

CONSCIOUS FOOD SYSTEMS

CASE STUDIES COLLECTION

Convened by:



CONSCIOUS FOOD SYSTEMS: CASE STUDIES COLLECTION

Acknowledgements

This report has been collectively written, with contributions from numerous CoFSA members and partners.

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The Conscious Food Systems Alliance

The Conscious Food Systems Alliance (CoFSA) is a movement of food, agriculture, and consciousness practitioners, convened by UNDP, and united around a common goal: to support people from across food and agriculture systems to cultivate the inner capacities that activate systemic change and regeneration. To find out more about the Conscious Food Systems Alliance and how to be involved, visit our website:

www.consciousfoodsystems.org/

Case Studies Collection

The collection builds on the [CoFSA Collective Inquiries](#), and the projects selected for the [Conscious Food Incubator's 2023 Call for Proposals](#). It is structured around key areas of intervention identified in the [CoFSA Rationale for Action Report](#):

1. Farmers' Wellbeing and Psychological Resilience
2. Conscious Local Communities and Cultures for Regeneration
3. Revitalizing and Strengthening Traditional Wisdom
4. Food Policy Reform
5. Multistakeholder Dialogues
6. Cultural Transformation of Organizations
7. Conscious Consumption

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Foreword



Food connects us to one another, to our cultures, and to our planet. However, instead of nurturing our collective health and well-being, food systems have become central to the social and environmental crises we face today. Despite significant investments and efforts to transform these systems, the solutions emphasized thus far have not produced the necessary impact. The barriers to transformation are deeply rooted in structural inequities and the lack of agency for the most marginalized stakeholders. Additionally, these barriers are fundamentally connected to our collective consciousness, particularly in cultural patterns of disconnection—from ourselves, from each other, and from nature.

Consciousness, in this context, refers to our awareness of inner and outer phenomena, which shapes how we perceive and interact with ourselves and the world around us, including others, nature, and future generations. Cultivating consciousness expands our sense of identity, care, and responsibility. In the field of sustainability, there is growing recognition of the need to deepen consciousness and cultivate inner capacities—such as awareness, mindsets, beliefs, and values. This importance is underscored in the latest IPCC reports on climate change mitigation and adaptation, which highlight the role of "inner transitions" and the inner capacities of individuals, organizations, and societies as critical levers for accelerating the transition toward sustainable development.

The Conscious Food Systems Alliance (CoFSA) was established to address this significant gap. Convened by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), CoFSA is a movement that brings together food, agriculture, and consciousness practitioners to support people across food and agriculture systems in cultivating the inner capacities needed for systemic change and regeneration.

This collection of case studies showcases the application of consciousness approaches and practices by CoFSA members to transform food systems. It also includes examples from other sectors that have the potential for replication and adaptation. By highlighting a wide range and diversity of conscious food interventions, this compendium demonstrates the vitality of this field while strengthening the evidence base on the relevance and effectiveness of these approaches.

Since its inception, CoFSA has emphasized the importance of context-specific and culturally relevant interventions that are grounded in respect, equity, and an awareness of power dynamics, supported by a diverse body of evidence and knowledge. This collection of case studies is a critical contribution to establishing the emerging field of conscious food as a promising and complementary pathway to transforming our food systems. I hope it will inspire others to engage with and collaborate on this vital agenda.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Bovarnick".

Andrew Bovarnick

Global Head of Food and Agricultural Commodity Systems, UNDP



1 Farmers' Wellbeing and Psychological Resilience

1. Sustainable Yogic Agriculture and the Cultivation of Farmers' Wellbeing

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University: Use of meditative practices to support farmers' wellbeing and facilitate the transition towards organic farming | India

*Authors: Julia Wright and Janus Bojesen Jensen,
Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, Coventry University, UK*

"Sustainable Yogic Agriculture and the Cultivation of Farmers' Wellbeing" is a case study exploring the integration of meditative practices to support farmers' well-being and facilitate the transition towards organic farming in India. The research was conducted by Julia Wright and Janus Bojesen Jensen from the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience at Coventry University, UK.

BACKGROUND

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, established in 1937, is grounded in the Vedic cosmological worldview, which emphasizes that all human beings are pure souls inhabiting physical bodies. SYA (Sustainable Yogic Agriculture) was initiated in response to Indian farmers who noted improvements in crop health when they practiced meditation in their fields. Recognizing the potential of these methods, the Brahma Kumaris' Rural Development Wing formally launched SYA in 2008 with the aim of enhancing farmers' lives and livelihoods through a blend of meditative practices and organic farming principles. SYA is premised on the belief that "as the food, so the mind, and as the mind, so the body", highlighting the interconnectedness of mental and physical well-being. Coventry University, UK, gained permission from the Rural Development Wing of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University to study their system of Sustainable Yogic Agriculture (SYA).

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

SYA incorporates thought-based meditative practices with traditional organic farming principles, which exclude the use of non-organic fertilizers and biocides. Farmers are taught to practice open-eyed meditation daily, especially between 4 and 5 am, either at home or in the field. This meditation helps farmers foster a connection to God, self, the Motherland, and cows, which are considered holy in India. The belief is that pure thoughts generate pure vibrations, creating a pure atmosphere that positively affects crop health and growth.

Farmers use affirmations during different phases of the cropping cycle and are encouraged to play music, sing spiritual songs, and use bells around oxen necks to create a harmonious and uplifting environment. Flags of Shiva, standing about 5 feet tall, are placed at intervals across the fields to remind farmers that the land is under divine care and to reflect sunlight and deter pests.

The first SYA field trials began in 2009, involving 400 smallholder farmers in central and northern India. Since then, training has expanded to hundreds of villages annually across various regions, supported by scientists from Govind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and Technology and Sardarkrushinagar Dantiwada University of Agriculture and Technology.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Farmers practicing SYA reported significant personal and social benefits. These included improved family relationships, a stronger connection to their livelihood, a greater sense of well-being, purpose, and peace. Emotional benefits included reduced feelings of anger and frustration, and an increase in patience, forgiveness, and self-esteem. Additionally, there was a noticeable reduction in addiction problems (e.g. smoking, alcohol, opium), fewer doctor visits, and higher inner strength.

Farmers experienced increased crop yields, improved nutritional content, and enhanced plant resilience. The costs of production were reduced, and the price per kilo of the produce sold increased. SYA also led to decreased crop vulnerability to pests, faster seed germination, and easy incorporation with other sustainable agriculture methods such as Sustainable Rice Intensification. The farm environment became more pleasant, joyful, and refreshing, with visitors noticing these positive changes. Villages became cleaner, more peaceful, and politically unified, especially during elections.

LEARNINGS

Similar to other sustainable farming approaches, SYA faced challenges in adoption. Farmers often lacked sufficient labor and found organic inputs harder to access compared to agrochemicals.



Information poster on the 'before' and 'after' effects of meditation. Brahma Kumaris HQ, Rajasthan, 2017

A three-year transition period was required to restore land and soil biodiversity. Overcoming skepticism about farming without agrochemicals was essential, and this was addressed by explaining the financial benefits of higher-quality produce and lower production costs. The Rural Development Wing facilitated farmer-to-farmer networks to support adoption.

The alignment of Raja Yoga meditation with organic farming principles significantly enhanced the psycho-social well-being of farmers. The meditation practice not only benefited individual farmers but also positively impacted their families and communities. The increased peace of mind and well-being are invaluable, especially considering the challenges faced by small farmers in India and other regions globally. The positive local and regional results achieved in a relatively short period (12 years) indicate the potential for wider recognition and adoption of SYA and its meditative practices.

Table 1. Key Quantitative and Qualitative Benefits of SYA, as Described by SYA Farmers

Quantitative Benefits	Qualitative Benefits
Increased crop yield	Improved family relations
Increased crop nutritional content	Increased feeling of connection with livelihood
Decreased costs of production	Increased sense of wellbeing and purpose
Increase in the price per kilo of product sold	Increased sense of pride as a farmer
Increased plant resilience	Improved relationships among farming communities
Decreased crop vulnerability to pests	Reduction in emotions such as anger and frustration among farmers
Faster seed germination	Increase in emotions such as patience and forgiveness among farmers
Easy incorporation with other methods of sustainable agriculture such as Sustainable Rice Intensification	Brings together disparate social sectors into a common purpose with wide-ranging benefits
	Incorporates cultural and spiritual meaning into work life



2. Empowering Communities to Bridge Mental Health Gaps

Atmiyata Programme: A Community-led Intervention for mental health support | India

Author: Jasmine Kalha, Program Manager and Research Fellow, Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy

“Empowering rural communities to address mental health challenges head-on, the Atmiyata Programme is transforming lives in India's underserved regions. This case study delves into how a community-led, low-cost intervention has not only bridged the mental health care gap but also fostered resilience and empathy in over 1,890 villages. Discover the journey of Atmiyata, a beacon of hope and change, recognized globally for its innovative approach to mental health.”

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a substantial public health burden globally, especially in low-resource settings like rural India. The latest data shows that approximately 150 million people are impacted by mental health conditions, yet nearly 76-85% of Indians with mental health conditions are unable to access care and treatment. The Atmiyata Programme, developed by the Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy (CMHLP) in Pune, India, offers a community-led, low-cost, and evidence-based intervention to tackle this challenge.

BACKGROUND

In rural India, mental health services are scarce, and stigma and discrimination prevent many from seeking help. To address this, CMHLP launched Atmiyata in 2013, starting with 41 villages and expanding to reach 1,890 villages across seven districts and five states by 2024. This initiative leverages the social capital of communities, working closely with state

governments, local systems, community health workers, and stakeholders to create sustainable mental health support systems. It assists people with Common Mental Disorders (CMDs) to lead productive and healthy lives and break the vicious cycle of poverty and mental ill-health.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

Atmiyata aims to:

- 1.Reduce the treatment and psychosocial care gap for common and severe mental disorders.
- 2.Improve mental health outcomes for individuals with common mental disorders (CMD).
- 3.Enhance the quality of life for people with mental health problems.
- 4.Improve access to social welfare schemes for those with mental health issues.

In 2021, the World Health Organization recognized Atmiyata as one of 25 good practices for delivering community-based mental health services in line with a rights and recovery-based approach for marginalized and vulnerable groups. To reduce the mental health care gap, the model is complementary to the public mental health systems.

Atmiyata uses several consciousness approaches:

Psychological and Cognitive-Behavioral Practices: Volunteers are trained, mentored and supervised to conduct four activities:



Atmiyata Champion interacting with an end-user

(i) identify persons with distress and common mental health conditions (CMD) and provide 4–6 sessions of evidence-based counseling; (ii) raise community awareness by narrowcasting the four films on the social determinants of mental health on a smartphone; (iii) refer persons with severe mental health conditions to the public mental health services when required, and (iv) enable access to social care benefits.

Transformative Spaces and Communication

Practices: Training modules use animations, role plays, and open discussions to build volunteer skills in creating transformative spaces in the villages by using active listening, problem-solving, behavioral activation techniques and other non-verbal communication to provide acceptable and feasible intervention. Transformative Education and Leadership Practices: Capacity-building sessions empower volunteers to become community leaders in mental health.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

By design, Atmiyata facilitates the development of inner capacities by enabling communities to define and address their own mental health and social care needs. The program fosters inner transformation among community members, particularly volunteers. They develop skills to identify mental health stressors, challenge mental health myths, and build empathy and compassion.

Volunteers report improved mental health and social status, feeling empowered to help others and foster community connections.

The stepped-wedge-cluster randomized controlled implementation trial shows Atmiyata is effective in reducing CMD (depression and anxiety) and improving quality of life at 3 months. The volunteers are skilled (58%) at accurately identifying persons with CMD. Atmiyata has normalized mental health discussions in rural communities, increased help-seeking behavior, and improved awareness of mental health and its social determinants. The program has enhanced the confidence of volunteers, some of whom have successfully contested local elections, won their seats, and then used the village-level resources for mental health.

Participants in the program report improved confidence in addressing mental health concerns, fostering genuine dialogue, and managing conflicts. Community engagement in the program has been significant, with many completing the counseling sessions and benefiting from social entitlements. The intervention has made previously invisible mental health conditions more visible and manageable.

Atmiyata works with farmer groups, both formal and informal in rural communities. As there is a high prevalence of distress among farmers, both landed and landless labor, owing to changing climate conditions, irregular water supply, crop failure, and financial insecurity due to loans and debts. Engaging, training, and involving farming communities and other informal groups in delivering the intervention has led to community transformation. Also, Atmiyata has influenced the health system at the district level, increasing the demand for mental health services and reducing stigma around severe mental health conditions.

The program emphasizes equitable participation, with a significant proportion of volunteers from marginalized castes and a gender-equal team to ensure accessibility and reach.

LEARNINGS

One of the primary challenges faced during the implementation of the intervention was stigma and resistance. Initially, the intervention was framed in the context of mental illness, which led to resistance within the community. To improve acceptance, the approach was reframed around addressing daily social and economic challenges, which proved to be more effective in gaining community support.

Another challenge was ensuring equitable reach. To effectively expand the intervention's impact, it was crucial to have demographic representation among volunteers. This inclusivity helped to improve the program's reach and effectiveness. Additionally, training more supporters, referred to as Mitras, was essential in overcoming social barriers and enhancing the intervention's accessibility and acceptance within diverse communities.

Structural barriers also posed significant challenges. Addressing broader issues such as domestic violence and unemployment became necessary to better meet the community's needs. These structural problems were closely tied to the overall well-being of individuals, highlighting the need for a holistic approach to mental health support.

The intervention's success and scalability were greatly influenced by strong community engagement. By co-designing the intervention with community members and leveraging existing social capital, the program gained widespread acceptance and showed potential or scalability. This collaborative approach helped to ensure that the intervention was culturally sensitive and aligned with community needs and values.

Collaborating with existing health systems also emerged as a crucial factor for sustainability. Integrating the program within these systems not only enhances trust but also ensures that the intervention can be maintained over the long term. This alignment with established health infrastructure helps in building a sustainable model for mental health support.

The intervention's flexible model allows for its integration into various community-based programs and urban settings, offering a scalable solution for broader mental health support. Its adaptability enables it to be customized to different contexts, making it a versatile tool in the pursuit of comprehensive mental health care.

Overall, Atmiyata's success is rooted in its low-cost, evidence-based approach that effectively utilizes community resources. This makes it a sustainable model for mental health care in low- and middle-income contexts. The program's expansion and positive outcomes demonstrate its potential for wider replication and integration into public health systems, offering a promising avenue for improving mental health care accessibility and effectiveness.

“We strongly believe that individuals and communities can address their own mental health and social care needs.”



Narrowcasting of films by an Atmiyata Champion



3. Embodied Permaculture Project

Alef Trust, Earthbound and Permaculture Association Britain:
Inner and Outer Transformation through Presence-oriented
Permaculture | UK and EU

Author: Dan McTiernan, transpersonal psychology coach, Earthbound Coaching

In a world where the rhythm of nature often feels distant, the Embodied Permaculture Project beckons us to reconnect deeply with our environment, to not just work with nature, but to live as part of it. This innovative initiative, spearheaded by Alef Trust's Conscious Community Initiative in collaboration with Earthbound facilitators and Permaculture Association Britain, invites 20 passionate permaculture practitioners from across Europe to embark on an 18-month journey of transformation, blending inner consciousness practices with sustainable ecological design. Through this fusion, participants explore new ways of being that harmonize with the natural world, promising profound changes in both personal and community dynamics.

BACKGROUND

The Embodied Permaculture Project is being carried out as part of Alef Trust's Conscious Community Initiative and implemented by Earthbound facilitators, Dan and Johanna McTiernan in partnership with Permaculture Association Britain. This initiative examines the intersection of inner integrative practices and social change to foster individual and systemic transformation. It is a live, facilitated online program engaging 20 permaculture practitioners, tutors, and diploma students from the UK and Europe. The participatory element of the project runs for 18 months from June 2023 to November 2024, with data analysis and reporting concluding by May 2025. Permaculture is a design methodology following the patterns and principles of nature,

it advocates working **with** nature rather than **against** it. The Embodied Permaculture Project aims to deepen this principle by exploring how permaculture can be practiced as an experience of **being nature working**. This involves discovering new ways of living and being attuned to our ecosystems through embodied presencing and relational practices, focusing on listening, attuning, and intuiting within action learning cycles. The project examines the impact of these practices on permaculture work, design, and community engagement from a felt sense of interbeing.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACHES

The project employs a four-stage process:

- 1. Grounding:** This phase focuses on regulating the nervous system through practices such as breathwork and embodied meditation to promote safety, presence, and relaxation, facilitating connection to the body and nature.
- 2. Attuning:** Participants tune into their bodymind through subtle interoception through meditation, dyadic relational inquiry, and somatic coaching. This stage involves gently releasing unhelpful patterns and listening to deeper sources of information.
- 3. Opening:** This phase encourages participants to connect with others through "social field" practices and apply these in their permaculture contexts, supported by community action learning cycles.

4. Integration: This final stage aims to solidify these practices as ongoing traits, normalizing them in social contexts and embodying the resulting transformation.

These approaches target deep leverage points for transformation and are taught in live group Zoom sessions, 1-to-1 coaching and supported by recorded exercises for home practice.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Quantitative data is collected through scale questionnaires at the project's start and end, exploring inner, outer, and relational experiences. Qualitative data is gathered from 1-to-1 interviews, group sessions, and participant journaling shared on a private forum. Participants, invited through the Permaculture Association Britain, include practitioners, tutors, and diploma students from the UK and Europe, some of whom are Association employees, including the Chief Executive. The project posits that the belief in our separation from each other and nature underlies current crises. Transformative inner experiences, where participants feel more connected to themselves, others, and nature, offer leverage for harmonious existence. Reported benefits include increased grounded awareness, trust in inner knowing, patience, and compassion. Participants noted improved listening and attunement skills, empowerment to effect change, and enhanced conflict resolution abilities. Participants reported greater control over their actions, openness to the present moment, and a stronger sense of purpose and energy. Group dynamics improved with better listening, openness to needs, and generative problem-solving. Most participants integrated embodiment practices into meetings, workshops and other work contexts yielding positive outcomes.

Participants observed that their inner and outer changes positively impacted their permaculture work environments. They reported better group experiences and a sense of shared purpose in community projects. Enhanced listening, openness, and reduced anxiety contributed to improved team dynamics. Greater trust in “inner knowing” also led to more emergent design solutions.

Early signs of systemic change include new collaborative capacities and skills. Participants felt more confident in fostering positive spaces in business meetings and encouraging practices like group breathing exercises, leading to better teamwork and alignment with purpose.

LEARNINGS

Initial one-on-one meetings with participants helped build trust, while early group sessions focused on intentions without titles, fostering a safe group dynamic. Though some experienced participants resisted the heavy emphasis on teaching embodied presence, adjusting the balance between educational content and relationship-building improved cohesion and participation, resulting in high retention.

Facilitators' expertise in permaculture, particularly Dan and Johanna McTiernan's experience since 2008, has been vital. Their ability to integrate inner and outer change within permaculture language made the connection between interior and exterior experiences more accessible and valuable for participants.

Plans are underway for a large-scale online course focused on farmers' and food producers' well-being, aiming to expand from 20 participants to several hundred across the UK. While short courses can boost well-being, lasting transformation requires ongoing facilitation and peer connection. The project is exploring live online communities to support sustained practice and deeper shifts in consciousness.





4. A Holistic Approach to Sustainable Agriculture and Personal Growth

Tiny Farms Academy: Bridging the gap between self-awareness and sustainable farming, Germany

Author: Merle Hildebrandt, Director, Tiny Farms Academy

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In an age where sustainable practices are crucial for our planet's future, Tiny Farms Academy stands out by integrating organic farming with mindfulness and personal growth. This innovative NGO is not just about growing vegetables; it's about growing individuals who are deeply connected to the land and their own well-being.

BACKGROUND

Tiny Farms Academy is an innovative NGO based in Berlin, Germany, with additional locations in Hamburg and soon to expand to Zürich, Switzerland. The organization offers a nine-month learning program designed specifically for career changers interested in transitioning into the field of organic vegetable farming. This comprehensive curriculum aims to provide participants with a holistic learning experience by integrating expertise from organic agriculture, mindfulness, and modern work practices. Through a hybrid learning format, participants have the opportunity to learn from a diverse array of experienced instructors and embark on a journey of transformative education.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The primary goal of the Tiny Farms Academy is to reestablish the connection between individuals and organic vegetable production while fostering personal growth and

community engagement. By offering a comprehensive curriculum that combines practical gardening skills (field work) with inner development (inner work), the project aims to empower participants to become changemakers in sustainable agriculture and beyond. Through hands-on learning experiences at the farm, online training, and a strong community, the Academy seeks to create a new generation of conscious farmers and consumers who are deeply connected to the land and their own well-being.

Drawing from principles of mindfulness and self-awareness, the Tiny Farms Academy integrates inner capacities into its curriculum to cultivate a holistic understanding of sustainable growth and living. The curriculum has two major elements: field work and inner work. Both elements are made of six workshops. The element field work teaches all the basics of organic market gardening, whereas the element inner work helps to connect and work with yourself, with others and identify one's own purpose. Also, participants are introduced to the societal context of agriculture and learn about the administrative and organizational aspects of setting up a small-scale farming business.

During the workshops on the farm, conscious practices are integrated such as mindfulness meditations, reflective walks, and embodiment exercises.

During the online workshops, guided meditations, reflective journaling exercises, and peer-group discussions on personal values and goals are part of the program.

These consciousness approaches are chosen for their ability to promote self-awareness, empathy, nature connection and personal and communal resilience. We firmly believe that these qualities and inner capacities are essential for the well-being and resilience of farmers. They play a crucial role in navigating the internal and external changes and uncertainties that characterize our current era.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Data collection for monitoring and evaluation includes during- and post-program surveys, participant interviews, and direct observation. The evaluation process monitors progress, measures outcomes, and gathers feedback for continuous improvement. Surveys and interviews provided valuable insights, leading to adjustments in the curriculum and the introduction of brief feedback surveys after each session.

Participants experienced varying degrees of inner growth, with many discovering new methods and expanding their horizons. Some found clarity in their life purpose through self-reflection exercises, while others appreciated the supportive community and increased optimism for their future plans. Overall, hands-on learning, peer support, and introspection fostered a deeper connection to nature and a clearer understanding of personal values and goals.

On an individual level, participants reported adopting more sustainable lifestyle practices, reducing food waste, and engaging in farming activities. These changes reflect a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness between personal actions and environmental impact. Group dynamics improved, with increased cooperation and collective problem-solving skills strengthening community bonds.



