEs), whose goal is to foster a community of business development service providers and others working to support the emergence and growth of AAEs and agroecology markets in East Africa; and 2) a working group focused on investing in AAEs, whose goal is to foster a community of finance providers and financial practitioners who are working to increase the availability of appropriate forms of finance for AAEs in East Africa. The latter, the Financiers Working Group of the CoP, or FinCoP, is cofacilitated by TIFS and Biovision and managed by Shona Capital.



Packaging of Orders at Rabolo Food Coop, Kenyan Peasants League

Conclusions

This report has documented how 15 organizations, many of which are networks incubating multiple businesses, used Business Planning Grants (BPGs) to establish the foundations for viable, market-ready enterprises. By focusing on local crops, traditional knowledge, and community needs and agency, these initiatives suggest that transitioning toward food sovereignty could be a primary driver of economic resilience and growth. This shift is characterized by a move away from export-oriented industrial monocultures and toward diverse polycultures and territorial markets that feed local populations first.

The BPG initiative shows the potential to bridge a critical gap in imagination in agricultural finance. For many grassroots organizations, these grants provided the first formal opportunity to conduct professional market research, analyze complex value chains, map consumer demand, and develop business plans.

Much compelling data was generated by this process. In Cameroon, for example, replacing just 20 percent of imported wheat with local tuber flour could save the country US\$19 million annually and offer a critical market to thousands of agroecological entrepreneurs. In Senegal, the local production of natural bouillon by smallholder women farmers and processors offers a healthy alternative to industrial imports that cost West Africa US\$375 million a year. In Kenya, research shows that 94 percent of surveyed urban consumers are ready to purchase directly from local agroecological cooperatives. These findings suggest that the most stable financial and social returns could indeed be in enterprises that also restore soil health and biodiversity while meeting the nutritional needs of the community.

The planning process has empowered farmers to see themselves as entrepreneurs; it has also catalyzed the formation of new self-organized cooperatives. Broad networks like ESAFF Uganda, representing 765,560 farmers, have demonstrated how helping farmer members shift mindsets through business training and support can lead to more profitable and resilient farming systems. By identifying specific equipment or technology needs that range from bouillon-processing machinery in Senegal to cold storage and seed exchange platforms in Kenya, networks and

organizations have created clear, data-backed roadmaps for future investment in the businesses that they spawn.

For the ethical investor and the philanthropic community, this BPG trial provides a powerful foundation on which to build. As of August 2025, 8 of the 15 participating groups have already successfully converted their business plans into implementation grants of up to US\$120,000. Scaling this impact, however, requires moving beyond narrow financial metrics to embracing the agroecological principles that value community well-being and ecological health alongside profit, and that recognize the power of networks to support small businesses and advocate for a supportive policy environment for them. Appropriate support must address capital needs between US\$10,000 and US\$250,000, which remain largely unmet by current financial institutions.

The path forward requires a commitment to food sovereignty, long-term holistic sustainability, and strengthening agroecology movements. To reach the next stage of development, these enterprises require patient capital that understands biological cycles and respects the agency of smallholder farmers and the organizations that represent them. Such enterprises also require policy support to dismantle regulatory barriers that currently favor industrial agribusiness over local entrepreneurs. By investing in these agroecological businesses and the networks that support them, donors and investors will be investing in the transition to agroecology and in a continent's ability to feed itself through a regenerative, fair, and resilient economy.

Transport of fonio from the field to the home, INADES-Formation Togo



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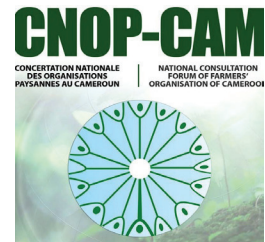
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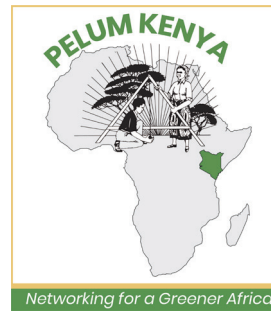
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