Ten out of 40 participants are initiating their own farming projects, while others reported enhanced well-being and a renewed sense of purpose.

Participants perceive that transformations facilitated by Tiny Farms Academy extend beyond individual growth, catalyzing systemic change. Emerging signs of systemic transformation include new relationships, insights, and improved collaboration within the local food system. The Academy fosters a growing community committed to redefining agricultural practices, highlighting its potential to drive systemic change beyond its immediate sphere of influence.

LEARNINGS

Managing expectations among participants with diverse backgrounds, personal barriers to mindfulness practices, and group size were notable challenges. Last year, accommodating 40 participants per location proved too much, leading to a reduction to 30 individuals per site for a more intimate learning environment. Regular feedback mechanisms help address challenges proactively.

Strong social connections among participants enrich the learning experience and create a supportive community. The program benefits from strong community partnerships, dedicated facilitators, and flexibility to adapt content to local contexts. These elements amplify the program's reach and effectiveness, empowering individuals to contribute to sustainable farming and holistic living.

Tiny Farms Academy shows significant potential for replication and scaling in other communities. A strategic scaling initiative aims to establish Academy-Farms in every region, spreading the concept of small-scale agriculture and supporting individuals in their personal change journeys. Key considerations include securing sustainable funding, building facilitator capacity, and maintaining program quality.

By sharing best practices and lessons learned, Tiny Farms Academy aims to contribute to the wider adoption of sustainable agriculture practices and transformative education initiatives, empowering individuals and communities to embrace sustainable living and cultivate a healthier, more resilient future. The Academy is expanding its inner work program offerings, integrating personal growth practices with organic farming methodologies. New learning formats tailored for teams and organizations are being introduced, fostering transformative experiences for all participants. The aim is to bridge personal development with sustainable farming principles, promoting a deeper understanding of oneself and a greater appreciation for the natural world.



5. Universal Human Values with Farmers

Shramik Bharti: Promoting natural farming practice in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, India

Authors: Neelmani Gupta, Rakesh Kumar Pandey, Shramik Bharti

Shramik Bharti, is an organization that has been actively promoting "Avartansheel Kheti," a natural cyclical farming practice rooted in Madhyasth Darshan philosophy, among small and marginal farmers in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Despite financial incentives to move to natural farming practices, many farmers reverted to chemical farming, indicating a need for a deeper, more holistic approach.

BACKGROUND

Natural farming, as promoted by Shramik Bharti, faced challenges as financial motivation alone was insufficient. To address this, Shramik Bharti engaged 200 farmers in Uttar Pradesh in a knowledge system called Universal Human Values (UHV), based on Madhyasth Darshan. This 'Co-existential Philosophy' is an insight into reality and human nature. 'Darshan' in the Sanskrit language means to "see", or have a vision of reality as-it-is. This comprehensive knowledge system (darsana) examines and provides clarity in all dimensions of human life: the experiential, rational, emotional and occupational. This understanding further contributes to living with care, love, generosity, kindness and benevolence.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The project aimed to instill a holistic perspective towards life, nature, and farming among the participants through 3 objectives:

1. Develop a holistic perspective towards life and profession, happiness, and prosperity based on a correct understanding of human reality and existence.
2. Foster the competence to understand and participate in the harmony of nature/existence.
3. Cultivate the ability to conceptualize a humane society characterized by an undivided society and universal human order.

To achieve these objectives, a series of six workshops (each lasting five days) and five follow-up sessions (each lasting two days) were conducted. These workshops involved self-investigation and self-exploration, allowing farmers to internalize UHV principles through natural acceptance and experiential validation.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

There was a process of self-investigation and self-exploration. Whatever is found as truth or reality was stated as a proposal and the participants were facilitated to verify it in their own right, based on their Natural Acceptance and subsequent Experiential Validation—the whole existence was the lab and every activity was a source of reflection. These images (see Figure 1 and 2) capture the words farmers used to describe their values and priorities before and after their participation in the workshops. They are now able to see that they can achieve happiness and prosperity, in continuity by developing harmony with self, family, society and nature.

Before attending the program, some believed that happiness was about accomplishments and possessions, while others connected it with physical facilities and external factors.

However, after the program, they now see happiness as living in harmony with family, society, and nature. The focus shifted to understanding and nurturing relationships, and not just accumulating material things.

The participating farmers are members of Farmer Producer Organizations formed in their districts by Shramik Bharti. They realized that after attending the Program their behavior towards other members has become more compassionate and trustworthy. They now feel to cooperate with others, in contrary to competition.

Some of the farmers clearly stated that they were mainly doing chemical farming and experimenting with natural farming on a small piece of land, before attending program on Universal Human Values. But after attending UHV workshops, they recognize the value of natural farming for self, family, society and nature. The change in participants' understanding of nature and farming practices is illustrated in Figure 2, where they emphasized and committed to adopting natural farming for the production of safe and nutritious food for everyone and enrichment and protection of Mother Earth.

Overall, UHV education has changed farmers' existing mindsets, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors and practices that were largely based on assumptions. The program brought a shift from self-centered views to a holistic understanding of life. This has led to a fostering of self-awareness and personal growth. In particular, participants embraced the idea of mutual enrichment and harmonious co-existence with nature. This understanding will strengthen farmers' commitment towards natural farming, thus ensuring greater longevity in the shift to sustainable food production.

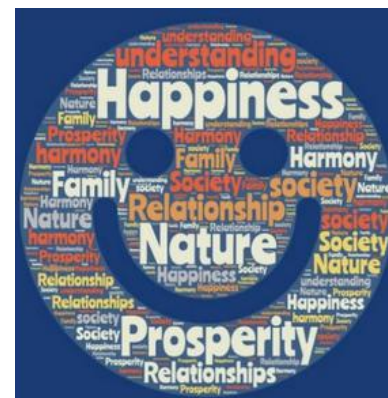


Figure 1: Words describing “goal of life” pre and post UHV Workshops

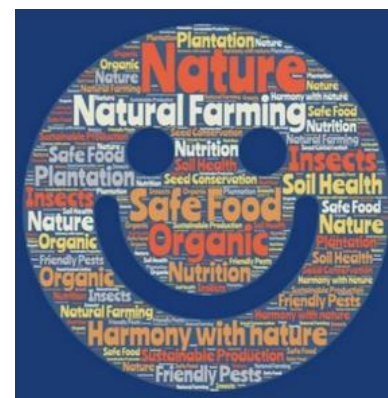
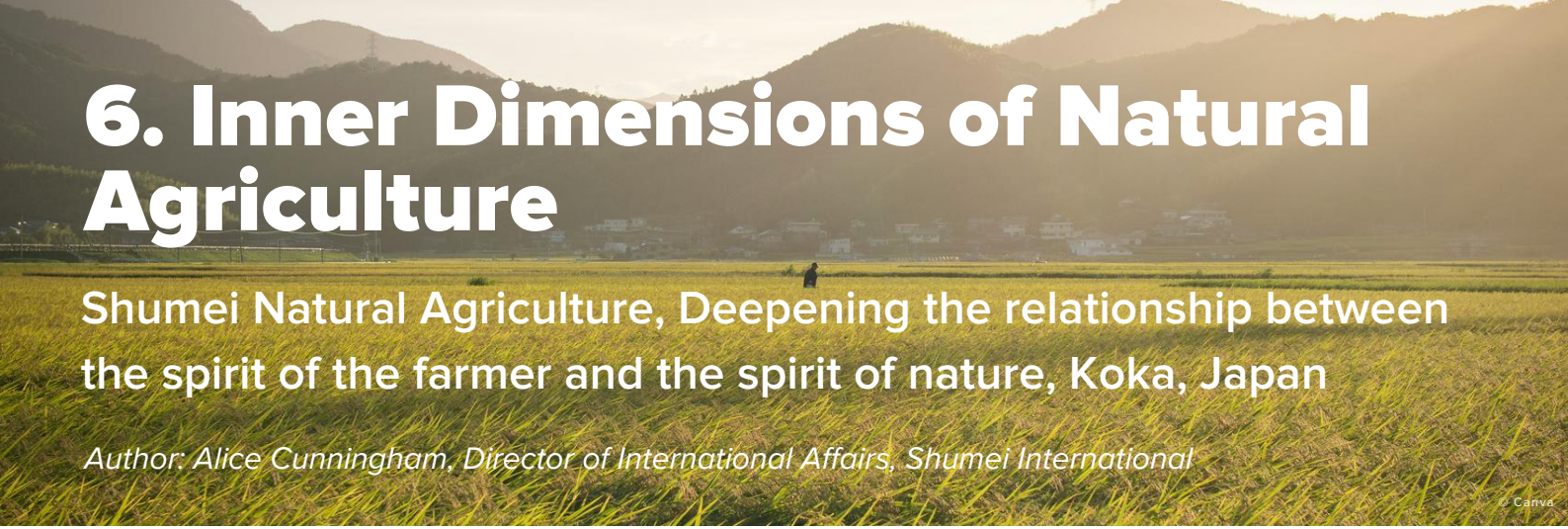


Figure 2: Words describing “happiness” pre and post UHV Workshops.

LEARNINGS

The UHV workshops significantly altered the participants' mindsets, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, leading to a holistic understanding of life. The experiential learning approach proved effective in fostering self-awareness and personal growth, promoting a commitment to sustainable farming practices. This model holds potential for wider application across different farming communities, with the need for continuous and intensive mentoring to support ongoing learning and practice.

Challenges included accommodating farmers' busy schedules and adverse weather conditions, which were mitigated by adjusting the workshop schedule. Overall, the initiative demonstrated that integrating UHV into farming practices can lead to sustainable and fulfilling agricultural practices.



6. Inner Dimensions of Natural Agriculture

Shumei Natural Agriculture, Deepening the relationship between the spirit of the farmer and the spirit of nature, Koka, Japan

Author: Alice Cunningham, Director of International Affairs, Shumei International

Gaining traction throughout Japan and globally, Shumei Natural Agriculture is a transformative farming approach that awakens our connection to nature and the sacred dimension of life. This case study will explore how the practice of Natural Agriculture can cultivate profound respect for nature, gratitude, and oneness between people and the environment. By embracing the interconnectedness of all life and striving to live in harmony with nature, Natural Agriculture farmers reconnect with traditional knowledge and their own internal capacities while positively impacting their communities, including those who enjoy the food they produce.

BACKGROUND

Natural Agriculture (NA) is a spiritually based approach to farming, developed by the founder of Shumei, Mokichi Okada, to promote an overriding respect for nature. By cultivating crops without the use of any additives, fertilizers, or pesticides, and with heirloom seeds, emphasis is placed on love, respect for nature, and gratitude, which are seen as essential for growing healthy food.

NA programs encourage participants to recognize themselves as expressions of nature, understanding that nature is alive and responds to thoughts and actions. NA farmers view the natural world as a conscious partner in the growing process and believe that by listening to and observing nature with an open heart, individuals can discover its beauty and divinity.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

Established in 2003, Shigaraki No Sato is an NA demonstration farm based on the concept of Satoyama: living in harmony with nature. It serves as the headquarters for the Natural Agriculture Network and associated programs, and partners with Shumei's Miho Museum and the Miho School to bring NA to wider audiences. The diverse project site sits on 6-acres of land with rice paddies, vegetable and tea fields, bee hives, and two traditional Japanese farmhouses.

The objective of Shigaraki No Sato is to inspire a deeper connection with nature and showcase Natural Agriculture as a way of farming and living in harmony with nature. The demonstration farm serves as a catalyst for inner and outer change, encouraging the practice and support of NA among farmers, visitors, community members, and consumers. Farmers are taught principles of nature and encouraged to spend time alone in nature to allow deep connection and a transformative shift to unfold.

Through training programs and workshops, farmers are guided through conscious and mindful interactions on the land, with seeds and soil, such as planting rice paddies barefoot to heighten the senses. The cultivation of crops without the use of additives requires farmers to relinquish control and place trust in the innate power of nature.

Visitors to the farm learn about a way of life in harmony with nature through the two refurbished 200-year-old Kominkas: traditional Japanese farmhouses. The Kominkas showcase harmony through design and building materials, demonstrating how traditional values, wisdom and aesthetics can be incorporated into modern life. Shumei also offers a “seed to table” experience at the nearby Miho Museum restaurant and farmer’s market, allowing visitors and community members to eat and experience the life force in NA food prepared from local, seasonal and native ingredients.

By engaging in mindfulness, deep listening, observation of the beauty in nature, and reconnection to traditional wisdom, farmers experience a shift in mindset and deeper engagement with nature. Visitors to Shigaraki No Sato experience harmony with nature and its impact on their sense of wellbeing firsthand.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Farmers recount that through practicing Natural Agriculture, they experience significant inner changes, such as a greater sense of connection to nature, self and others, as well as faith, patience, humility, and gratitude. Many also report feeling part of a greater whole and experiencing an overall sense of well-being.

An NA tea farmer said, “It’s about learning from nature; in doing so, we saw the quality of our tea improve. We listen to what the crops tell us, observing and feeling to understand what they need.”

By choosing to rely on the natural resilience of their crops, NA farmers place their faith in the growing cycle, and feel a deep sense of gratitude for nature.

Many NA farmers and consumers have discovered the life force in the plants they cultivate and consume, and this has shifted their perspective. For example, one said:

“When you have a sense that there are spirits in nature, and spirits of plants, you have a different relationship with them...So you have a higher regard for them, when you prep, when you plant, you pray for them to grow like a child, to grow well. And when they grow well, and give you fruits, you give them gratitude, you thank them. So your relationship with them is very different.”

— Farmer

Through its programs and workshops, Shigaraki No Sato has inspired hundreds of farmers to adopt Natural Agriculture. Shigaraki No Sato serves as the center for the Shumei Natural Agriculture Network, a community of over 1000 NA farmers across Japan. In addition to knowledge sharing, network members are in the process of creating an NA seed bank, promoting climate resiliency and community connection through preserving the genetic diversity of native and heirloom seeds.

Scientific studies conducted at Shigaraki No Sato have demonstrated the effectiveness of NA in protecting biodiversity and improving soil health. As a result, Shumei NA farmers are helping to restore abandoned rice paddies in the region through NA approaches and are further increasing biodiversity through the cultivation of more than 300 rice varieties





LEARNINGS

Natural Agriculture emphasizes fostering deep relationships between farmers and nature—resulting in inner change that has been difficult to measure. Shumei is continuing efforts to gather regular feedback from NA practitioners and visitors to Shigaraki No Sato to document inner shifts and outer change.

Interest in the NA approach continues to grow for gardeners and farmers alike, stemming from concerns around agrochemicals and the desire to increase climate resiliency. Additionally, there is a growing understanding of the connection between human health and soil health. Despite this, there is a general lack of interest in agriculture among young people in Japan. Some farmers face challenges in practicing NA consistently or full time, often balancing additional jobs for financial security.

Several larger scale producers are transitioning to NA, demonstrating the potential for scalability. Since Shigaraki No Sato was founded, NA community projects and demonstration farms have been established in Brazil, the Philippines, Zambia, Nepal, the US and across Europe. NA farmers are increasingly sharing the approach and their experiences through virtual tutorials, courses and webinars.

Moving forward, Shumei will continue to seek opportunities to uplift farmer voices and share the message of Natural Agriculture through demonstration farms and experiences that inspire deeper connections with nature.

A group of approximately 15 people are sitting in a circle on the ground in a forest, under the shade of a large, ancient tree with thick, gnarled branches. They are engaged in a community meeting or ceremony. In the center of the circle, there are colorful fabrics, flowers, and other ritualistic items. The people are dressed in casual clothing, and the atmosphere appears to be one of shared purpose and connection. The background shows more trees and a dirt path, suggesting a natural, outdoor setting.

2 Conscious local communities and cultures for regeneration

7. Creating a Conscious Corporate Culture

Economy of Love Education Programme, Egypt

Author: Nana Woo, Education Manager, SEKEM

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Transforming corporate culture through education: How does the Economy of Love (EoL) Educational Programme drive sustainable and ethical practices in businesses? This case study explores the EoL EDU curriculum's impact on producers, farms, and processors, emphasizing the journey toward holistic and sustainable development.

BACKGROUND

The Economy of Love (EoL) Educational Programme (EDU) is an educational curriculum that accompanies the EoL Certification Standard for sustainable and ethical producers, farms, and processors, implemented by SEKEM. The EoL EDU Program is applied to all the organizations that wish to be certified to adhere to the principles of holistic and sustainable development.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The objective of the EoL EDU Programme is to empower producers and processors to initiate the transformation of corporate culture and its current state of operation toward a working culture that supports the EoL principles and fosters the 4 dimensions of sustainability: ecology, economy, society, and culture. Getting the EoL Certification takes 3 years, during which companies make a deep commitment to their employees by offering them the EoL EDU curriculum and to consumers by fulfilling the promises of ethical and transparent production throughout the value chain.

Joining the program means companies take care of their employees' personal development through various cultural activities offered to their staff in different forms, ranging from the arts to Islamic spiritual practices. Companies commit to ensuring that 10% of employees' working time is devoted to their individual development. This includes weekly meetings (about 1 to 2 hours at a time) to discuss critical issues concerning their daily and working lives, led by SEKEM Initiative founder Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish. Additionally, employees are involved in ongoing development and specific training directly related to their work tasks and challenges.

EoL Curriculum: 4 Modules and 7 Sessions

The course is structured into four modules designed to shift the paradigm both at individual and collective levels. So far, around 1300 employees have been trained through the EoL EDU curriculum.

Module 1. ECOLOGY Basic Awareness Training: the module begins with observation and immersion in nature to foster interconnectedness with the whole system. It includes learning about current food production systems and their influence on climate change, and exploring traditional and indigenous farming practices.

Module 2. ECONOMY Basic Awareness Training: explores an economic system based on collaboration, solidarity, and care for people and nature.



Module 3. CULTURE Basic Awareness Training: balances productivity and efficiency with nurturing employees' individual development through the arts, creativity, spiritual practices, and well-being. In this way, EoL EDU focuses on providing space for individual empowerment and cultural diversity, fostering a healthy, respectful work environment and thus leading to a more sustainable and balanced society.

Module 4. SOCIETY Basic Awareness Training: aims to create a community of trust and mutual understanding, with communication skills, conflict resolution skills, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence being essential for building a strong community.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Over the implementation of the curriculum, SEKEM Project Team conducted interviews to capture some of the lessons related to changes in behaviors, attitudes, needs, and constraints of participants. The EoL EDU curriculum has led to significant inner and outer changes among participants. On an individual level, there has been an increase in empathy and communication skills, as participants connected with their colleagues on a more personal level, discussing issues not typically addressed in the workplace. This has developed their ability to empathize and communicate effectively.

Additionally, participants reported a strengthened self-connection due to the active learning approach, which encouraged deep reflection and expression of opinions and ideas within the group. Many found the sessions to be a source of energy and inspiration, providing a

mental respite from work stresses and leaving them feeling refreshed and motivated. Collectively, these inner changes have translated into tangible outer changes at the organizational level.

Companies involved in the EoL EDU Program have become part of a movement rooted in sustainability, solidarity, and mutual respect, fostering a corporate culture that values holistic development and environmental stewardship. The curriculum's focus on adult education has driven participants to reflect on life's goals and purposes, thereby raising working-class consciousness and promoting sustainable practices.

LEARNINGS

The EoL EDU Program has provided several valuable lessons and insights. One of the main challenges faced was ensuring consistent commitment from companies and employees over the three-year certification period, which required balancing productivity and efficiency with cultural and personal development activities. The adaptability of the curriculum to different cultural and organizational contexts also emerged as a critical factor for success. Key lessons learned include the importance of personal and cultural development for sustainable transformation, and the significant benefits of regular, structured reflection and discussion sessions in enhancing empathy, communication skills, and self-awareness among employees. Additionally, the program highlighted the need for flexibility and adaptability to meet diverse settings' unique needs. Looking ahead, there is considerable potential for scaling up the EoL EDU Program. With increased funding and support, more companies can join the initiative, leading to broader adoption of sustainable and ethical practices across various industries. Expanding the program to new regions and sectors can further amplify its impact, creating a global movement toward holistic and sustainable development.



8. Empowering Communities and Transforming Lives

Opportunity International: Pathways to Wellbeing Programme | Global

Authors: Genzo Yamamoto, Director of Knowledge Management, and Mary Pat McVay, Senior Research and Knowledge Manager, Opportunity International

"Empowering communities and transforming lives through holistic wellbeing," embodies the essence of Opportunity International, a global not-for-profit organization. Opportunity International's mission is to provide financial solutions and training to those living in poverty, enabling them to transform their lives, their children's futures, and their communities. With a vision of a world where everyone can live a life free from poverty, with dignity and purpose, the organisation operates in some of the poorest regions globally.

BACKGROUND

Opportunity International's Pathways to Wellbeing program (hereafter "Pathways") is a unique, holistic training program that conscientizes participants to the different areas where they and their households can develop. Between 2022-2023, the program was devised and tested in three poverty-stricken contexts—urban Colombia (1,200 participants), rural Malawi (1,850 participants), and throughout Ghana (6,050 participants). In two cases, participants were members of savings groups or churches, and in one situation—Ghana—they were microfinance clients. As an adult training program, Pathways is focused on less literate populations.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The Pathways program empowers people to adjust their mindset and use God's gifts so that they can flourish in all aspects of their lives, families, and communities. It is not a community development program. Rather, it is a holistic training designed to spark behaviour change in which participants own their own development process. Each of the 6 training modules focuses on 3-4 specific objectives that help participants learn practical tools, adjust their mindsets, and use God's gifts. The program also aims to benefit implementing organizations by helping to improve their financial or operational performance, and it seeks to benefit supporting organizations (like Opportunity) by enhancing impact and strengthening their unique value proposition to donors (see figure 1.)

Poverty presents barriers and opportunities across spiritual, social, and physical aspects of life, yet most development programs specialize for efficiency. The Pathways program offers a middle ground by addressing multiple dimensions of poverty while enabling delivery by organizations that maintain a primary focus on one intervention, finance in the case of Opportunity.

Figure 1. Pathways to Wellbeing Training System Theory of Change



Based on the concept of “shalom,” the training curriculum drives towards joyful human flourishing through restored relationships with God, ourselves, others, and Creation (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Shalom and Module Dimensions

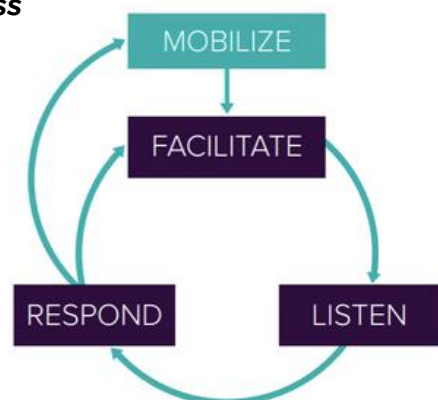


The curriculum uses adult learning best practices and is story-based, featuring real client stories (video or presentations) to engage participants in discussions and practical applications. The materials are user-friendly for amateur or volunteer facilitators and low-literacy adults, with versions available in multiple languages.

RESULTS AND IMPACTS

During the two-year pilot test, Opportunity facilitated a joint learning process engaging implementing partners, facilitators, and clients. The system is designed to generate immediate feedback that facilitators and implementing partners can respond to by improving the training and/or mobilizing a more appropriate set of participants (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Pathways Training Implementation Process



The Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system involves:

- Regular discussions among implementing partner staff and facilitators, and among Opportunity and implementing partner leaders.

- Evaluation forms designed for less literate populations and completed by a sample of several hundred participants, when they completed their second (and final) module of the pilot test. These asked participants some demographic questions, and to self-rate their level of knowledge, skills, and application around the objectives of each module, to report their level of satisfaction, and to answer a handful of “objective” knowledge or behavioural questions. These forms were administered before and after the training.
- In-depth client stories captured by implementing partner staff.

Participants in Malawi and Colombia experienced significant inner changes. In Malawi, improvements were seen in financial security, goal-setting, and self-worth. In Colombia, participants reported increased self-worth, hope, resilience, family well-being, and overall sense of well-being. Testimony from Participant:

“During the training, I discovered a profound appreciation for the message of unwavering hope in challenging times. This realization is inspiring me to maintain a steadfast mindset in my endeavors, knowing that difficulties are not to be feared but rather overcome with resilience and persistence.”

– Sophia, Ghana

Participants also reported behavioral changes. In Malawi, after the training, more participants:

- Set goals and took steps to reach them (38% - 64%)
- Saved to reach goals (32% - 44%)
- Prepared themselves financially for difficult times and emergencies (40% - 52%)
- Had a mobile money account (36% - 64%)
- Made household decisions independently (36% - 52%)

In Colombia, after the training, more participants:

- Set goals and took steps to reach them (66% - 82%)
- Were able to construct healthy relationships in their families (29% - 39%)
- Divided household work equally between men and women (53% - 70%)
- Managed emotions, contributing to peace in the family (66% - 81%)

LEARNINGS

Throughout the implementation of the Pathways program, several challenges and lessons emerged. Engaging senior leadership was crucial, and a dedicated session for them proved valuable in securing their commitment. High staff turnover was particularly disruptive, highlighting the importance of appropriate incentives and the preference for full-time staff over part-time facilitators. The video presentations required adequate equipment and conditions, which were often challenging to meet, especially in rural areas. Time constraints were a persistent issue, with sessions frequently exceeding the allotted duration. Ensuring consistent participant attendance necessitated additional planning to help participants complete all sessions. The initial monitoring and evaluation system was found to be onerous for lean programs, leading to the development of a leaner system. Despite these challenges, the curriculum was well-received, with positive feedback on the facilitation guide, the engagement of internal values, the participatory approach, and the flexible framework. The program's success relied heavily on visionary leaders who could convey their commitment to staff and volunteers in both values-based and practical ways. Looking ahead, Opportunity International is actively seeking funds and partnerships for replication and exploring improvements such as additional videos, languages, and digitization.



9. A Community Faith-Based Approach For Sustainable Living

World Vision: Enhancing Conscious Food Systems through an Empowered World View | Global

Author: Daniel Muvengi, PhD. Regional Faith & Development Director, World Vision East Africa Region

Empowering change begins with transforming mindsets. For over 70 years, World Vision has been committed to protecting and caring for children and those in need. Since its inception in 1947 with a humble \$5 gift to a poor child, World Vision has ventured into the toughest places where being a child is hardest. This unwavering commitment is driven by the belief that where God is, we should be too.

BACKGROUND

The Empowered Worldview (EWV) approach was developed in 2015 by World Vision in Tanzania and by 2023 had been implemented in over 40 countries across four continents, with its hub in Nairobi, Kenya. Over nearly 8 years, World Vision engaged local farmers, savings groups, children, youth, and local leaders, including faith leaders and government officials, to transform mindsets and behaviours towards sustainable development using the EWV model.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The Empowered Worldview is a dynamic, faith-based empowerment approach that encourages individuals and communities to examine their beliefs, mindsets, and behaviors in light of scripture and God's plan. Participants engage in workshops to explore community challenges and affirm their identity, dignity, and agency, allowing them to fully participate in sustainable transformational change.

EWV comprises six core modules: introduction, identity, vision, compassion, relationships, and faith in action, all facilitated in a participatory manner. The model is anchored in four foundational pillars:

1. Scripture and faith reflection: to tap into the spiritual capital for development
2. Mobilizing local Assets: discovering and celebrating what's already there in the communities.
3. Building Communities from the "inside-out": to unleash their agency
4. Relationships: connecting people and gifts to drive local change EWV

EWV aims to change mindsets in 4 dimensions: hope and self-efficacy, community self-reliance and capacity, relationships with others, and integrity.

EWV employs psychological and cognitive-behavioral practices such as self-reflection, appreciative inquiry, and experiential learning. Participants reflect on their journeys through exercises like the River of Life, exploring their past, present, and future in areas affecting them. Field visits, games, role plays, drama, and storytelling help participants learn from real-life situations. The Making of the Longest Line exercise, for example, demonstrates the abundance of resources participants have and how best to utilize them collaboratively. These approaches are primarily shaped by the adult learning cycle, which involves participants experiencing, analyzing, reflecting, and acting based on their prior experiences.

By visiting successful farmers and observing their methods firsthand, participants can consider replicating this knowledge within their own contexts. This process allows the learning to spread and positively impact more individuals within the community.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Participants reported improved hope, self-efficacy, and self-reliance, leading to better child well-being, increased food production, access to health services, improved maternal health, and better feeding practices. While not all participants showed improvement due to varying factors—depth of understanding the model, inherent cultural beliefs and practices, and levels of participation—the program's content, especially its focus on beliefs, values, and practices, significantly contributed to these changes.

EWV has led to significant behavioral changes and well-being outcomes. Examples include increased hope, aspirations, improved identity, and self-esteem among participants. These changes were documented through various respondent observations, indicating a shift from poor to non-poor or resilient statuses over the intervention period. Figure 1 summaries in a nutshell how that change is worked out during the EWV processes. Mindset and behavior changes created cyclical improvements at both individual and community levels. Participants demonstrated enhanced agency, risk-taking, transformed relationships, and better stewardship. Group-level changes included inclusivity, joint advocacy, peaceful coexistence, and flourishing neighborhoods.

Figure 1. Empowered World View Snapshot



EWV also positively impacted systems and structures, leading to new house constructions, garden growth, higher incomes, and increased resilience.

At advanced level, World Vision observes the emergence of cooperative movement or establishment of local industries for value adding, like in the case of Badaptai program in Kenya. In Malawi for example, the government has included a pillar of mindset transformation within their country's vision 2063, and Rwanda has requested World Vision to lead the review of the community development policy in the country to include EWV elements, as key to transformation. EWV has had a significant impact in the various contexts where it has been implemented. Table 1 provides examples of behavioral changes and well-being outcomes attributed to the EWV program.

LEARNINGS

Implementing the EWV approach in diverse and complex contexts posed several challenges. As a faith-based model, EWV initially attracted criticism and skepticism, with some perceiving it as a tool for conversion. Addressing the multifaceted nature of

behavior change required tackling various factors simultaneously, adding to the complexity. Additionally, an overemphasis on praising efforts without addressing underlying issues hindered the development of a growth mindset among participants. The priority challenges in social and behavioral modeling required comprehensive strategies to navigate successfully.

EWV Behavior dimension	Respondent observations
Hope	<i>"I am more hopeful about my life and I know that my life will be better. Better still, I want to secure my children's future by educating them and also transmitting agricultural knowledge to them so that they too do not suffer in future." – Male respondent, married with 5 children. Started gardening as a business using EWV training. Moved from very poor to poor over the intervention.</i>
Aspiration /Vision	<i>"I want to build houses, buy a car, and have workers at my farm. I want my well-being to improve, I will do that by creating job opportunities for people who will help me at my farm. Not only that, I don't want to continue having challenges with transport." – Female respondent, married with 4 children. Applied lessons on farming as a business to improve yields and marketing. Since EWV she and her husband built their house. Moved from poor to non-poor over the intervention period.</i>
Identity	<i>"I never felt I belonged to my community because my standard of living was not good. Most of my friends were living in houses with iron roofs but mine had grass and their way of living was way better than ours. I started having a sense of belonging after the knowledge I got from the [EWV] workshop on how to improve my farming skills and have a better life for me and my family." – Female respondent, married with 4 children. Applied farming, budgeting and saving methods. Moved from very poor to poor.</i>
Self-esteem /Confidence	<i>"I feel more confident that I will accomplish all what I have set to do in future. I know I will manage to achieve what I have planned to because I have the knowledge on how to go about it." – Male respondent, married with 12 children. Applied lessons on conservation farming and joined a cooperative. Moved from non-poor to resilient.</i>

Source: ODI report- Empowered Worldviews Technical Brief: Assessing the role of behavior-change programming on mindsets and livelihoods in World Vision Zambia

Understanding core human needs and how success creates behavioral patterns was crucial for implementing effective behavior change.

Despite these challenges, the implementation of EWV over the past 8 years has unlocked numerous personal and societal opportunities. Faith-driven approaches encouraged individuals to challenge comfortable yet limiting beliefs, fostering personal growth and resilience. EWV also opened doors for interfaith collaboration, promoting peaceful neighborhoods and fostering godly character at both individual and community levels. As people embraced new identities, they learned to love and respect one another, working together to support the most vulnerable groups in society. This led to greater inclusion, mutual respect, and ethical decision-making.

EWV empowered people around three core areas: beliefs, mindsets, and behaviors, driving social innovation and addressing societal challenges effectively. As more people embraced value-based processes of transformation, development outcomes improved, and sustainability efforts gained momentum. Faith played a pivotal role in shifting mindsets towards sustainability and climate action, fostering transformative change at both individual and collective levels.

The potential for amplification of EWV is significant, with its application extending to various contexts and groups. In multi-faith contexts, such as India, Indonesia, Cambodia, and many African countries, farmers have embraced the approach with enthusiasm, leading to increased production and household incomes. EWV is increasingly being adapted to address the adverse effects of climate change and creation care, as seen in Ghana. Additionally, it has been adapted for children aged 8-12 years to address spiritual and value formation at an early age and is in the process of being adapted for adolescents and youth, equipping them as the next generation of change agents. Targeting organizational and partner staff and leaders is essential to empower them to effectively facilitate community empowerment. Due to its efficacy and potential for early results, EWV has attracted attention from various stakeholders, including development agencies and donors. Its foundational programming model has been integrated across all World Vision sectors, and there is increasing interest for training and implementation in diverse contexts. EWV has become a pivotal tool for organizational and community transformation, demonstrating its ability to catalyze change within individuals and communities in a relatively short period.

10. Nurturing Regenerative Lifestyles Worldwide

Gaia Education: The Ecovillage Design Education Programme | Global

Author: Sally Bogale, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Gaia Education

From rural villages to bustling cities, Gaia Education is igniting a global revolution in regenerative living. How is this Scotland-based NGO empowering communities worldwide to design regenerative cultures and livelihoods? This case study delves into the transformative impact of Gaia Education's award-winning programmes, highlighting the innovative approaches that earned it the 2022 Luxembourg Peace Prize for Outstanding Peace Education.

BACKGROUND

Gaia Education provides online, face-to-face, and project-based learning programmes supporting individuals and organisations to design regenerative cultures and livelihoods in their area of influence—anywhere in the world, whether in urban or rural, young or old, rich or poor communities. For Gaia Education, 'regenerative' describes cultures that bring vitality and renewed growth to communities and ecosystems and puts life and connection at the centre of every decision. Gaia Education won the 2022 Luxembourg Peace Prize for Outstanding Peace Education for the transformative effect of its programmes.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The flagship Ecovillage Design Education (EDE) programme, which started nearly 20 years ago, is a face-to-face, immersive 5-week programme run by Gaia Education and certified partners worldwide.

It provides participants of all ages and backgrounds with the knowledge and practical skills to design regenerative cultures. To date, over 380 EDEs have been run by 111 host sites, reaching over 26,000 individuals.

The objective of the EDE is to create inspired change-makers who, having more deeply connected to themselves, each other, and the natural world, can leave the programme with the tools, skills, knowledge, models, and drive to lead transitions to regenerative cultures and livelihoods—whether that be in communities, businesses, schools, farms, or any other context. With its 'head, heart, hands' approach, the EDE supports transformations in consciousness and confidence, with participants forming support networks and co-creating design projects for tangible post-course action.



Gaia Education's statutory-funded Project-Based Learning programmes extend the EDE programme, working with locally-based expert partners to provide training and longer-term support to farmers on the frontline of climate change effects. Project members harness more holistic and participatory community-building and decision-making processes, ecological agriculture approaches, and eco-social enterprises, raising their income, mitigating and adapting to climate change effects, and becoming pioneering communities moving towards regenerative practices in these challenging times.

As well as Gaia Education's head, heart, hands approach which supports the emotional and physical embodiment of learning, the EDE is based on a holistic 4-dimensional framework, woven together by a Whole Systems Design approach, which looks not just at the traditional pillars of sustainability—social, ecological, and economic—but adds a 'Worldview'/Spiritual pillar to support participants to more deeply (re)connect to themselves, each other, and the natural world. Participants become more present and reassess worldviews that might no longer serve, shifting their mindset from the conditioning of an extractive, separated dominant global culture towards a regenerative understanding of how humans can interact harmoniously within their ecosystem.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Gaia Education's EDEs have been running for nearly 20 years, and the MEL process is based on feedback surveys and case studies for longer-term transformational impact. Participants often report significant inner changes, such as a deeper connection to themselves, a renewed commitment to ecological values, and a transformative shift in consciousness.

For example, an EDE graduate, Om Sunisa, was inspired to set up [Gaia Ashram](#) in Thailand, where people can live holistically and practice permaculture.



Gaia Education's project-based learning partnerships with farmers facing devastating climate effects have more conventional MEL systems based on funders' needs.

In the [ZYCALA project](#) with WWF Zambia and the Young Emerging Farmers Initiative, young Zambian Farmers gained the confidence to seek an end to traditional deforestation practices (for charcoal production) and incorporated sensitization and training sessions into community farming celebrations. This resulted in the welcoming of a beekeeping cooperative run by 500 young people, raising incomes by 40%, producing internationally viable honey and saving 2500Ha of trees by project end in 2022.

LEARNINGS

Each of Gaia Education's EDEs, mostly run by certified partners, encounter their own challenges and opportunities, which they report on in their EDE reports. Challenges can stem from particularly volatile group dynamics, especially when treasured worldviews are challenged. If the socio-cultural uniqueness of the bioregion is not sufficiently honoured, this can also bring conflict. In EDEs, Gaia Education aims to move all such challenges through participatory, non-violent, and group-building restorative processes so that they provide opportunities for deeper connection as well as modelling such processes.



In Gaia Education's Project-based Learning programmes, a typical challenge is blending the community-led, bioregionally unique approach of the EDE with the often quantitative and rational demands of the statutory funder for project planning and the need for quantitative results. Through ongoing conversations, Gaia Education's funders have become increasingly interested in the community-led participatory approach of the programmes, due to the transformative tangible results achieved. The 2017 Senegal project received an A-grade from DfID because of the transformational results from the process maintained.

There is huge potential for amplification of the EDE. Gaia Education has a vast international network of EDE providers who would welcome funding support to sponsor participation and logistical costs. EDEs cost around £1,000-£1,500 per person for the 4-5 weeks. The more EDEs Gaia Education conducts, the more changemakers can be ignited.

There is a desperate need for more Project-Based Learning programmes across the globe, and Gaia Education's partners are ready to support their local communities as soon as funding arrives (e.g. Bangladesh Association for Sustainable Development needs urgent support for coastal farming communities). However, the amount of competition and staff investment needed in securing statutory-level funding makes them difficult to secure. The average 3-4 year PBL costs from £250,000 to £400,000 to support 5000-7000 community members to pioneer regenerative livelihoods and homesteads in the face of climate change effects.

Quotes demonstrating changes include:

"It's such a transformative experience full of keys to practice and live according to our ecological values."

– Denmark EDE 2023

"I am more ready than ever to step into collaboration on regenerative projects now that I have tools for communication, governance, and conflict resolution."

– Damanhur, Italy EDE 2023

"I strengthened my commitment for the earth, for the needed changes in the world, which is something quite dear to me."

– Thailand EDE 2019

"I have developed a keen interest in Beekeeping which is something I never thought I'd do as a girl child in a rural setup. I feel empowered and want to share these practices with fellow students at my school as I feel everyone should be a part of this change".

– Zambia, ZYCALA project
([see one of the Zycala instructional videos they set up](#))



11. The Happy Farm

Plum Village: Integrating mindfulness into farming and promoting healing through nature connection | France

Author: Michael McEvoy, Farm Manager, Plum Village France

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Mindful farming is cultivating more than just crops. The Happy Farm project at Plum Village, inspired by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, merges mindfulness with sustainable and ethical food production, creating a harmonious blend of productivity, environmental care, and personal happiness.

BACKGROUND

Plum Village, established in 1982 by Thich Nhat Hanh (Thay), is the largest Buddhist monastery in Europe, with 200 monks and nuns. The Happy Farm project is a realization of Thay's dream to integrate mindfulness into daily life and healing through nature. Located in South-West France, the agroecology farm spans 3 plots of organic cultivation, promoting regenerative and organic practices. Volunteers practice mindfulness while working, experiencing the deep connection between nature and human effort.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The Happy Farm at Upper Hamlet was founded in 2013, in the pursuit of producing seasonal, organic vegetables within Plum Village for the long-term sustainability and food security of the community. There is approximately 1 acre of land in cultivation, with more than 70 beds and a large polytunnel greenhouse. Each year, fruit and nut trees are planted within an emerging food forest.

The Happy Farm at Upper Hamlet produces around 10,000kg of organic produce annually, and offers the opportunity for 300 children and 500 young adults to mindfully get their hands dirty on the land, through gatherings such as the Summer Family Retreat and the Wake Up Earth Retreat.

The Happy Farm at Lower Hamlet was founded in 2016, where it is tended to by the nuns and laypersons of the Plum Village Lower Hamlet. A wide variety of seasonal vegetables are grown here, which is all offered to the Lower Hamlet Sangha. In its first year, The Happy Farm at Lower Hamlet produced 1,000kg of organic produce.

CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The Happy Farm project emphasizes mindfulness in every aspect of farming. Cultivating the land, harvesting, and observing nature's rhythms are seen as practices of understanding, love, and mindfulness. The farm serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all life and encourages gratitude and reverence for the Earth. The practice of mindfulness in farming is seen as a path to personal healing and transformation. Mindful farming includes working in silence for periods of the day, using the breath to anchor into the present moment, and using a bell to unite together in the sensation of listening. Each workday begins with a short sitting meditation, followed by a round of check-ins to promote connection and presence among the volunteers.

In the mornings, farm work is done in silence to create a work environment in which volunteers can be in deep contact with the natural world and stay connected to their breath and their senses. The sound of the bell is used as an opportunity throughout the day to re-connect volunteers with the present moment by interrupting the habitual flow of internal thinking and chatter. The sound invites volunteers to bring mind and body together with the nature all around. Volunteers also unite with one another through song and through sharing circles. These practices are consciously cultivated by creating intentional moments throughout the working schedule—through tea breaks and moments for walking meditation.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

By farming with mindfulness and observing the rhythms of nature at The Happy Farm, participants cultivate an intimate connection with the planet as a living, breathing being. This connection provokes reverence and gratitude, which in turn catalyses healing and transformation within the self and for the Earth.

The Happy Farm is not just a place for farming but also a community where individuals live and practice together. It fosters brotherhood and sisterhood among its members, who share living spaces and practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings and the Six Harmonies. The morning circles, shared work, and living together all create a deep connection between members at the farm. The Lower and Upper Hamlet Happy Farm have established an intricate and mutually beneficial relationship, through the practice of work exchanges which ensure the sharing of knowledge and joy.

The interconnection of mindfulness with farming is underpinned by the teachings of Thich Naht Hanh, who taught that when we sow seeds, cultivate land or water plans, we can be happy right in the present moment. The quality of the harvest depends on our peace and our happiness.



Therefore, the quality of our being, our peace and our freedom are crucial to the practice of happy farming. The Happy Farm believes that adopting human-scaled agricultural technology is crucial for sustainability. However, it also recognizes that achieving sustainability is a spiritual challenge. By practicing mindfulness and slowing down, individuals can identify their true needs and reduce wasteful consumption. The farm serves as a training ground for holistic sustainability practice and offers educational opportunities to explore living in close community and reconnecting with nature.

The Happy Farm's method of growing organic food is based on classical organic farming methods and permaculture elements. The farm practices agroecology, where food production is not more important than caring for and enhancing the land's ecology. The farm nourishes the soil and grows food organically through natural soil amendments, crop rotation, green manure, no-dig methods, mulching, and companion planting.

Finally, they are now in their 11th year on the Upper Hamlet Farm and 8th year in Lower Hamlet. Together, these farms have over 100 agroecological graduates from the one year programmes. Those who join the programmes are trained in mindfulness-based approaches in the tradition of Plum Village. Plum Village has trained over 200 volunteers in the same tradition as part of the Summer Volunteer programmes, has hosted retreats for 11 years and has welcomed over a thousand guests to practice mindfulness mixed with agroecology and nature connection since 2013.



LEARNINGS

The Happy Farm project faced challenges such as team continuity and time management. Despite establishing paid facilitators and managers, the fluctuating composition of the team presented distinct difficulties. Additionally, balancing the 20-hour weekly commitment to farm operations with the center's schedule and mindfulness practice required efficient management, given the extensive tasks associated with food production.

Key lessons learned include the importance of integrating mindfulness into farming to promote personal and environmental well-being and the value of community building through shared practices and living spaces, fostering deep connections and a sense of belonging. Looking ahead, there are significant opportunities to scale up by expanding educational programs and retreats, thus promoting mindfulness and sustainable farming practices on a broader scale.





12. Regenerating Landscapes, Minds and Livelihoods

Groundswell International: A Farmer-Managed Transformation | Mali

Authors: Steve Brescia, Executive Director, Groundswell International; Pierre Dembele, Executive Director, Sahel Eco; Drissa Gana; and Peter Gubbels.

In Mali's Mopti region, communities are turning back the clock to move forward. By restoring traditional farming practices and strengthening village organization, they are combating soil degradation and food insecurity. This blend of ancient knowledge and modern support is transforming their environment and inspiring sustainable farming practices worldwide.

BACKGROUND

During the 1960s-1990s in Mali, centralized, national environmental management and population pressure ushered in massive soil degradation and the spread of national food insecurity. In the Mopti region, communities mobilized to stop the cycle of desertification and vulnerability by restoring traditional farming practices and village organization. Since settling in the area in the 12th century, the Dogon, Fulani, and Dafing peoples have farmed millet, sorghum, and cowpeas and raised livestock.

The area is now known as Bankass Cercle (an administrative subdivision) in the Mopti region. The dryland ecosystem, where annual rainfall varies between 400 to 850 mm per year, is challenging, but through a combination of well-suited social structures and ecologically appropriate farming practices, these people have built a successful society. By 2009, the population within the Bankass Cercle had grown to 263,446 inhabitants (République de Mali Institut National de la Statistique, 2010). Since then, their work, in combination with decentralized government control and support

from local NGO Sahel Eco and international NGO network Groundswell International, has allowed them to spread agroecological strategies in Mali and beyond.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

For the previous 900 years, the traditional farming and environmental management practices of the Dogon people and other ethnic groups in Bankass have enabled them to sustainably meet their needs while coping with occasional droughts and bad years. The process of community-based management of natural resources worked through Barahogons, traditional community organizations tasked with managing the balance between production, livelihoods, and natural resources. While their capacity diminished during the colonial era, their resurgence in the early 2000s enabled them to encourage small farmers to learn new strategies to regenerate trees on their land and adjust farming practices to integrate trees into their farming systems.

Sahel Eco and Groundswell invested in research to understand and document the processes and agroforestry techniques developed by the Barahogon in Ende, then supported them through participatory strategies to establish farmer-to-farmer extension networks to enable further scaling of their methods. The FMNR (Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration of Trees) practices are



based in Indigenous knowledge, strengthening their connection to the land. Collaborative learning and scaling processes develop solidarity among small farmers, empowering them to become agents of their own development by adapting and sharing practices.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Participants gained a greater understanding of the threats posed by modern, industrial farming practices and their incompatibility with traditional practices that help them retain their cultural independence, integrity, and authenticity. The structure provided by the Barrahogon helped breed a sense of control over their physical and emotional wellbeing. Their actions regenerated local environments, boosted incomes, and revived ancestral knowledge in line with their beliefs, values, and worldviews. One such example is the competition organized by Sahel Eco to recognize farmers excelling in their implementation of FMNR, thus demonstrating their capacity for creativity and courage. These local contests not only raised awareness on agroecology, but they also had the side effect of fostering greater social interactions between people in the communities. The winners were proud to be recognized within their communities, and the most successful communities were proud of the public recognition of their actions. Events like these helped to foster a sense of progress, without

forcing communities to sacrifice their beliefs towards how the environment ought to be stewarded. Community members and local government officials expressed great enthusiasm and a strong sense of local ownership for the work. They created more transparency in the sale of licenses for cutting and using trees, increased municipal revenues, and reinvested these resources in local development. Fewer people migrated out of the area, loss of livestock was reduced, and local craftspeople recovered artisanal, income-generating activities.

Two evaluations conducted by Sahel Eco highlight significant progress. By 2010, the adoption rate of FMNR practices passed a "critical mass," indicating the likelihood of self-sustaining adoption and continued spread. Among 13 communes in Bankass, six reversed deforestation and reached a stage of "balance" between farming production and tree management. By 2013, farmers regenerated over 56,500 trees and planted an additional 25,241 "high value" trees with a survival rate of over 96%.



LEARNINGS

Communities in many areas of Mali continue to experience high rates of deforestation and increasing vulnerability. Government agricultural investments favour large-scale commercial agriculture and international agribusiness interests. Climate change has contributed to the desertification of large swaths of territory. Rising insecurity in Northern Mali has impacted program areas, making it difficult for program staff to visit communities and assist with activities.

Laws and regulations must be revised to empower farmers to sustainably manage their trees and land. Government agriculture and forestry departments, local authorities, NGOs, and traditional organizations must harmonize principles around these goals. Traditional organizations should continue to strengthen their capacity to manage natural resources, while municipalities create territorial development plans that delegate responsibilities to them.

Supporting farmer-led innovation processes to integrate a wider array of agroecology principles and practices into existing FMNR practices can further increase production and resilience. Improving agroforestry product value chains for local markets and collaborating with research institutions to support the development and documentation of these strategies are essential steps. Through the Groundswell network, Sahel Eco continues to amplify these accomplishments by sharing lessons with other network members in Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Ghana and assisting them in setting up similar initiatives.



13. Regreening and Increasing Agroecological Integration

CIFOR-ICRAF: Focusing on smallholders' assets and agency to sustainably scale | Western Kenya

Author: Lisa Elena Fuchs, Social Systems and Engagement Scientist, CIFOR-ICRAF

CIFOR-ICRAF

Empowering communities to drive their own sustainable land restoration is not just a strategy; it's a movement. With support from the Biovision Foundation, CIFOR-ICRAF's asset-based community-driven development (ABCD) team initiated the 'Regreening Kenya by Scaling Asset-Based Community-Driven Development Tools and Processes' project, commonly known as 'ABCD in Regreening,' from January 2021 to February 2024.

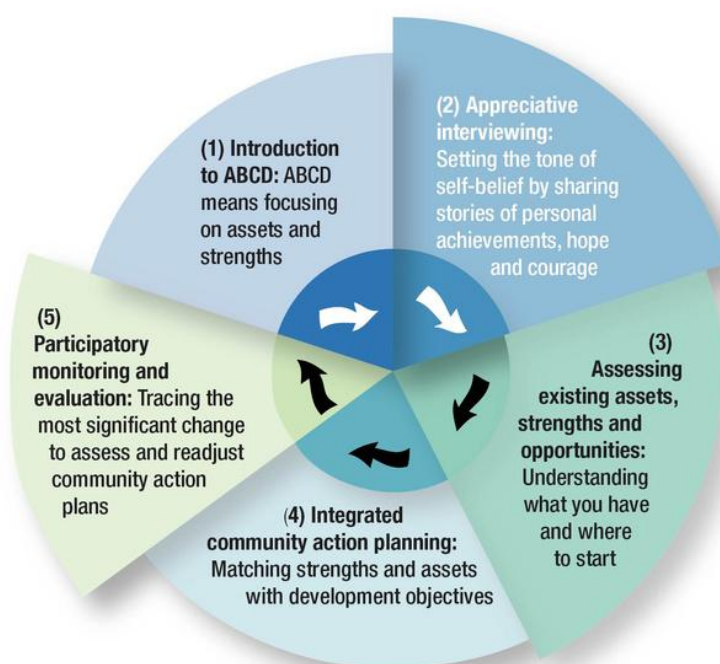
BACKGROUND

The project was implemented in Homa Bay County, a key intensification site for Regreening Africa in western Kenya (see Figure 1). Regreening Africa, recently recognized as a UN World Restoration Flagship project, was conducted from 2017 to 2023 across 8 African countries with support from the European Union. In Kenya, the goal was to restore 150,000 hectares of degraded farmland by encouraging 50,000 smallholder farmers to adopt sustainable practices, with 20% directly targeted by World Vision Kenya's interventions.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The primary objective of the 'ABCD in Regreening' project was to strengthen the adoption and sustainable engagement of smallholders in land restoration practices within Regreening Africa's intensification sites.

Recognizing that sustainable restoration must be driven by those who manage the land, the project aimed to overcome structural and behavioral barriers through an asset-based and agency-focused approach. The project was implemented over 3 years, from January 2021 to February 2024, using a highly integrated 5-step ABCD process (see below).



The ABCD approach, rooted in community-driven development, builds on people's agency and capacity, aligning with various theoretical frameworks like appreciative inquiry and positive deviance. The ABCD in Regreening project used this approach to empower communities by focusing on existing assets and agency, self-assessment, and self-evaluation.

The project involved 30 groups selected from the Regreening Africa areas using a purposive structured selection approach.

Drawing on extensive previous action research, CIFOR-ICRAF developed five core intrinsic contribution claims for ABCD (see Table 1).

Table 1. The five intrinsic contribution claims for ABCD

Category	Label	Summary Description
Attitudinal changes	Asset mindset	People realize and appreciate what they have
	Sense of agency	People believe in their ability to influence their lives positively
Behavioural changes	Individual action	People decide to start with what they have and use it better, and in a more coordinated way, at an individual level
	Collective action	People come together and start with what they have collectively within their social networks to achieve joint objectives
	Strategic collaborations	People use their social networks to find solutions through strategic collaborations and partnerships with external actors

Source: Fuchs et al. (forthcoming)

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The ABCD process led to significant inner transformations among participants. Through tools like appreciative interviewing and human asset assessment, individuals gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of their identities, interests, and preferences. This process fostered a strong sense of agency, enabling participants to realize their potential and believe in their ability to positively influence their lives. The project also enhanced participants’ awareness of their communities’ resources and opportunities, encouraging more efficient use of these assets.

At the community level, the project contributed to increased collective action and strategic collaborations.

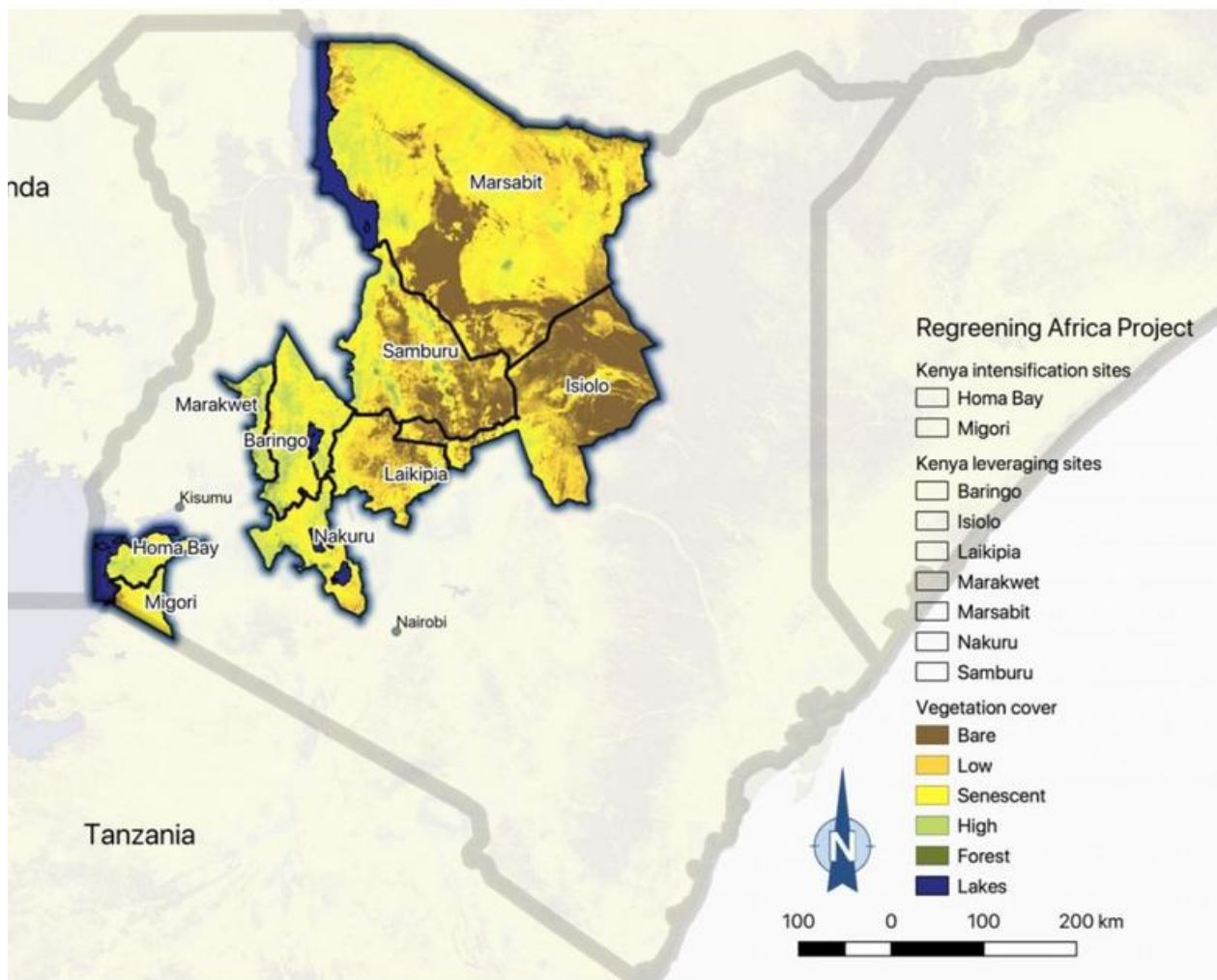
While individual behavioral changes were more pronounced, collective mobilization towards joint objectives was also evident, particularly among well-connected groups. The ABCD approach encouraged communities to seek targeted support from external actors, improving development efficiency and fostering more sustainable outcomes. The project’s contributions were recognized by Regreening Africa, highlighting the approach's success in driving sustainable land restoration.

LEARNINGS

One of the main challenges encountered was resistance to the ABCD approach from some external actors, who felt that community-driven methods undermined scientific rigor. There was also skepticism about the effectiveness of in-depth engagement processes, which were perceived as slow and resource-intensive. Additionally, proving the effectiveness of low-cost interventions did not always gain the respect or attention it deserved, as the project sizes were considered too small to make a significant impact.



Figure 1: Regreening Africa sites in Kenya including the 'intensification' site in Homa Bay in western Kenya



Source: Regreening Africa, 2022.

Despite these challenges, the project identified significant opportunities for scaling up. Strong alliances with like-minded partners played a crucial role in promoting the ABCD approach, leading to increased interest and investment. The ABCD team's strategic collaborations with Regreening Africa and other organizations opened doors for further integration of the ABCD approach into broader development and research initiatives. The approach's flexibility and content-neutrality make it an ideal strategy for integrating into any project aiming to co-create solutions with communities.

The 'ABCD in Regreening' project demonstrated that sustainable land restoration can be effectively driven by communities when they are empowered to leverage their assets and agency. The project's success in fostering inner and outer change, despite challenges, highlights the potential for scaling the ABCD approach in other contexts. The key lesson learned is the importance of participatory, community-driven approaches that respect local knowledge and capacities, ensuring that external support is responsive and collaborative.





14. Catalysing Female Social Entrepreneurs to Lead from Within

Conscious Social Change: a holistic approach that uses inner work, as a vehicle and design tool for sustainably solving complex social issues | Rwanda

Author: Gretchen Ki Steidle, Founder and President of Global Grassroots

"Change begins from within." This is the guiding principle of Global Grassroots, a mindfulness-based social venture incubator for women in East Africa. By focusing on the inner transformation of local leaders, particularly women, Global Grassroots empowers them to lead systemic changes within their own communities.

BACKGROUND

Global Grassroots operates in post-conflict East Africa, specifically in regions where access to clean water is severely limited. The organization invests in local women-led teams, equipping them with the skills and tools necessary to drive sustainable community improvements. The core of their work is built on a unique methodology called Conscious Social Change, which integrates mindfulness, social-emotional learning, trauma healing, resilience, and agency-building into the process of social entrepreneurship.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The objective of Global Grassroots is to empower women-led teams to design, construct, and implement social-purpose water enterprises that benefit their communities. This project is implemented over an 18-month period, during which the teams undergo a four-phase curriculum. In the first phase, participants engage in an intensive, experiential 40-hour training that covers the principles of Conscious Social Change.

This includes mindfulness-based leadership, trauma healing, project management, budgeting, and creative resourcing to prepare them for venture leadership. The second phase involves 3-6 months of hands-on coaching as the teams design comprehensive plans for their ventures. In the third phase, teams receive seed funding and 1-4 months of support during the construction of their water access points. Finally, in the fourth phase, the water ventures become operational, with profits reinvested into community projects.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The personal transformation of team members is a key focus. Throughout the venture incubator and accelerator, significant improvements have been observed in mindfulness, self-management, confidence, agency, wellbeing, resilience, leadership skills, and a sense of belonging. These changes are meticulously tracked through a Team Member Survey (TMS), administered at the start of the incubator training. Over 12 years of data collection reveals marked increases in confidence and agency among participants. When problems arise, rather than solving for the women, staff leverage their own mindful leadership skills to facilitate discussion. This includes honouring women's wisdom and leadership instincts and using "inquiry without imposition" to help teams generate solutions of their own. When a situation persists, staff may provide additional training, co-facilitate problem-solving sessions, or support team leaders as they work with key stakeholders.



The sample for the CIS is small and purposive but provides a helpful snapshot of how the team's efforts are impacting their community.

Through this multi-levelled and mixed method approach to monitoring and evaluation, Global Grassroots is building a base of data and insights to help illuminate the linkages between inner work, personal transformation, and sustainable community development.

The journey has not been without challenges. The main difficulties faced by Global Grassroots include ensuring the long-term sustainability of ventures and addressing cultural barriers to women's leadership. However, these challenges have also provided valuable lessons. The importance of continuous support and coaching has become clear, as has the value of empowering teams to solve problems on their own using mindful leadership and inquiry without imposition.

Looking ahead, the success of Global Grassroots' model presents significant opportunities for scaling up. By expanding their approach to other regions and adapting it to address different social issues, Global Grassroots can continue to empower women and transform communities across East Africa and beyond.

On a broader community level, the impact of these ventures is profound. Between 2008 and 2021, 26 women's water ventures provided clean water to over 82,000 individuals in Rwanda and Uganda, with 96% of these ventures still operational. On average, within one year of operation, these ventures have provided access to fresh, clean water for 3,000 individuals, reduced the distance to water sources by 50%, decreased the cost of a jerry can of water by 86%, and ensured that 94% of households boil water for drinking. Additionally, 95% of households now wash their hands before eating, 30% fewer children report frequent illnesses, there has been a fivefold increase in men fetching water for their households, and 50% fewer households report daughters missing school due to water collection. A consistently reported decrease in sexual violence related to water collection further highlights the positive community impact.

Throughout implementation, Global Grassroots's staff work with teams to document community-level outcomes. Prior to launching their water access point, teams work with staff to collect baseline data using a Community Impact Survey (CIS) that has both standard and customizable questions. These include items about the household; income level and sources; gender roles; access to water; time and money spent on water; school attendance; children's health and more. The survey is repeated after 12 months of venture operations.



A photograph of three elderly women standing outdoors under a large tree. The woman on the left is smiling and holding a large, patterned ceramic pot filled with yellow and pink flowers. She wears a white blouse with colorful embroidery and a green and red skirt. The woman in the middle is holding a large, reddish-brown cacao pod. She wears a patterned blouse and a grey skirt. The woman on the right is holding a smaller, patterned ceramic pot. She wears a white blouse with colorful embroidery and a blue and red skirt. All three women are wearing multiple necklaces. The background is filled with green foliage.

3 Revitalizing and Strengthening Traditional Wisdom

15. An Indigenous Youth Leadership Initiation Ritual to Support Regeneration

Better World Cameroon: Reviving the spirit of Ndanifor in young leaders of permaculture ecovillages | Cameroon

Author: Author: Konkankoh Joshua, Director, [Better World Cameroon](#)

Building resilient communities requires more than just sustainable practices—it requires a deep reconnection with nature and ancestral wisdom. Since 2013, Better World Cameroon has been on a mission to transform traditional villages in the Bafut area of Cameroon into ecovillages that thrive in harmony with the environment.

BACKGROUND

The initiative, led by Joshua Konkankoh, aims to redesign around 54 traditional villages into ecovillages where sustainable food production, biodiversity preservation, and a renewed connection with nature are key elements. Konkankoh's vision goes beyond the physical transformation of the villages; it seeks to create what he calls "peace villages." According to him, to build these ecovillages in Africa, there must be an understanding of peace, a reconnection with oneself, nature, and indigenous wisdom, and a commitment to the principles of trust, solidarity, and love.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The cornerstone of this project is the Ndanifor Permaculture Ecovillage, which serves as the first demonstration site. This site has been transformed into a resilient ecovillage through a unique combination of indigenous initiation rituals for leaders and permaculture training for the community.

The project began in 2013 and continues to evolve, aiming to foster systemic change at both individual and community levels. The indigenous Ndanifor ritual, a leadership initiation practice for young locals, plays a crucial role in this transformation. During a seven-day spiritual retreat in the forest, participants undergo a rigorous process of fasting, mindful eating, and community healing activities, such as communal bathing and water soaking. These practices are designed to help them connect deeply with their inner selves and Mother Earth, guided by village elders through ancestral mindful breathing, deep listening, and sacred chants.



RESULTS AND IMPACT

The impact of this project is evident at both individual and community levels. On a personal level, participants have reported increased self-awareness, confidence, and a profound sense of connection to their cultural heritage and natural surroundings. The inner transformation fostered by the Ndanifor ritual has inspired young leaders to engage more actively in ecovillage activities, including regenerative agriculture and the cultivation of medicinal gardens.

At the community level, these inner changes have translated into a stronger sense of communal identity, with villages adopting sustainable practices that honor their traditions and protect their environment.

The ecovillages have become thriving hubs of biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, and cultural renewal, demonstrating a model of resilience that can be replicated across the region.

LEARNINGS

The path to transforming these villages has presented several challenges. One of the main obstacles has been balancing traditional practices with modern sustainability techniques. Integrating indigenous rituals with contemporary ecological practices requires a sensitive approach that respects both the old and the new. However, this has also been a valuable lesson in the importance of inclusivity and adaptability in community-led initiatives. Another challenge has been sustaining the momentum of change amidst external pressures, such as economic constraints and climate change. Despite these challenges, the project has shown great potential for scaling up. The success of the Ndanifor Permaculture Ecovillage provides a blueprint for other communities interested in embracing similar paths toward sustainability and cultural revival. Future opportunities lie in expanding the network of peace villages and promoting a broader movement that combines ecological stewardship with indigenous wisdom to foster resilience in communities across Africa.



16. Living Cultures

InsightShare: Creating Indigenous Community Video Collectives to preserve and document traditional knowledge | India

Authors: Seno Tsuhah, Educator, Community Organizer and Facilitator at [North East Network](#), and Nick Lunch, Founder of [InsightShare](#)

Community filmmakers from nine Indigenous communities in North-East India have been harnessing the power of participatory video since 2014-15, transforming narratives and empowering voices. From the Garo and Khasi Hills to Nagaland, these filmmakers have turned their lenses on their communities, using video as a medium for cultural preservation and social advocacy.

BACKGROUND

The participatory video (PV) project began in 2014-15 with training for Indigenous community filmmakers in North-East India. This initiative aimed to amplify Indigenous voices, particularly women, by documenting and celebrating local culture, languages, and food systems through film. Over 60 community-authored films have been produced, winning awards at festivals and being showcased on international platforms. Despite challenges, such as the severe lockdowns in India and the migration of original members, a community video hub remains active in Chizami village, Nagaland, supported by North East Network (NEN).

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The objective of the PV project is to enable Indigenous communities to document their own traditions, customs, and practices through video. The project was initiated in 2015 with a one-year funding from The Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty and NESFAS.

Since 2016, North East Network has supported the work of the Naga video hub, with InsightShare providing additional support through small grants and training. In October 2023, a workshop was held to train a new generation of filmmakers, with plans to expand into a regional network that promotes local culture and traditions.

Participatory Video is more than a way of making videos, it's about getting people to unite and plan together to make change in their communities—and it is a way of making videos with the whole community. To begin with, the group learns how to use the camera through easy games and exercises. Each person teaches the next how to do it—anyone can do it. We call this approach 'each one teach one'. Everybody learns how to do all of the different elements of filmmaking, working as a team. Every team member knows how to set up the equipment, how to film, how to record, monitor sound and to edit.



InsightShare's approach to participatory video incorporates a wide variety of complementary techniques, to fully develop the potential for self-development, including: Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Visualisation in Participatory Practices (VIPP), Non-Violent Communication (NVC), Design Thinking, and Theatre of the Oppressed.

The consciousness approaches used to cultivate inner capacities are particularly linked to psychological and cognitive-behaviour practices alongside transformative communication and leadership skills. Self-reflection, equal participation, deep listening and non-violent communication are embedded in all the [games, exercises and approaches](#). All the processes include experiential learning that promotes genuine leadership and active citizenship. These approaches are rooted in Freire's pedagogy of hope, where growth in self-esteem (power within) and abilities to do certain things (power to do) boost agency and critical thinking. As all the processes are group-based, communities experience collective power (power with others and in many cases power over others) in horizontal and vertical communication processes that elevate critical consciousness whilst advancing home-grown and locally-led development. The end goal is always locally defined and linked to advancing and upholding human rights.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The PV project has had a significant impact on both individual participants and their communities. At the individual level, the youngest participants, aged 16-18, have reported a marked increase in self-esteem and confidence, along with a newfound sense of purpose as advocates for their communities. The project has enabled them to reconnect with their elders and gain recognition for their work, preserving and promoting their culture and languages.

On a broader scale, the community-produced videos have helped raise awareness of food sovereignty and Indigenous knowledge systems, inspiring greater community engagement and interest in preserving ancestral practices. This initiative has also influenced organizational practices, encouraging the allocation of resources to support young filmmakers and fostering a long-term commitment to cultural preservation and advocacy.

LEARNINGS

Throughout the project, several challenges were encountered, such as member attrition due to life changes and the logistical difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.



However, these challenges provided valuable lessons in resilience and adaptability. The project highlighted the importance of continuous training and community engagement to sustain momentum and expand impact.

The success of the Naga video hub presents an opportunity to scale up the initiative by creating a regional network of community filmmakers. This expansion could offer even more communities the chance to document and share their unique cultural practices, fostering a stronger regional identity and greater advocacy for Indigenous rights.

The launch of the Living Cultures Fellowship in 2020 by InsightShare, which trained 50 youth from ten Indigenous communities across four countries in Africa, demonstrates the potential for scaling up. This program utilized a design-thinking approach to tailor training to the needs of Indigenous communities, using digital tools and community media to empower young leaders. With initiatives like these, there is potential to expand the impact of participatory video on a global scale, uniting Indigenous communities in the preservation and promotion of their cultural heritage.



17. Weaving Wisdom: From Ubuntu to Kapwa

Developing a Deep Design Approach to Conscious Food Systems at the Edges | Global

Authors: Sarah Queblatin, Thao Ngo, Margarita Zethelius, Abumbi Prudence, Sonita Mbah, Damaris Mufur, Konkankoh Joshua | Better World Cameroon, Living Story Landscapes, Alianzas para la abundancia, Global Ecovillage Network, Gaia Education

© From Ubuntu to Kapwa

“From Ubuntu to Kapwa” is a transformative initiative rooted in local communities across Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America. This project seeks to revolutionize regenerative food systems by weaving together cultural values, worldviews, and traditional wisdom from diverse regions.

It is a South-South collaboration that captures the essence of collective wisdom and presents a novel framework for whole systems change.

BACKGROUND

The project was inspired by the aspirations of three teams already connected through the Global Ecovillage Network and Gaia Education. They envisioned a deep design approach to food systems that integrates the cultural values and traditional wisdom of communities. The initiative draws from the African philosophy of “Ubuntu” and the Filipino concept of “Kapwa,” both of which emphasize interconnectedness and shared identity.

The goal was to create a framework that reflects these worldviews, offering a fresh perspective on resilience, shaped by the shared experiences of colonization, climate change, and conflict in regions like Cameroon, Colombia, and the Philippines.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The project “From Ubuntu to Kapwa” commenced with the objective of highlighting the cultural and worldview dimensions of the Ecovillage Design Mandala. This framework, developed by the Global Ecovillage Network and Gaia Education, includes social, economic, and ecological aspects of design but had yet to fully integrate indigenous and local wisdom. The initiative, which ran from January to June 2024, aimed to localize the Mandala’s approach by incorporating insights from indigenous communities. The project documented three case studies focusing on conscious food systems, demonstrating how traditional practices can enhance ecovillage designs and policies related to climate adaptation and economic development.



The project followed this learning journey, inspired by indigenous research methods:

- **Listening:** through a mindfulness practice of attunement - connecting to the wisdom of our body and spirit; listen to the story of the interconnectedness we carry within ourselves
- **Honoring:** paying tributes to all the partners, stakeholders, members, donors and supporters of the project
- **Dreaming & Offering:**
 - Rituals from each country (Cameroon, Colombia, Philippines)
 - Altar-making: seeking guidance for the question “how does incorporating a conscious food system in the courses/trainings that you design or facilitate look like to me?”
 - Expressing the guidance message through artwork or writing
 - Sharing highlights in the big group
- **Learning:** sharing the deep design patterns that the project have woven together from different activities of the project
- **Celebrating:** honouring the process and the fruits that it bore with gratitude, songs and celebration
- **Embodying:** the whole design process as the manifestation of this deep-design pathway



This figure shows the types of activities enacted in this intervention.



© From Ubuntu to Kapwa

Each activity is infused with traditional wisdom, and together they demonstrate conscious approaches to designing food systems in a deeper way.

Each activity was done independently across each country then woven together through pattern weaving sessions as a means of identifying common practices.

Cameroon

The Achu Festival - a ritual for connection to nature, hosted at the Palace of the King of the Bafut Kingdom, February 2024. This ritual involves sharing Achu - one of the main indigenous meals - to give thanks to the land and bless the good harvest, while bringing the community together. It also passes ancestral wisdom and connection to the food down to younger generations.

The Mandeleh Festival - a ritual to connect with the ancestors through dance, sharing food, and chanting at the Palace of the King of the Bafut Kingdom. This identity ritual for the Bafut Kingdom empowers the community and blesses them with good health and fertility.

Colombia

Andean-Amazon Experimental Station La Realidad - a pedagogical project for the regeneration of the human bond with the earth through agriculture, native gastronomy and arts. The project explores Syntropic Agriculture and Shagralidad (ancestral techniques) for producing food and regenerating land; and El Cocinadero is a project which investigates indigenous food and native culinary arts.



Music and Dance are used as reflection and exploration practices used as reflection and exploration practices of the beneficial role of humans in the planet earth system, weaving cultural bridges and connecting with tradition.

“La Fiesta del Platano” - The Plantain Festival - this Festival is a space to share ancestral knowledge from different regions of Colombia where the banana/plantain is a common thread. This festival and its roots come from the core of emancipation, the identification of a plant as an articulator, a living expression of the ancestral knowledge on service to conservation and care.

The Philippines

Kapwa Story Circles: Engaging Indigenous and Local Wisdom in Designing Regenerative Food Systems in Cebu City - The Kapwa Story Circles are a series of activities for 20-30 organizations working on ecosystem regeneration in Cebu City. This lab weaves the process of Theory U (a change management approach for awareness-based systems change) with “Pamumuno” (a leadership approach patterned from indigenous Filipino systems, which invites actors to embody leadership for landscape regeneration by taking inspiration from trees). These circles came after one year of sensemaking with stakeholders; the circles are the presencing stage: a practice of letting go and letting come, which resonates with Pakikipagkapwa: a practice of relating without separating, a state of unity and deep

relationship with all, in the spirit of Kapwa. These circles engaged indigenous and local wisdom through storytelling and ritual, as an opportunity to deepen the stakeholders’ worldview on their role and relationship with people and place.

Bringing consciousness approach to virtual space - Opening Ceremony & Blessing Ritual for “From Ubuntu to Kapwa” - On 12th January 2024, a launching ceremony with blessing ritual for the project “From Ubuntu to Kapwa” was held virtually with the presence of wisdom keepers from the three project sites of “From Ubuntu to Kapwa” and participants around the world. After a short introduction by the project coordinator Sonita Mbah, a blessing ritual was held in which wisdom keepers shared prayers and teachings in reply to the core inquiry of the project: *“How might we consciously design resilient and regenerative food systems from a deeper approach?”*.

More detailed case studies per country can be found [in this document](#).

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The project had a profound impact both at the individual and community levels. In Cameroon, cultural identity was strengthened through indigenous education and ritual practices, fostering a sense of belonging and resilience. The King of Bafut’s public endorsement of conscious food systems highlighted the expanding awareness and support for these practices. In Colombia, participants reconnected with ancestral knowledge and developed new skills for conflict resolution, all while deepening their relationship with the land. In the Philippines, the integration of indigenous wisdom into regenerative food systems fostered values like respect, cooperation, adaptability, and resilience among participants.

Virtual events further connected people worldwide, generating excitement about the shared wisdom and cultural similarities among different regions.

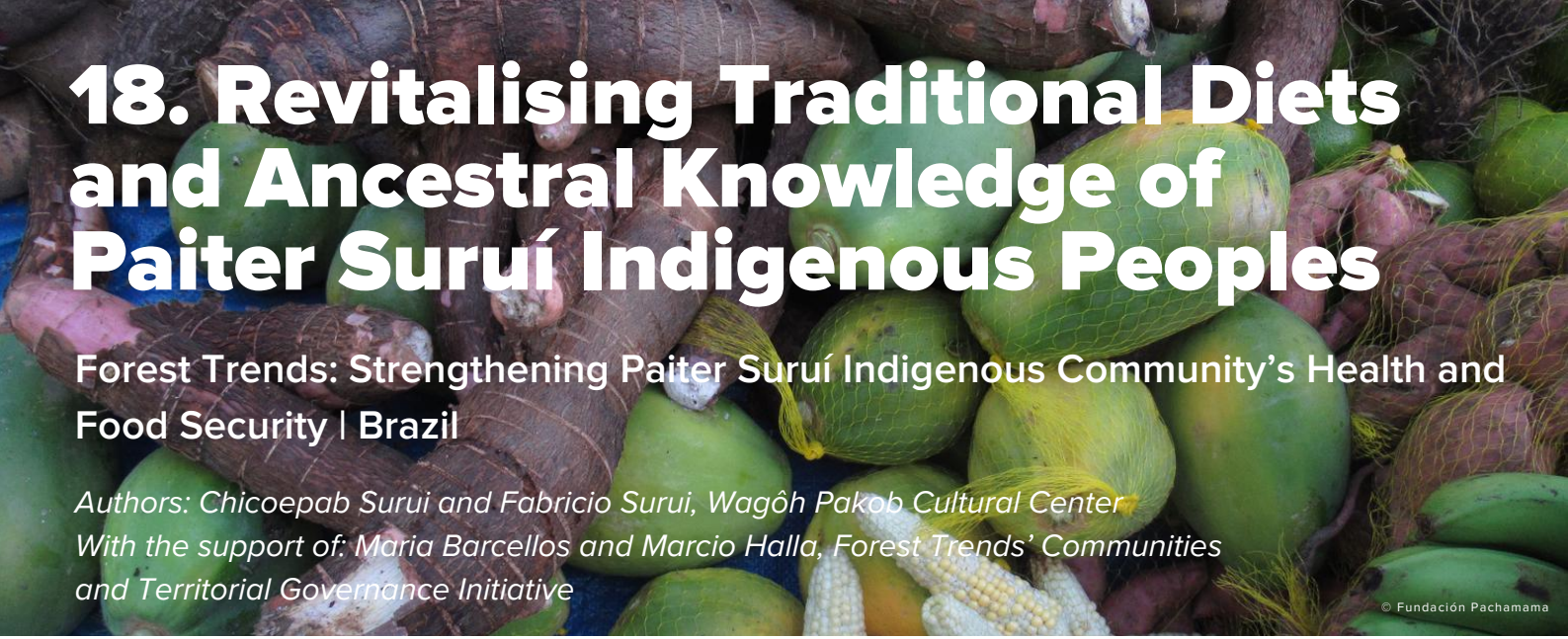
Overall, the project engaged over 450 people through virtual and in-person activities across the three countries. Participants included local wisdom keepers, community members, educators, and others passionate about ecosystem restoration and sustainable food systems.

LEARNINGS

The project presented several challenges and valuable lessons. One significant challenge was the difficulty of conveying the spirit of cultural rituals and prayers in a virtual space. Despite technical issues like sound quality and internet connectivity, the team found that authentic and carefully conducted virtual rituals could still have a powerful impact. Another challenge was the need for translation support to share local wisdom across languages, which added complexity but also enriched the experience. Coordinating activities across different time zones required flexibility and effective use of asynchronous communication.

Looking ahead, there are significant opportunities for scaling up the initiative. The project team has compiled [a living guidance document](#) that captures the methodologies and insights gained, making it a valuable resource for future trainings on Ecovillage and Regenerative Settlements Development. The lessons learned from integrating indigenous wisdom into food systems can inspire similar efforts worldwide, promoting resilience and regeneration in diverse cultural contexts. The team is actively seeking financial and collaborative support to continue this meaningful work and expand its impact further.





18. Revitalising Traditional Diets and Ancestral Knowledge of Paiter Suruí Indigenous Peoples

Forest Trends: Strengthening Paiter Suruí Indigenous Community's Health and Food Security | Brazil

Authors: Chicoepab Surui and Fabricio Surui, Wagôh Pakob Cultural Center

With the support of: Maria Barcellos and Marcio Halla, Forest Trends' Communities and Territorial Governance Initiative

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The Wagoh Pakob Cultural Center (CCWP) strengthens the community's health and food security by revitalising the traditional diet in the daily use of families, expands vital ancestral knowledge beyond indigenous territory, developing a form of ethno-tourism based on sustainability and innovation for income generation, integrating visitors into the experience and immersion in the Paiter Suruí culture.

BACKGROUND

In the 1970s, colonisation arrived to the region inhabited by the Paiter Suruí, in Rondônia, in the Brazilian Amazon, bringing profound social and cultural changes for these people, as well as the devastation of the native forests. New eating habits were adopted due to their proximity to non-indigenous society after contact.

To reinforce this, government agencies encouraged the planting of rice and bean fields and the care of the coffee plantations inherited from the invading settlers, which required a lot of labour.

In addition, the consumption of manufactured food products such as biscuits, noodles and soft drinks was widely adopted and consequently the practice of the traditional diet was weakened, which led to serious health problems such as obesity, diabetes and hypertension.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The Wagôh Pakob Cultural Centre, located in the Central village of Linha 9, Sete de Setembro Indigenous Land, is an initiative that emerged as a strategy to strengthen the culture that had been weakened by colonisation and has become an important ethno-tourism centre that allows people to immerse themselves in indigenous culture. In this context, traditional gastronomy is one of the most important aspects, materialising in actions to rescue the gardens and traditional food products with traditional culinary processes and procedures that value and strengthen ancestral culture, improving the health and food security of the families involved in the process. Traditional gardens maintained in family backyards and products from gathering, hunting and fishing form the basis of traditional gastronomy.

Awareness approaches are based on respecting and valuing traditional knowledge and ancestral Paiter wisdom. This includes dialogue and respect for ancestral wisdom, holistic education, earth connection practices, food sovereignty, and respect for natural cycles and biodiversity. Ancestral and traditional practices have been essential over many generations in all aspects of traditional peoples' lives and should be used to promote social well-being in its broadest aspects while keeping the culture alive.



The first and main activities came from the awareness of the indigenous women of the community when they realised that the breakdown of the traditional diet with the indiscriminate use of manufactured food products could be responsible for the impacts on the population's health. With this awareness, they organised themselves and began activities with the revitalisation of the traditional gardens, involving the men and young people, and from there the revitalisation of the traditional cuisine.

The aim of the initiative is to revitalise and strengthen traditional culinary practices, highlighting their importance as a cultural asset for maintaining health and food security in the face of imbalances in the community's diet, which occurred after contact with non-indigenous society and culminated in serious impacts on the health of the group involved. As a spin-off, it aims to give scale to the approach, enabling visitors to the Centre to get to know and value these practices, based on experiments and traditional knowledge. In this way, while strengthening the community's health and food security through the traditional diet revitalisation in the daily use of families, it expands vital ancestral knowledge beyond indigenous territory, developing a form of ethno-tourism based on sustainability and innovation for income generation, integrating visitors into the experience and immersion in the Paiter Suruí culture.

RESULTS AND IMPACTS

At a systemic level, the initiative has promoted community unity and organisation, guaranteeing the health and food security of the people and also expanding this knowledge beyond the territory, which contributes to the

recognition and appreciation of indigenous culture.

The main changes brought about by the intervention were:

- The realisation that manufactured food products, which were acquired and considered important soon after contact, were unhealthy and required financial resources to purchase.
- Women united around the idea of revitalising the local gardens with traditional products and recovering traditional ways of preparing food with the elders who still have this knowledge.
- Uniting women, men and young people around the idea;
- Improving the general health of the community by using the traditional diet and drastically reducing the use of manufactured products;
- Strengthening ethnic identity by strengthening ancestral culture.

Women's actions to encourage the planting of traditional gardens, shift consumption behavior patterns, and revive traditional methods, cuisine and rituals foster deep inner change among the community by raising awareness on the importance of revitalizing and strengthening the local culture.

These efforts strengthen and enable access to traditional foods, promoting food security and making these foods a powerful tool against new challenges and impacts on local health. This approach preserves traditional knowledge associated with ancestral agriculture, gathering, hunting, and food preparation. Additionally, these actions enhance the community's flexibility and adaptability,

ensuring that the initiative remains relevant and responsive to the community's real needs. Community members recognize the positive changes, sharing their experiences and insights at regular cultural center meetings, where these initiatives are consistently celebrated and reinforced by the community itself.

According to the reports, the project gave each person involved the opportunity to have significant experiences in opening up their own consciousness to the value of the food products from their fields and their knowledge of the ancestral diet, which led to an obvious improvement in their health, understanding that these products are significantly better than the manufactured products that were imposed on their lives after contact with non-indigenous society.

On the other hand, the fact of dealing with non-indigenous people from different places offering traditional cuisine when they visit the centre, and realising how it is valued and respected by these visitors, strengthens their sense of identity.

It's quite clear that working as a group to carry out the centre's work, and especially the work related to diet, strengthens unity and fosters a feeling of joy and well-being among everyone in the community.

LEARNINGS

Challenges related to eating habits and the weakening of culture still persist among different communities in the Sete de Setembro Indigenous Land. However, through this traditional food system initiative, we are gradually overcoming these obstacles over time. Without the project, it would be much more difficult. We hope we can inspire other communities to replicate the initiative in their villages. The strengthening of women's unity and community organisation, based on ancestral wisdom and awareness of and commitment the community through valuing the knowledge passed down from parents and



grandparents, was rescued at the right time. Without this initiative, it would certainly have been lost forever and the population's health conditions would surely be in decline.

In order to amplify the initiative, it is important that we carry out a survey of the practices and methods that have been effective in strengthening and boosting the revival of traditional foods, highlighting the role of communities, especially women, in building and implementing the initiative. This survey should address the positive impacts generated for the community in general. We will use these results as motivation to replicate initiatives and tackle health problems caused by irresponsible consumption of industrialised foods in the other villages of the Paiter communities.

An important lesson learnt is the importance of unity, which has made us stronger as a Paiter community and has strengthened us to move forward with our mission, showing that together we can achieve great things for the community and the environment, always with a focus on valuing our culture and protecting our territory.



19. Ancestral Wisdom to Inspire, Empower and Transform Lives and the Environment

Mater Iniciativa's projects located in Peruvian Andes that impact people's life and environment.

Author: Sheilla Baldeon, Researcher

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In a world facing increasingly complex challenges, such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and the neglect of ancestral knowledge, there is a need to seek innovative and sustainable solutions. How could we implement innovative solutions involving ancestral wisdom? Initiatives such as Mater Iniciativa are inspiring examples of how research, cooperation and community work can contribute to a more sustainable and harmonious present and future.

BACKGROUND

Mater Iniciativa is a Peruvian research center located in Cusco, Peru that explores the deep connection between food, nature, environment, and culture. Inspired by the ancestral legacy of the Incas [1], this center works hand in hand with local communities to preserve ancestral wisdom, promotes sustainable agricultural practices, and facilitates community empowerment.

The center welcomes volunteers with project proposals aligned to their values, focused on staying connected with neighboring farming communities or within the Cusco region, and with local producers, artisans or collectors, as well as with the environment.

Mater Iniciativa is the "brain" behind the curtains of the Mil, Kjolle, and Central [2] restaurants providing interdisciplinary support.

Mater Iniciativa promotes research through various projects, such as the "Mil Inmersión" route and the "Warmi" project, Mater Iniciativa has been able to generate a positive impact in the communities with which it works, contributing to the conservation of cultural heritage, the development of internal capacities, and the protection of the environment.

Sharing good practices at a global level is essential to replicate them and foster environmental sustainability, promote harmonious relationships, and stimulate a paradigm shift. This also enriches the communities' worldview and contributes to their development. Mater Iniciativa has been working with local communities for over seven years and is a clear example of the transformative power of the environment-human-art relationship.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Mater Iniciativa has identified and developed a wide range of best practices and activities that have proven to be transformative for its members. On this occasion, two cases of these projects are highlighted that clearly exemplify the positive impact that best practices can have on communities: preservation of ancestral wisdom and empowerment of women in communities.



Preservation of ancestral wisdom

One of the services that the Mil restaurant, located in Cusco-Perú, offers is the route called “Mil Inmersión”. This route proposes the presentation of ancestral knowledge and its connection with nature and the scientific names of the species that are observed on the route. There is a great desire to share and rescue the ancestral knowledge that can be transmitted to the world, as well as to other associations or communities. In addition, there is a desire to carry out an exchange of knowledge and cultures with visitors to the route who come from all over the world. This route is a "constant exercise of memory" and stimulates remembering stories of the past and telling them to the visitors.

The interesting thing about the immersion route is the preservation of ancestral wisdom through collaborative work between community leaders and young scientists. This route is provided by two people (a community leader and a biologist, agroforestry professional, or anthropologist). This tourist route includes learning about plants, local crops and Inca cultivation practices based on the observations of the solstice and equinox in the decision-making process for agriculture. This interaction has promoted a very big change: a change of aptitude in the leaders of the communities that has a transcendental impact on the preservation of ancestral knowledge through written content. Indeed, from working on Mater Iniciativa projects, one of the community leaders now has the life

purpose of writing a book about plants in their community to share with the world. This clearly highlights local governance, as the heritage is recognized and protected by local institutions. This route highlights the practice of gratefulness to nature, as communities recognize that there is a connection between human and nature, and therefore thank the earth for the harvest and respect the mountains as protectors. This is reflected in the “Sumak kawsay”, a Quechua term meaning "good living" and harmony with “Pachamama” (Mother Nature).

Empowerment of women in communities

Cultivating internal qualities is fundamental for the development of communities. So is fostering a safe environment with tools to develop skills, or simply serving as a bridge to transmit ancestral practices and knowledge in different languages. Female empowerment is reflected in the history of Warmi, women in Quechua, where the main objective is to preserve an ancestral technique of dyeing and empowering women to show their art through looms. Warmi also strengthens the communication of its members, as this project has taught women from the communities of Mullaka's-Misminay and Kacllaraccay to communicate in Spanish and thus show their work of looms and plant-based natural dyes to visitors from other parts of the world. Mil helped form an association comprising a group of women who have empowered the collective work that rescued the experimentation with plants in their

environment; a practice that had been lost in time due to the introduction of industrial dyes in Cusco. This work has been recognized by three other Cusco communities that have been trained by Warmi during 2023.

In the preservation of ancestral wisdom activity, one of the shared practices is the gratitude to Pachamama through the payment to the earth, a ritual of gratitude that is part of the cultural heritage. This ritual not only promotes the connection with nature, but also an improvement in human bonding and teamwork.

The interaction of the work with other cultures has promoted a change of aptitude in the leaders of the communities that has a transcendental impact on how ancestral knowledge is preserved through written content. The changes that can be observed in the members of Warmi and include a great appreciation of themselves for their ancestral knowledge and textile skills, as well as confidence to express their stories in Spanish to visitors from around the globe.

At the community level, the “Mil Inmersión” route is a “constant exercise of memory” and stimulates remembering stories of the past and telling them to the visitors. This gives life to unspoken stories and stories that are only known by local communities, preserving knowledge for the broader community. The preservation of the community practices and knowledge through the life purpose of some community leaders writing a book about plants in their community to share with the world shows that heritage is recognized and protected by the locals.

The concept of “Ayni” is highlighted in the spaces generated in Warmi in sharing time and working together. Ayni, a Quechua word, is a concept of reciprocity and mutual care between people of the Andean communities.

Ayni also is practiced within the communities and workers of Mil. The local land is so large that, when harvest time comes, the workers ask family and friends to help with the harvest. This community work is celebrated with the “Huatia”, a traditional way of cooking and harvesting different potatoes.

LEARNINGS

The “preservation of ancestral wisdom through community work in agriculture and collaborative work between local leaders and scientists” and “empowerment of women in communities through Warmi” are practices that should be shared with the world as they generate a symphony of mutual collaboration and connection with the environment, through nature and art.

Mater Iniciativa's activities promote sustainable agricultural practices that respect and connect people with the environment. This contributes to a paradigm shift in the conservation of biodiversity and the fight against climate change. We can protect what we care about and love. The values of Mater Iniciativa, including healthy social relations, reflection, and adaptability bring up the alignment with the five dimensions of the inner development goals towards more sustainable futures.

These practices could be scaled up to provide opportunities to other organizations, which could focus on the relationship between communities and environment to preserve indigenous knowledge and empower communities through the recognition of their abilities and knowledge.

“Gratefulness instead of worship”

— Cleto Cusipaucar at 3568 m.a.s.l.
Cusco, Peru 2023



Cultural 4 Transformation of Organizations



20. Transforming Communities Through Regenerative Agriculture and Cultural Preservation

Mountain Hazelnuts: Fostering a Harmonious and Spiritually Mindful Work Environment | Bhutan

Author: Sean Watson, CEO of Mountain Hazelnuts

"Transforming communities through regenerative agriculture and cultural preservation"—this is the guiding mission of Mountain Hazelnuts (MH). Since its inception in 2009, MH has embarked on a journey to blend economic growth with social and environmental responsibility, creating a unique model of business that nurtures both land and people.

BACKGROUND

Mountain Hazelnuts was established as Bhutan's first Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in a public-private-community partnership with the Royal Government of Bhutan. The company is committed to achieving lasting social, environmental, and economic impact through a 30-year Memorandum of Understanding. This partnership aims to create sustainable income for farmers, reduce rural-to-urban migration, and support Bhutan's unique cultural heritage and biodiversity.

MH currently collaborates with over 8,000 smallholder families (44% women-led) across 4,300 acres in 19 of Bhutan's 20 districts, with plans to expand to 15,000 grower partners. By integrating with two local value-chain entrepreneurs, Bhutan Growers and Yiga Chocolate, MH also supports the production of Hazelnut Oil and Chocolate, fostering local entrepreneurship and adding value to the hazelnut supply chain.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

Mountain Hazelnuts aims to generate long-term income, revitalize vulnerable communities, and promote sustainable land stewardship through the cultivation and sale of premium-quality hazelnuts. The project commenced in 2009 and is designed to run until 2039, aligning with Bhutan's holistic approach to development known as Gross National Happiness (GNH).

The company's approach is built on three main pillars:

1. **Mindfulness and Bhutanese Cultural Practices:** These practices represent the cornerstone of the company's philosophy, carefully selected as essential elements drawn from the rich tapestry of Bhutanese traditional culture, which bears the influence of both Buddhist and Hindu traditions. These practices are deeply rooted in promoting self-awareness, emotional resilience, and inner peace. To ensure inclusivity and accessibility, more secular mindfulness meditation sessions are conducted as part of the project, allowing participants to acquire valuable skills for personal growth while respecting the diverse cultural tapestry of the region.
2. **Integration with Local Communities:** MH actively embraces an integration-with-community approach. This approach fosters communal solidarity and mutual

well-being, while participating in local festivals, rituals, and customs. Mountain Hazelnuts participates in and organizes community events, workshops, and support groups, providing a platform for community members to come together, share experiences, and build meaningful relationships. By intertwining our initiatives with local traditions, MH honours the diverse heritage of the regions they work in, nurturing a culture of inner capacity development within the broader community.

3. Gross National Happiness (GNH): MH's embrace of the GNH framework is deeply rooted in Bhutan's distinctive development philosophy, where GNH stands as a foundational principle. This holistic approach, encompassing not only economic and environmental indicators, but also the spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being of individuals and communities, has been a guiding beacon for the project. In taking inspiration from their government partners, who have consistently championed GNH as a pivotal driver of Bhutan's advancement.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

At the individual level, MH's initiatives have fostered increased self-awareness, emotional resilience, and mindfulness among employees and community members. Participation in mindfulness practices, local cultural activities, and community events has contributed to personal growth and well-being.

At the community level, MH's efforts have revitalized rural areas by providing sustainable income opportunities and reducing rural-to-urban migration. The company's integration with local traditions and support for community events has strengthened social cohesion and preserved Bhutan's cultural heritage.

LEARNINGS

One of the primary challenges MH faced was balancing modern business practices with traditional cultural values. To address this, MH adopted a flexible approach that respects local customs and integrates them into its corporate culture. Another challenge was ensuring the sustainability of the hazelnut orchards in a challenging mountainous terrain. This required innovative agricultural practices and strong collaboration with local communities.

MH's model offers significant opportunities for scaling up, both within Bhutan and in similar contexts worldwide. The integration of cultural preservation, community development, and sustainable agriculture can serve as a blueprint for other regions looking to balance economic growth with social and environmental stewardship. As MH continues to grow, it remains committed to its mission of fostering a thriving Bhutanese hazelnut industry while honoring the country's rich cultural heritage and promoting holistic well-being.





Box 1. Mountain Hazelnuts' initiatives to foster a harmonious and spiritually mindful work environment

MH is committed to fostering a culture of spiritual well-being and community harmony. To achieve this, MH has established a set of practices and initiatives that reflect their deep respect for the well-being of all sentient beings and the welfare of their employees. These initiatives include:

1. **Annual Rimdro Rituals:** Every year, we conduct the traditional Rimdro rituals with the intention of promoting the welfare of all sentient beings, as well as the prosperity of our company. Employees are encouraged to participate in these rituals, with financial support provided by the Hazay Welfare Fund.
2. **Shrine (Chösham) in the Conference Room:** We have a dedicated Chösham in our conference room where daily morning and evening prayers and meditations are offered for the benefit of all sentient beings and the local deities.
3. **Daily Mindfulness Meditation:** Our staff is encouraged to practice daily mindfulness meditation to enhance their well-being and promote a mindful workplace culture.
4. **Support for Local Festivals:** We actively support local Tsechus (annual festivals) that are aligned with the community's well-being and values.
5. **Hazay Welfare Fund:** Our staff-led Hazay Welfare Fund, primarily established to assist with funerals and the rituals to assist the deceased navigate to the next life. It is financially supported by the Company.
6. **Astrological Consultations:** Prior to initiating any new projects or major decisions, we seek astrological consultations to choose auspicious dates and approaches for success, a common and highly regarded practice in Bhutan.
7. **Ground Breaking Ceremonies:** We conduct ground-breaking (Salang Tendrel) ceremonies before construction begins to appease local deities, ensuring the welfare of the environment and all beings affected by the project. These ceremonies include traditional offerings, hiring of local monks to recite prayers, and celebrating the milestone as per Bhutanese traditions.
8. **Working Time Flexibility:** Our staff is granted flexibility to attend spiritual teachings and blessings, enabling them to nurture their spiritual growth.
9. **Ceremonies in July:** In July, we support ceremonies in local temples to honor and support the well-being of all insects and worms that may be affected by farming activities.
10. **Community Beautification and Clean-Up Campaigns:** We actively engage in community beautification and clean-up campaigns, embodying our commitment to mindful community service.
11. **National Religious Calendar:** We observe and celebrate religious days according to the national calendar, encouraging our community to attend temples and teachings that resonate with our shared values.
12. **Collaborative partnerships with Monastic institutions:** We lease land and establish orchards with local temples and Monasteries, with a long-term commitment to mutual benefit.

21. Unlocking the Power Within: A Journey of Transformative Change in Public Service

Welsh Government: The Sustainable Development Behaviour Change Programme | Wales

Author: Diana Reynolds, Sustainable Development Change Manager, Llywodraeth Cymru / Welsh Government

In 2015, the Government of Wales set a groundbreaking precedent with the Well-being of Future Generations Act, a bold move to embed long-term thinking, collaboration, and problem prevention at the heart of public service. This initiative sparked the launch of the Welsh Government Sustainable Development Behaviour Change Programme, a powerful vehicle designed to cultivate a culture of sustainable development among civil servants.

BACKGROUND

The Well-being of Future Generations Act was designed to revolutionize how public bodies in Wales approach their responsibilities. The Act emphasized the importance of long-term thinking, collaboration with communities, and a preventative, systemic approach to governance. To support this transformative vision, the Welsh Government introduced the Sustainable Development Behaviour Change Programme. Targeting approximately 5,000 civil servants, the programme sought to foster a profound shift in both individual and collective behavior, aligning their work with principles of sustainable development and behavioral science.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The programme's core objective was to transform the working ethos of the Welsh civil

service, promoting equal, reciprocal, and caring relations through a new leadership narrative that addresses power dynamics. Launched in 2015 and still ongoing, the programme was built around a competency framework for leadership, emphasizing four key transformation skills:

1. Pause: Encouraging civil servants to take time, whether alone or with others, to reflect and allow new ideas to emerge.
2. Listen: Fostering deep listening skills, both to oneself and others, to understand and facilitate understanding.
3. Ask Good Questions: Cultivating the ability to ask insightful questions and engage in meaningful dialogue.
4. Collective Action: Promoting collaborative efforts through co-production, learning by doing, and experimentation.

The approach was collaborative, relying on action research, Theory U, and an on-demand service model that provided advice, coaching, and space for reflection. Participation was voluntary, with training tailored to individual needs and focused on applying behavioral science in practical settings.

Over nine years, the programme successfully trained and coached around 2,000 civil servants, championing co-production techniques and deepening the understanding of sustainable practices.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

At the individual level, the programme has sparked significant internal transformations among civil servants. Participants reported enhanced empathy, improved communication, and a greater openness to change. These changes have fostered a more reflective, thoughtful approach to their work, with civil servants becoming more attuned to the connections between well-being and effective service delivery.

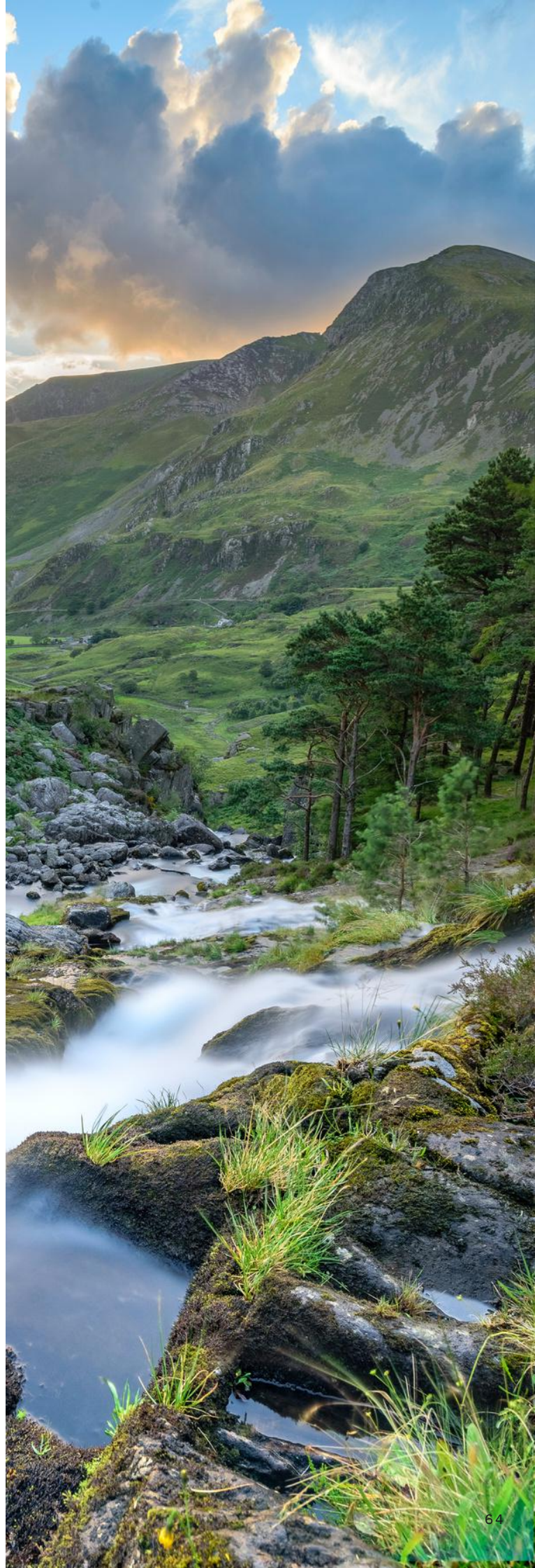
At the community level, the programme has led to stronger relationships within public services, characterized by improved collaboration and shared responsibility. The focus on co-production has empowered civil servants to work more effectively with communities, leading to better policy outcomes and a deeper integration of sustainable development principles in everyday governance.

LEARNINGS

One key lesson learned is the importance of patience and persistence in cultural change; fostering deep, meaningful change takes time. Additionally, the need for ongoing support and tailored training was highlighted as critical to sustaining the momentum of change.

Looking ahead, there are significant opportunities to scale up the programme, particularly by expanding its reach to more public bodies and deepening its integration with other governmental initiatives.

This would further embed the principles of sustainable development across all levels of Welsh governance, ensuring a lasting impact on both the civil service and the communities it serves.





22. Activating Regenerative and Conscious Food System Narratives

OpEPA: New Narratives for Nourishment and Sustainability | Global

Authors: Luis Alberto Camargo, Cristina Consuegra, Carmen Posada, Luisa Castellanos, Zora Katich

"Food is more than sustenance; it's a story waiting to be told." This 6-month project set out to rewrite that narrative by empowering journalists and influencers to reshape how we perceive and interact with food systems. Through a series of workshops and the creation of a comprehensive guide, the project aimed to inspire a global movement toward a more regenerative and conscious food system.

BACKGROUND

This 6-month project consisted of creating and disseminating a guide - "Eating and Shaping the World" - and a series of 1.5 and 2-hour workshops designed to activate regenerative and conscious food system narratives.

The project was implemented virtually in Colombia for participants around the world. It sought to strengthen the capacities of journalists and influencers to develop and promote new narratives on the food system. Both the guide and the workshops were delivered in Spanish and English.

During the workshops, the guide's topics were addressed, and dialogue for collaborative learning and internal capacity building was cultivated. Participants were convened thanks to OpEPA's platform for journalists and the networks of CoFSA and UNDP, partners in this project.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The project's objective was clear: to encourage deep reflection and improve the relationship between humans and food, ultimately promoting sustainable practices. The guide "Eating and Shaping the World" broadens the vision of conventional food systems, as well as offers tools for communicators to create new narratives. This was accompanied by practices to strengthen the internal capacities of the readers. At the same time, the experiential workshops were designed to delve deeper into the guide from the rational, corporal, and emotional points of view. These interactive sessions explored relationships with food through the stages of Joanna Macy's spiral. Starting with gratitude for the magic of food systems, participants then explored the pains of the food system crisis and finished with a fresh vision to create more hopeful stories that reconnect with food in new ways. The objective was to encourage reflections that improve the relationship between human beings and food, promoting sustainable practices and fostering a global movement towards a nutritious and interconnected world.

"I loved being able to see the interconnectedness between all the players in the ecologies of food and being able to understand the importance of journalism in changing these narratives."

— Participant

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The workshop demonstrated the connections of food with the world through social and planetary health and generated an awareness of the responsibility our decision-making has. The impacts that participants reported from this experience were incredibly positive. The workshop aroused curiosity and interest in "continuing to investigate and explore different ways of communicating and narrating our relationship with ecologies of food." Indeed, participants reported feeling motivated to include the learnings from the workshop and guide in their work and to involve people from other communities outside their usual circles. They also reported that the workshop strengthened behaviors, habits, and thoughts already present in relation to food systems and that this will impact the groups and communities in which they work.

At the behavioral level, participants reflected on changes in their beliefs and values towards food which could lead to changes in how they consume food and perceive their responsibility and agency within the food system.

Do you feel that this workshop has generated changes in the vision you had about food? in what way?

"The workshop allowed me to meet people, and their opinions made me reflect and deepen the relationship I have with food, in particular about the need to be more conscious about what I eat, what I buy, and where I buy what I eat."

— Participant

LEARNINGS

The potential for scaling up and replicating the intervention is significant, as the New Narratives for Regenerative Food Systems guide is already developed, eliminating the need for additional costs. The project's experience in training journalists and influencers could serve as an inspiring model

for engaging different audiences, particularly key decision-makers and public leaders, in the regeneration of food systems. Using the guide as a basis, the intervention could be adapted to empower decision-makers and public leaders to cultivate their inner capacities and influence policy toward regenerative food systems. In addition, virtual workshops would enable replication of the intervention in various countries and regions. The workshop methodology is also adaptable to other groups working in the food system. The emphasis on transformative educational practices and nature-based educational methodologies allows for a dynamic learning experience that others can adopt. The guide would allow for the development of a specific curriculum that explores the ecologies of food and this whole relational and practical issue of young people, food, and how this relationship is represented in their homes and at school. We believe that in order to replicate the intervention, it is essential to first identify the audience, then to create a relevant guide adaptation, and finally design a sequence of learning - through workshops - that builds collectively on the concepts of the guide and creates space for deep reflection specific to the public.

Upon evaluating the workshop and its impact, future iterations of the project would ideally include a workshop or master class in which the concepts proposed in the guide are explained, as these are complex and need time to fully understand. In parallel, a series of contemplative practices, meditations, and reflective eating practices could accompany the guide. Each practice would need time to develop and be internalized. For example, a diary or logbook could be kept recording the reflections and noticing the internal changes. Thus, with these changes, the total experience would have a longer duration, allowing the necessary time to carry out the proposed objectives, awakening and realizing the magic of the ecologies of food through gratitude, moving past the pains in the food system, recognizing the regenerative potentials, and allow us to "write" the story we want to see.



5 Food Policy Reform

23. European Leaders Exploring How to Tackle the Climate Crisis Inside Out

Inner Green Deal: A Climate & Environmental Leadership Programme | Europe

Author: Jeroen Janss, Co-Founder, Inner Green Deal

In March 2021, the Inner Green Deal (IGD), an independent non-profit organization, launched BEYOND, a Climate & Environmental Leadership Programme. This innovative initiative aims to inspire and equip leaders to foster sustainability by cultivating mindfulness, compassion, and collaborative habits.

BACKGROUND

The BEYOND programme was designed to engage 100 leaders from the European Union (EU), including 40 from the European Parliament, Council, and Commission. The programme focused on exploring both the inner dimensions of sustainability—such as mindfulness, compassion, systems thinking, values, and beliefs—and the outer dimensions, including behavior change, collaboration, and workplace initiatives.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The programme began in March 2021 and ran for 6-8 weeks. Its primary objective was to empower decision-makers to lead with mindfulness and compassion, fostering a deeper connection to environmental sustainability. The programme was delivered through five online modules totaling 14 hours, supplemented by daily meditations, weekly nature walks, and habit-shifting practices.

Participants collaborated on real organizational and societal challenges, developing initiatives such as encouraging EU policymakers to volunteer their expertise in environmental community projects.

Programme Overview

- Modules: 5 online modules of 2,5 hrs plus one online intro session (in total 14 hrs)
- Practice: daily meditations, weekly nature walks, and practicing habit shifts
- Delivery: blended learning with social learning platform, app, and peer learning
- Collaboration: participants collaborate around real organizational and societal challenges for which they develop initiatives and working prototypes (e.g. initiatives for EU policymakers to volunteer their expertise to environmental community projects)
- Time frame: 6-8 weeks



Method	Relevant for which qualities	Sources include...
Mindfulness practice	Inner and outer awareness, emotional regulation, integrity, agency, resilience...	Goleman & Davidson 2018, Hanson 2009, Bristow, Bell & Wamsler 2022
Compassion practice	Care, perspective taking, purpose, agency, moving into action, gratitude	Singer 2018, Wamsler 2021, Bristow 2020
Habit change	Environmental action, reducing carbon footprint, collaboration	Clear 2018, Wamsler 2021, Kang 2013, Fog 2007
Systems thinking, complexity thinking and sense-making	Perspective taking, defining collective action, understanding biases	Scharmer 2009, Meadows 2008, Leichenko & O'Brien 2019, Senge 1990
Participatory leadership	Collaboration, confidence, courage, trust in humanity and what emerges	Scharmer 2009, Edmondson 1999, Laloux 2014
Indigenous inspired practices such as medicine wheel, nature walks	Interdependency, perspective taking, nature connection	Macy 2014, Kumar 2013, Milton 2006 and others building on indigenous wisdom

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Professor Christine Wamsler of Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies (LUCSUS) attended all sessions and reviewed both quantitative data (pre- and post-surveys) and qualitative data (what people shared during the programme verbally or in written form).

According to preliminary findings, participants demonstrated:

- Significant increase in nature connectedness;
- Significant increase in climate agency (e.g. voting for environmental parties, signing petitions) and adaptation behaviour (taking measures to prepare for climate impacts);
- Clear links between compassion and pro-environmental behaviour;
- Increased integration of sustainability concerns into work, such as budget allocations, human resource allocation, internal working structures, and stakeholder relationships;
- Significant increase in well-being; and
- Significant reduction in climate anxiety.

The programme's impact extended beyond individual participants, leading to changes in budget allocations, internal working structures,

human resource management, and stakeholder relationships within the EU institutions. The recognition by the EU's training Institute EUSA, which funded the development of new programmes for management across EU institutions, underscores the broader influence of BEYOND.

LEARNINGS

The main challenges included adapting the programme to different organizational cultures and ensuring sustained engagement from participants. Additionally, scaling the initiative to reach a larger audience presented logistical and resource-based challenges.

The success of the BEYOND programme demonstrated the value of integrating mindfulness and compassion into leadership training for sustainability. It highlighted the need for continued research and adaptation to meet the evolving needs of participants. The IGD plans to scale its programmes by launching a teacher training programme, offering free programmes in unfunded areas, and expanding its online tools and resources. Additionally, IGD aims to translate its offerings into multiple languages to reach a broader global audience and continue inspiring its community through podcasts and other content.

24. Building More Collaborative Political Cultures Through Mindfulness

The Mindfulness Initiative: The success of mindfulness training in the British Parliament | United Kingdom

Author: Jamie Bristow, Director, Mindfulness Initiative

"A Transformative Journey Toward Mindful Leadership in Politics". In recent years, mindfulness has quietly revolutionized the way British political leaders engage with their work and with each other, creating a more compassionate and focused political culture.

BACKGROUND

In 2013, inspired by the benefits they had experienced in their own lives, a small group of British Members of Parliament and the House of Lords invited the University of Oxford Mindfulness Centre (OMC) to start providing eight-week mindfulness courses adapted from Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT, a health intervention with an extensive evidence base) to cross-party groups of politicians. As of December 2021, over 300 MPs and Lords have received training, which is now delivered by Awaris. A core group attends a weekly drop-in class that provides continued instruction and fosters a community of practice within the British Parliament. More recently, silent practice days have been offered twice a year.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

To implement this initiative, eight-week mindfulness courses, adapted from the extensively evidence-based Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), were offered to cross-party groups of politicians. Although early courses were held under a promise of strict anonymity, many participants have since

spoken out publicly about the profound effects that their training has had, both personally and professionally. Former Government minister, and current Member of the House of Lords, Lord Alan Howarth (Lab), said of the teaching: *"this is an oasis of trust and friendship – something very important in our adversarial politics. It is a very great help for my focus, energy, perspective, and sense of proportion and balance."*

RESULTS AND IMPACT

In a Westminster Hall debate, Member of Parliament (MP) Nic Dakin described the course as "transformative" and a "gift of the body and mind", whilst Baroness Lorely Burt said the following during a debate in the House of Lords:

"My life changed about seven or eight years ago, when [I went on a mindfulness course]... I found that being able to calm my mind and see things more objectively from a distance had an incredible, transformational effect on me... I became more open, aware and effective in my work life, my social life and my family life."

— Baroness Lorely Burt

Tracey Crouch MP has spoken widely in the media about how mindfulness helped her to tackle depression. She is also one of many politicians who have reported benefits to public speaking, recounting how she kicks her shoes off in the chamber so that she can bring awareness into her feet and feel grounded.

Shortly after mindfulness courses were established, graduates started to become interested in the science behind what they'd learned. The **Mindfulness Initiative** policy institute was formed to begin presenting the research evidence on mindfulness to ministers, MPs and senior policy advisors. In early 2014, The Mindfulness Initiative supported parliamentarians to set up a **Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group** (MAPPG) and helped them to carry out a 12-month inquiry into how mindfulness could be incorporated into UK services and institutions. The resulting report, **Mindful Nation UK report**, was the first policy document of its kind and made evidence-based policy recommendations in the areas of education, health, criminal justice and the workplace. The Mindfulness Initiative continues to clerk the MAPPG and has helped the cross-party group to host events that both go deeper into existing areas of inquiry like '**Mindfulness and Primary Education**' and have opened up new fields such as '**Mindfulness, Defence and Emergency Services**' and '**Mindfulness, Ageing Well and Older People**'.

LEARNINGS

Over time, the British MPs and Members of the House of Lords who took part in these inquiries started to observe that their mindfulness practice was not just impacting what they were considering in their policymaking, but also how they were doing it. At a Mindfulness Initiative event in 2017 Baroness Ruth Lister (Lab) asked, *"We talk about mindfulness being helpful 'out there', but what about how mindfulness could help 'in here', in Parliament? What about mindful politics more generally?"*. Since that time, politicians have become increasingly confident and even visionary about the potential for mindfulness to improve the quality of discourse and debate. Lord Howarth has suggested that "the mutual respect, the willingness to listen, the kindness, the open-minded seeking after better understanding that mindfulness helps to inculcate are the crucial cultural underpinnings for a better politics." At a conference on 'mindful leadership', Mindfulness All-Party Group Co-chair Tim

Loughton MP reported that "There is an affinity amongst those who have been through this mindfulness course and a rather more considered approach to exchanges of differing views." In a TV interview, Tim suggested that mindfulness practice helps politicians to "disagree better".

By far the most outspoken proponent of mindfulness in politics has been Chris Ruane. Chris was an MP for over 20 years and had a reputation in the early days for being loud and disruptive in the chamber. In 2011, Quentin Letts likened him to a "knuckle-dragging torturer's assistant", describing him as a "professional heckler", greeting "every comment from the Government benches with a derogatory witticism". By 2019, however, when Chris asked a question about mindfulness during PMQs, the Speaker of the House of Commons noted that "the gentleman is obviously a beneficiary of mindfulness himself, he seems a very calm fellow these days, which wasn't always the case in the past!" Politicians have also reported that mindfulness helps them keep "clarity of views... rather than ending up doing stuff just because there is pressure". At the international gathering of politicians in 2017, Dutch MP and party leader Esther Ouwehand said, "Mindfulness really enables me to stay in touch with what is most important to me, my own values."

Following the success of the UK programme, British politicians have been invited to parliaments around the world to discuss mindfulness training. This has influenced a further ten national legislatures to introduce mindfulness courses. The Mindfulness Initiative now supports politicians and advocates across the world and supports an 'International Mindfulness in Politics Network'. As part of these efforts, the Mindfulness Initiative and MAPPG hosted a first '**Global Mindfulness Congress**' of legislators in the UK Parliament in October 2017. At this historic international meeting, 40 politicians from 14 countries practised mindfulness together and engaged in insight-based policy inquiry with Prof Jon Kabat-Zinn.



6 Multi-stakeholder Dialogues

25. For Tomorrow's Harvest: An Awareness-based Journey for Change Agents in Food Systems

Commonland: A Theory U Leadership Programme to support the Transition towards sustainability in the Dutch Food Systems | Netherlands

Author: Maaïke Boumans, Programme Coordinator, Commonland

In 2018, Commonland, together with the OFL, an independent platform funded by the Dutch government, launched “For Tomorrow's Harvest”: an awareness-based journey for change agents supporting the transition of the Dutch food and agricultural system towards sustainability. The participants represented largely the agri-food system, having members from the business community, governments, banks, farms, and social organizations.

BACKGROUND

In a proven leadership trajectory, based on Theory U, eighty participants immersed themselves over a 1,5 - year course in the agricultural and food system. They learned to look through different perspectives and to understand and integrate other perspectives into their own thinking and acting. Participants reflected on their own role in the transition. They were given systemic and process-based tools to develop individual and collective leadership and thus the capacity to contribute more effectively to the desired transition. From there, participants developed transition experiments, or prototypes, focused on addressing systems barriers that were identified during the process.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

“For Tomorrow's Harvest” followed the U curve and started with a three-day immersive process

in September 2018 in which participants began building relationships with each other and started sensing into the agricultural and food system in the Netherlands and its challenges. This three-day co-initiation workshop was followed by a full day in January 2019 of further ‘co-sensing’ of the agricultural system through dialogue interviews, shadowing (spending half a day with someone from a different perspective in the system) and learning more about Theory U. Participants then undertook six different ‘learning journeys’ in March 2019, in order to visit various places and initiatives that hold potential for change. They witnessed, observed and engaged with people from those initiatives, and took their learning back to the rest of the group on day 6 of the journey, in April 2019. This day was spent at the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and included a presentation on ‘Value creation and new organizational and business models in a circular economy’ by the head economist at the Triodos Investment Group. The Lab finished with a two-day workshop on crystallizing visions for the future and developing system prototypes.





LEARNINGS

Participants have experienced the Lab as valuable by gaining deeper insights, growing their network, developing new tools they could integrate in their own work and leaving with a clearer sense of direction. The researchers found there were two ‘archetypes’ in the participants: people who enjoy the left side of the U (sensing the system, reflection, slowing down, deepening insights), and those who enjoy the right side of the U (stepping into action, developing new prototypes, searching for means, knowledge, and people to further support their current work). They indicated a need for ‘connectors’ between these two.

For Tomorrow’s Harvest is continuing in various smaller regional Labs throughout the Netherlands, as well as a Lab focused on youth: ‘for the harvest of the day after tomorrow’.

Watch this [3,5 minute video](#) that explains For Tomorrow’s Harvest. Here is a video of the [2-day summit](#) in June 2019 and a video of the [summit in September 2020](#).

Commonland is currently developing a partnership together with Presencing Institute and Ashoka to further this approach in Europe, under the title of “[Bioregional Weaving Labs](#)” and is exploring potential for this approach with partners in other regions across the world.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

A total of eight concrete initiatives were born out of For Tomorrow’s Harvest. One such example is ‘[Aardpeer](#)’, a collaboration between a bank, a farming community, and a foundation of regenerative agriculture. They established a foundation that allows citizens and investors to purchase bonds for land for regenerative farmers. In 2021, they were able to realize the purchase of land for five farmers through the sale of a total of 7.2 million euros in bonds. In a total of 3 weeks, they received 74 applications from farmers with a total volume of approximately 100 million euros, demonstrating the high need for access to land by regenerative farmers.

Another prototype, “**Biodiversity is achieved together**”, focuses on a specific piece of land, where they aim to increase biodiversity by placing it at the center of business development and involving consumers and residents of the area by offering locally produced goods and services.

“**JOIN Dialogue-dinners**” (DOE MEE - dialoog diners) offers space for an agricultural entrepreneur to share their story in a small group of people, who bring their curiosity, questions and inspiration. New connections are made, stories are shared, and potential for collaboration is enhanced.

“**Future-oriented business acquisition**” is a prototype to develop a two-hour game that supports financiers, licensing authorities, chain parties and landowners to think about what they can do differently to support young future farmers to develop sustainable agriculture. For more information on these and other prototypes, see the [website](#) in Dutch.



26. Regenerative Nations: A Transformative Journey for Communities

GENOA: Whole system co-learning journey and regenerative design lab | Oceania & Asia

Author: Thao Kin Ngo, Networking Coordinator, Global Ecovillage Network Oceania & Asia

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The Asia-Pacific region, home to some of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations, is facing unprecedented challenges. With dense populations and deep social and political divides, the region's vulnerabilities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, amidst these challenges, there is a growing movement to harness local wisdom and innovation for a sustainable future.

BACKGROUND

The Asia-Pacific region has been grappling with systemic issues that impact the environment, economy, and society. These issues, already formidable before the pandemic, have been further intensified by its effects. However, the region also holds rich cultural heritage and a wealth of traditional knowledge that, when combined with modern scientific methods, can offer holistic solutions to these complex challenges.

REGEN-Nations offers a learning program and incubation for solutions that emerge from the grassroots people of the region Oceania & Asia addressing the systemic problem they are facing with a holistic approach. Weaving together the wisdom of our rich cultural heritage with locally appropriate social and scientific methods and technologies, the project aims to explore ways that heal and restore ourselves, our communities, and our natural environments together.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

REGEN-Nations is a 6-month learning journey and prototyping lab dedicated to fostering sociological, cultural, economic, and ecological resilience and regeneration. Launched in September 2020 and running its first cycle until March 2021, the program was inspired by the ecovillage design education model and is grounded in the principles of Theory U and Regenerative Design Thinking:



The program is designed to:

- Empower individuals and communities to develop impactful projects.
- Teach skills for empathic, collaborative, and agile leadership in times of complexity.
- Provide participants with access to real-world practitioners for inspiration and one-on-one coaching.
- Develop an online ecosystem of regenerative projects for ongoing support, peer-to-peer learning, and collaboration.

The program ran its first cycle from September 2020 to March 2021 with 49 participants (16 teams) from 11 countries in Oceania & Asia. Participants journeyed through five areas of regeneration (cultural, social, ecologically, economic and whole system design) together with the companionship of 2 coaches, 9 workshop facilitators and 15 speakers who are thinkers and practitioners in different fields. Its 2nd cycle was implemented from January to June 2022 on the GEN Learning Platform. Through the REGEN-Nations program, GENOA was able to also engage a network of thought leaders, trainers, activists, ecovillages and kindred spirit organizations from the region as trainers, speakers and partners of different learning sessions. It was special to feature topics that ranged from Buddhist worldview on right livelihood and Maori perspectives on doughnut economy, interfaith peacebuilding from Sri Lanka, Filipino innovations in disasters, to Permaculture design, popularized by Australians, to offer more applicable solutions to the complex realities of countries in the region ranging from poverty, conflict, and the climate crisis, among others.

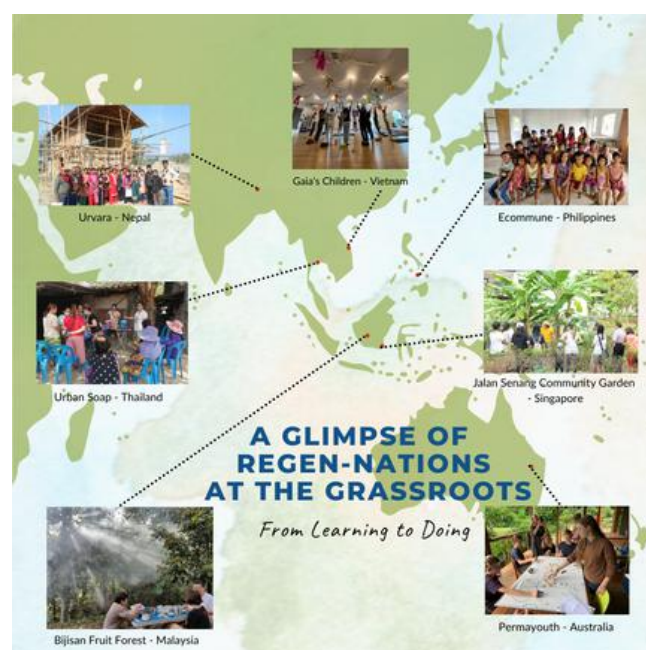
On the topic of Conscious Food Systems, the program offered extensive sessions on:

- The indigenous link between food, biodiversity and health.
- Regenerative agriculture practices (including permaculture, analogue forestry and appropriate technologies).
- Local and regenerative agri-economic systems (e.g., co-operatives, and community supported agriculture CSA).
- Whole system design for agricultural systems.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The program has sparked profound inner transformations among participants, enhancing their confidence, leadership skills, empathy and collaboration. Participants have developed a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of social, cultural, ecological, and economic systems.

On a community level, the program has led to the incubation and activation of 10 regenerative projects across the region. These projects, which emerged from the first cohort of 49 participants from 11 countries, address various local challenges, from poverty and conflict to climate resilience. Additionally, the program has fostered a network of thought leaders, trainers, and activists, amplifying the reach and impact of regenerative practices across the region. Some examples of these projects are featured in the graph below:



LEARNINGS

The diverse cultural and geographical contexts required tailored approaches, and the online format posed difficulties in maintaining engagement and connection. However, these challenges also provided valuable lessons in adaptability and the importance of context-specific solutions. The success of the first cycle ([more data here](#)) has opened doors for scaling up the program. There is significant potential to expand the reach of REGEN-Nations by leveraging the growing online ecosystem and deepening partnerships with local organizations. By continuing to refine the program and adapt to the unique needs of different communities, REGEN-Nations can play a pivotal role in fostering resilience and regeneration across the Asia-Pacific region.

27. Shifting Mindsets to Shift Development Systems

UNDP SDG Integration Team: The UN Action Learning Lab | Global

Author: Laurel Patterson, Head, UNDP SDG Integration Team

As the world grapples with unprecedented challenges, the need for innovative approaches to global development has become more pressing than ever. In response, UNDP, in collaboration with the MIT Presencing Institute, embarked on a transformative journey to cultivate systems leadership capacities within the UN, aiming to turn crises into opportunities for meaningful change.

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered the global development landscape, reversing progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and exposing critical vulnerabilities in our systems. This moment has highlighted the urgency of fostering new capabilities to navigate the complexities of the Decade of Action. At the heart of this endeavor is the need to shift from an ego-centric mindset to an eco-centric awareness—one that connects our minds, hearts, and hands in collective action.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

In June-September 2020, UNDP partnered with the [MIT Presencing Institute \(PI\)](#) to host a series of [Summer Dialogues](#), aimed at building inner capacities for awareness-based collective action. Drawing on the energy and insights from the Summer Dialogues, UNDP continued with a global [Transformation Dialogue Series](#) in the first half of 2021 to strengthen systems

leadership capacities for the Decade of Action. These virtual gatherings and learning spaces invited UN practitioners into a unique space to understand and apply awareness-based approaches, such as deep listening, mindfulness, and embodied practices for systems inquiry, to the complex challenges at the core of their work. UN staff had the opportunity to hone their action confidence by applying consciousness approaches to problems of their choice. The sessions took the main questions from the [2020 Human Development Report on Human Development and the Anthropocene](#) as a point of focus for co-inquiry into mechanisms for systems transformation.

The 4-month initiative was advanced as a collaborative powered by UNDP's integration function, with FAO, UNHCR, UN Women, UNCDF, UNV, UNEP and DPA/DPPO, facilitated by the Presencing Institute, and moderated by Laurel Patterson, Head, UNDP SDG Integration Team. To know more about the dialogues held you can watch the recordings below:

- Dialogue 1: [Co-Initiating: Uncovering Shared Intention](#)
- Dialogue 2: [Co-Sensing: Seeing Reality from the Edges of the System](#)
- Dialogue 3: [Presencing: Connecting to the Highest Future Potential](#)
- Dialogue 4: [Co-Creating the Emerging Future: Doughnut Economics](#)
- Dialogue 5: [Co-Evolving: Organizing the Future As It Emerges](#)



RESULTS AND IMPACT

During this four months' interactive journey practitioners learned how to move from concept to prototype and build the confidence to enact them. Participants were introduced to systems methods by the Presencing Institute, drawing on its Theory U methodology, in a series of workshops, and received and contributed to peer-coaching to collectively move ideas from paper to practice.

This journey equipped participants with a unique skill set that empowers them to be a true agent of change in the Decade of Action, by learning:

- Modalities for sensing - ways of finding, navigating, and understanding complex development challenges by situating yourself in the system and centering the voices of the people with lived experience.
- Modalities for presencing - ways of reducing the noise in complexity and finding clarity about what and how to tackle acute challenges.
- Modalities for prototyping - ways of proactively testing actions required for operating in uncertainty.

LEARNINGS

Over the four months, a UNDP team with external partners conducted design-led research to capture some of the lessons related to changes in behaviours, attitudes, needs and constraints of participants of the Action Learning Lab.

Through observation, interviews, surveys and focus groups, the team sought to better understand how UN practitioners act as systems leaders, what enables their actions, how these actions change over time, and the pathways by which a container like the Action Learning Lab can influence this. Among the insights that emerged:

Insight 1: Positionality of Practitioners

Different positionalities – understandings of the world based on personal values, views, and location in time and space – of UN practitioners who participated in the Action Learning Lab influence how they theorize change, understand, and act in systems. This creates a myriad of expressions of what 'systems' are and contributes to differing preferences on how to engage in learning about them.

Insight 2: Permission to Feel

When UN practitioners perceive spaces to be different from other UN spaces, such as the Action Learning Lab, they feel that they've been granted permission to be vulnerable. Practitioners who see these types of spaces as unique, point to an acceleration of relationship building within them and a potential for the space to provide a sense of belonging for participants. In these same spaces, other UN practitioners feel discomfort with the examples, activities, and ask them to participate. These practitioners point to dissonances experienced due to culture and language and missed expectations of the space to deliver practical methods.

Insight 3: Knowledge Sharing

UN Practitioners seeking to upskill in systems leadership often make implicit references to a personal-work divide, and they associate “inner transformation” learning with a personal environment. Some practitioners place a high value on reflective learning spaces, indicating how the Action Learning Lab helped them gain clarity about their priorities and goals. At the same time, a majority of research respondents identified uncertainties about how to share knowledge from the lab with colleagues and carry over their experience into their work.

Insight 4: Myth of Neutrality

Some Global South and BIPOC UN practitioners identify a “myth of neutrality” in approaches to systems transformation, particularly as taught through a Western lens without unpacking its foundational entanglement with inequality and structural racism. These practitioners stated how the Western approach poses explanations, while for them, systems transformation is experienced with little need for explanation.

Insight 5: Knowledge Adaptation

Despite widespread acceptance that adaptations are needed when learning new ideas and methods, UN practitioners expressed a high degree of uncertainty about how to apply what they were learning in the lab in their work environments. Furthermore, they feel

conflicted about who has the responsibility to translate and spread learnings from the lab, questioning whether or not it is their role or if others should create these bridges.

Insight 6: Experience in Systems

UN practitioners that consider themselves advanced systems thinkers seek to learn how to act in systems. They display an eagerness to get to the applications in context and to better understand the ‘how to’ of systems practice. At the same time, some practitioners that present as novices to systems thinking demonstrated an acceptance of starting by situating themselves in systems to explore sophisticated actions later.

Insight 7: Influence & Ownership

UN practitioners participating in the Action Learning Lab expressed desire to change processes. At the same time, they showcased doubts in their level of influence to do so, and a tendency to look for leaders outside of themselves to provide an invitation and permission to lead a process. A group of practitioners referenced fears they have that encourage them to ask for permission to lead.

Insight 8: Listening & Empathy

A significant number of UN practitioners who participated in the Action Learning Lab said that listening and developing empathy are valuable inner transformation practices that strengthen the connection between them and others. Some practitioners said listening is a good first step for systems transformation because it helps to create connections between otherwise very different roles, expertise, and focal areas. Practitioners remain divided on the meaning of listening and empathy, and hence applications of it for systems transformation also vary.

Building on the initial momentum and insights from the Action Learning Lab and dialogues, UNDP SDG Integration is continuing to work with partners to expand democratized spaces for building systems leadership capabilities, with a focus on how to shape social fields and learning infrastructure that catalyse more awareness-based modes of collective action.



28. The Role of Individual Inner Dimensions and Transformation in Sustainability

Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies: The Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program | Global

Author: Christine Wamsler, Professor of Sustainability Science and Director of the Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program, Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies

"Transforming the world starts from within." In an era where sustainability challenges like climate change, natural disasters, and resource conflicts are becoming increasingly complex, traditional approaches focusing solely on external solutions are proving insufficient. To truly address these issues, it is essential to explore and integrate the often-overlooked inner dimensions of sustainability.

BACKGROUND

Humanity is facing increasingly complex sustainability challenges, such as climate change, disasters, and food, energy, land or water conflicts. The influence of human activities on their environment and climate system is so profound, and unprecedented, that a new geological epoch—the Anthropocene—has been declared. It is clear that our trajectories remain deeply unsustainable.

While sustainability scholarship and practice has led to substantial advancements over the past decades, it has not catalysed the necessary change. A critical review shows that the vast majority has, so far, focused on the external world of ecosystems, wider socioeconomic structures, technology and governance dynamics. At the same time, a critical second dimension of reality has been neglected: the (individual and collective) inner dimensions of sustainability.

In order to fill this gap, at the end of 2015, the Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program was set up at the Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies (LUCSUS).

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The aim of the Contemplative Sustainable Futures Program is to create space and opportunities for knowledge development, learning and networking on the role of inner dimensions and inner-outer transformation for sustainability. It consists of three building blocks: research, education, and networking/outreach activities.

- Research: research on the role of inner dimensions and spheres of inner-outer transformation in sustainability includes theoretical and empirical studies on: mindsets, social values, beliefs, worldviews and associated cognitive/emotional capacities and virtues, such as awareness, consciousness, compassion, empathy and mindfulness, for improving sustainable governance. In this context, it explores the linkages between adult development, personal transformation, norms, policy, and systems change.
- Education: education activities on the role of inner dimensions and inner-outer transformation in sustainability includes a Master's level Course on 'Sustainability and Inner Transformation', PhD education

and contemplative teaching and learning activities, such as Practice Labs and Weekly Councils. All educational activities are linked to research activities and together address the linkages between personal transformation, norms, policy and systems change.

- **Networking/outreach and practice:** networking activities include cooperation with practitioners and the development of a professional database of stakeholders, networks, projects and resources on inner dimensions and inner-outer transformation in sustainability. A platform for sharing and mutual support is created where it is possible to work closely with different organizations, implement together a range of different projects, and engage in various networking events.

Interventions

The Program includes a range of interdisciplinary projects and interventions on the interface between the mind, consciousness and sustainability, such as the [TransVision](#), [Mind4Change](#), [ActivateChange](#), and [BeChange-Together](#) projects. Related collaborative interventions include, amongst many other things, i) the implementation of [Co-Creative Reflection & Dialogue Spaces](#) at the COPs (Conferences of the Parties, a decision-making body responsible for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change UNFCCC); ii) SenseMaker work for governmental and non-governmental organisations to improve joint city-citizen cooperation for climate action; iii) different training interventions to support inner-outer transformation for sustainability.

Additional information on some projects: [TransVision](#) and [Mind4Change](#) focus on the questions:

- What mindsets (values, beliefs, paradigms and associated cognitive/emotional and relational capacities) support sustainable climate action?
- What is needed to enable such mindsets (learning processes, enabling factors, methods)?

The target group of Mind4Change are policy- and decision-makers.

In contrast, TransVision focuses on the role of citizens as key agents of change for sustainability and climate action.

Both projects involve the assessment of a range of different practice and education interventions.

The project BeChange-Together focuses on the work with local governments and connects mental tools with climate-related guidance in a multi-step program that encourages inner and personal lifestyle changes with wider societal transformation. In previous applications, the methodology has shown to achieve a carbon dioxide reduction of an average of 45% for participants and give measurable results around improved wellbeing and reduced climate anxiety. The project involves: (1) applying and further developing the digital methodology, and (2) developing a framework that includes the methodology and a strategy for scaling it.



Actors

The Program involves many partners that are linked to different research projects. Practice partners include The Transition Network, local governments (e.g. Malmö, Umeå), the sustainability leadership network Forward Malmö; Ekskåret Foundation; Awaris and its Inner Green Deal Initiative; BeChange; the European Network for Community-Led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability (ECOLISE), Parliamentarians, etc.

Research partners include: The Centre for Social Sustainability and Department of Neuroscience at Karolinska Institutet, Sweden; the International Institute for Industrial Environmental Economics (IIIEE), Sweden; the Aberystwyth Behavioural Insights Research Centre, Aberystwyth University, UK; the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, USA; the Research Centre for Environmental Humanities at Bath Spa University, UK; the University of Oslo, Norway; the Centre for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at Stanford University, USA; and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), Potsdam, Germany.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

The many outcomes involve:

- the implementation of different training programs, including professional courses and a Master's level course on sustainability and inner transformation (the first of its kind in sustainability and environmental higher education),
- around 50 publications and associated talks on the issue of inner-outer transformation with strong influence on local, national and international discourses on transformation and sustainability,
- an increasing number of interdisciplinary projects, and
- a growing network of collaborating partners, including private and governmental organizations with whom we actively engage in linking inner and outer transformation for sustainability in research, education and practice.

All projects involve concrete initiatives to support transformational change. There are a range of lessons learnt with potential for replication and scaling up, such as the developed Theory of Change for inner-outer transformation, related implementation of educational training, policy integration, monitoring, and evaluation.

"I believe that we put way too little focus on the interiority of human beings—not saying that this is the most important one, I am still a structuralist, but if we want change, we have to challenge those structures in whichever way, and inner transformation is one way to contribute to this challenge."

— LUMES student, Canada

LEARNINGS

There is increasing research connecting internal and external systems change for sustainability, yet the field remains fragmented across disciplines with varied terminology and approaches. Most studies take a narrow, one-directional view, focusing on specific aspects of the internal-external relationship. Limitations include the narrow scope, a lack of empirical, inter- and transdisciplinary studies, and insufficient focus on professionals and their working environments.

To bridge this gap, a comprehensive understanding of internal-external transformation is required. This involves fostering environments that nurture transformative qualities and integrating internal dimensions into policy and institutional structures. This approach can enable more sustainable narratives and practices across sectors, leading to systemic change. A proposed model highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, addressing interdependencies, and focusing on emergent outcomes rather than cause-effect relationships. This framework supports the creation of conditions that enhance both personal transformation and broader sustainability goals, helping address the root causes of environmental and societal crises (Wamsler, C. et al, 2021).



7

Conscious Consumption



29. A Conscious Food Education Program

Instituto Maniva: Enhancing cultural identity to promote sustainable and healthy eating habits in the schools of Rio de Janeiro | Brazil

Author: Teresa Corção, Founder, Instituto Maniva

Food is more than just sustenance; it's a gateway to cultural identity and sustainable living. The Tapiokit program is a transformative food education initiative that fosters sustainable eating habits while reclaiming indigenous cultural roots.

BACKGROUND

The Tapiokit workshops, originally called Tapioca Workshops, are run by the Brazilian NGO Instituto Maniva, founded by Teresa Corção. The goal of the project is to demonstrate, through gastronomy, to children in public schools that they should be proud of their past. Ancestors of migrants from very low-income areas, knew how to treat nature so that it would provide the sustenance of thousands of generations. When children become aware of the cultural and symbolic richness of the foods of original populations, they begin to have a new perspective, valuing their predecessors more and giving them value.

Cooking is art and science simultaneously. In addition, cooking has a deep effect on human beings because it is directly related to their survival. However, original, regional foods are rarely considered valuable, often associated with times of shortage and poverty.

But it is precisely these foods, coming from the surrounding nature and not from trade of unknown origin that connects people with their territories, their history, and geography.

By unraveling this often-unknown universe and teaching, at the same time, the basic recipes developed hundreds or thousands of years ago, the child comes into contact and becomes aware of a deep connection that has maintained its heritage and existence.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

Tapiokit was a workshop composed of four parts: history and geography of the main food element of that culture, in this case the cassava; staging of the myth of the origin of the cassava, its importance in indigenous culture, and finally the focus on cooking where each child learns to make their tapioca by spinning it in the air.

Tapiokit began in 2002 at Agostinho Neto Public Elementary School. The tapioca dough making workshops continued for the following ten years, including tapioca filling contests that were judged by the Ecochef network and by other prominent individuals.

The approach at the school involved engaging all audiences—children, teachers, and parents—by drawing on their knowledge and memories of tapioca. This process aimed to involve all participants in reconstructing the act of cooking, while simultaneously uncovering the history of the food through shared experiences and memories of tapioca.

"Not eating indigenous fruit and vegetables causes both an economic and an emotional problem: on one hand it means loss of income for local farmers while on the other hand it has a great cultural impact and causes an emotional detachment from indigenous origins".

— Teresa Corção

RESULTS AND IMPACT

On an individual level, children who participated in the Tapiokit workshops developed a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage and interest in cooking, fueled by the newfound ability to prepare food for themselves and their families. According to reports from parents, this empowerment not only boosted the children's confidence, creativity and autonomy but also led to improved domestic and intergenerational relationships. Since tapioca and cassava recipes are part of many parents' past, the curiosity sparked in the children created a bridge between generations, helping to revive family traditions centered around food.

The program also had a transformative effect on the broader school environment. After the first year of Tapiokit at Agostinho Neto school, the entire institution seemed changed by the intervention. Teachers from other classes expressed interest in applying the Tapiokit methodology in their own classrooms, while some even began independent research on cassava, exploring its derivatives and recipes. This enthusiasm spread beyond the school, as the Tapiokit methodology gained recognition and was broadcast on prime-time television by Brazil's largest TV channel. As a result, Instituto Maniva was invited to implement the workshop in other states and countries, expanding the program's reach. On a broader scale, the program reached over 3,000 children, creating a significant impact not just within the schools but also in the wider community.

Families and local communities began to adopt healthier and more sustainable eating habits. Tapiokit succeeded in revitalizing knowledge about Brazil's socio-biodiversity products, helping to restore pride in Brazilian culture while strengthening the community's connection to its indigenous identity.

The Tapiokit methodology, initially built on volunteerism and intuition, proved its value over time. Careful documentation of the process before and after each implementation made it possible to refine the approach and achieve broader scalability. The impact of the program is further recognized through Instituto Maniva and its founder's participation in the Conscious Food Systems Alliance.

LEARNINGS

One of the main challenges faced during the implementation of Tapiokit was overcoming the widespread perception of cassava as "poor man's food," a legacy of colonialism that continues to shape modern dietary habits. However, the workshops underscored the power of food as an educational tool. Children quickly internalized the concepts of sustainability, cultural pride, and health through immersive, hands-on learning experiences. The success of the program highlights the opportunity for expansion. Tapiokit has already been successfully scaled to other states in Brazil and even Uruguay, demonstrating that the model can be adapted to different cultural contexts. By focusing on "identity food," the program can inspire other countries to use their native foods to promote sustainability, cultural revival, and healthier eating habits among their youngest generations.



30. Connecting with Cultural Identity Foods

LeeKit: Unveiling Ancestral Foods through Workshops in Welsh Schools | Wales

*Authors: Katie Palmer, Teresa Corcao, Gustav Guterman, Sian-Elin Davies
Maniva Institute and Food Sense Wales*

"First, we learn to appreciate food, then to cook, and finally to prepare it for others." This quote by renowned chef Ottolenghi encapsulates the journey of the Leekit project, which reimagines food education for students in Wales by linking them to their cultural and ancestral food heritage. This initiative sparks curiosity, builds awareness, and fosters a deep connection to food beyond its nutritional value.

BACKGROUND

The project Leekit describes a methodology of connecting students and teachers with culturally relevant, ancestral food, through a practical, dynamic workshop in schools. Leekit was inspired by Tapiokit, the workshop focused on the cultivation of cassava in Brazil. The teams at Maniva Institute and Food Sense Wales, together with a group of Welsh food leaders, including historian Carwyn Graves and the Dietetics team at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, adapted the Tapiokit methodology specifically for teachers and students in Wales.

The project aimed to verify the replicability of the Brazilian method in a new cultural context. By studying Welsh food traditions and involving local experts, the team chose the leek, a symbol deeply rooted in Welsh history, as the focal ingredient.

Educational materials were translated into English and Portuguese, and the Brazilian

team visited culturally significant sites in Wales to deepen their understanding of the local food heritage.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The first stage of the Leekit process was the cultural adaptation of the Tapiokit methodology to the Welsh context. The approach offers historical and geographical knowledge, culinary and nutritional, symbolic and cultural insights, and introduces mindful eating.

This process sought to verify the replicability of the original project's methodology in another country. To this end, a study was carried out on the territory and the local food culture, selecting an ingredient that was in tune with this culture. The learning journey for this adaptation involved collaborating with the food historian Carwyn Graves and the Dietetics team at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. The materials for the workshops - which included one guide for teachers and another for students - were translated into both English and Portuguese.

In addition, preceding the delivery of the workshops, the facilitators from the Brazilian Maniva Institute team (Teresa Corção and Caroline DeCnop) visited a series of culturally significant sites to immerse themselves in the heritage and history of Wales.

The sites visited were St. Davids Cathedral, St. David's birthplace, Caerhys Organic Farm, and National Museum of Wales (St. Fagans).

The second stage of the Leekit intervention was the delivery of the workshops. This involved one session to 'train the trainers', in which teachers and dietitians were introduced to the methodology. Then there were two workshops of two hours each delivered at Pentreban Primary School, on the outskirts of Cardiff. The first session, delivered to a (year 2) class of 6-year-olds, was facilitated by Teresa Corçao of the Maniva Institute. The second session, for a (year 4) class of 9-year-olds, was facilitated by the teachers and observed by the Maniva Institute and Food Sense Wales teams. These workshops involved an interactive session exploring the history and geography of the Leek, including its significance to the nation.

The whole approach was described in detail in a beautifully designed teachers' manual and students' handbook which not only supported this series of workshops but also provided a resource for other schools and settings.

The final dimension to the project was the engagement of policymakers with the initiative. There was a visit to the Welsh Parliament/Senedd, and a meeting - with members of Senedd and the Commissioner for the Welfare of Future Generations - presenting Brazilian Public Policies on food to the Welsh Government, and discussing the Brazilian School Feeding Programme (PNAE) and its relevance to Wales.

The whole process was described in the following press release.

Consciousness elements

Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator and philosophers' literacy method was based on the premise that one learns to read faster if the words have meaning and relate to the student's reality.

By the same token, the Tapiokit and Leekit workshops renew meaning and awareness of the relationship children have with food in the context of their local culture and environment. The methodology provides educators with a technique for engaging with children in a way that's different to the simpler transfer of knowledge. This is particularly relevant when working on food as teaching on nutrition in Western cultures is often confined to "do's and don'ts" about what to eat. This approach engages children's minds, hearts and senses.

During the workshop, the technique of "playing the ball" (the name given to the exchange of questions and answers with and for the children) is part of the workshop methodology that encourages the children to let go, to engage in a curious way, and to launch ideas in an open and non-judgmental way during practice.

Additionally, Teresa's guided meditation on body awareness and the present moment was carried out before the meal based on the mindful eating technique of Zen master Thich Nhat Hann, to help bring the focus to the present moment, calm them down and prepare them to try the soup made in class.



RESULTS AND IMPACT

Impacts on the different groups involved:

Children: All of the children tried the soup and about half liked it – teachers reported that this was more than expected. About half of them said they enjoyed eating together and trying new food. The most visible and immediate impact was the sense of joy expressed by the children and school staff. Although some children, during the workshop, did not like the soup, they all tried it. This is a crucial aspect of encouraging them to move away from "junk food" consumption patterns and develop a curiosity for genuine, fresh flavours. Additionally, the interest shown by children in not only consuming but also preparing food plays a significant role in fostering empathy, collaboration, and compassion.

Dietitians: According to the survey undertaken after the workshops, 60% of the dietitians who participated believed that the project provided opportunities for students to learn about the preparation and consumption of food in a healthy and conscious way. They also believe that Leekit is effective in bringing together healthy and traditional recipes at school, and promoting positive changes in students' eating habits, encouraging healthier and more balanced choices.

LEARNINGS

The learnings from this initiative emphasize several key aspects. First, the cultural and logistical adaptation of the methodology posed challenges, particularly with language barriers, geographical distances, and working across different cultures, especially in online settings. The Brazilian team noted difficulties with English proficiency, highlighting the need for additional team members, including another permanent administrative person to assist in applying the methodology.

Differences in the learning environments also became apparent. In Wales, schools were



better resourced, and teachers had more technical knowledge about nutrition compared to their Brazilian counterparts. Despite these differences, the Tapiokit/Leekit approach proved beneficial in both settings, offering new insights and sensations to students and teachers. A Wales team member remarked that while cultural differences were significant, the core ideas shared were universal.

There are several potential routes for scaling up the methodology. One involves delivering it to new groups, such as parents, allowing them to engage in hands-on cooking activities with their children. This approach could strengthen family bonds and encourage healthy eating at home. Another path focuses on expanding to more classes and schools. For example, staff at a Cardiff school expressed interest in applying the methodology across the entire school, which would increase its reach without requiring additional training. There is also the possibility of connecting the methodology with existing networks like the 'Food and Fun' summer activities in Wales. By developing an online training package, employees could be trained to implement Leekit during the summer holiday programs.

Further opportunities include developing workshops in other countries with a Celtic cultural foundation, which would create a deeper connection to Wales. The methodology could also be adapted for different continents and cultures. An upcoming collaboration with the Kairos Institute in São Paulo, Brazil, will explore how this approach can be applied in connecting local farmers with public food procurement for school lunches.



31. Mindful Eating for Health Professionals

Empowering Healthcare Providers Through Mindfulness: Insights from an Innovative Online Training Program | Brazil

Authors: Vera Salvo and Waverli Maia Matarazzo-Neuberger, Researchers

Mindful eating is more than a practice; it's a way to transform the way we relate to food, our bodies, and the planet. This case study explores a mindful eating online training program for health professionals, launched in 2018 in Brazil. Over six editions, the program has enrolled 60 students, and its innovative approach combines mindfulness, nutrition, and planetary health in collaboration with the Mindfulness Promotion Center (MPC), a leader in Brazil's mindfulness landscape.

BACKGROUND

The year-long program consists of five modules and is led by a multidisciplinary team of professors with expertise in mindfulness protocols and nutrition-related fields. The goal is to enhance dietary awareness through mindfulness, fostering healthier eating behaviors and encouraging the consumption of fresh, organic, and biodynamic foods. The program also seeks to reduce the intake of ultra-processed foods and instill a respect for both the body and the environment.

The initiative integrates individual health with planetary health, aiming to empower participants to make more conscious and sustainable dietary choices that benefit both their well-being and the planet.

IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSCIOUSNESS APPROACH

The project began in 2018 and remains ongoing. It is rooted in mindfulness, mindful eating, and compassion, promoting a holistic approach to health and food. The curriculum emphasizes self-knowledge and self-care, positioning food as a cornerstone of integral health. The program is unique in Brazil, with its curriculum adapted to local realities and incorporating compassion as a key element from the outset. The program's hands-on activities include practical exercises and psychoeducational dynamics, which deepen the understanding of mind-body interactions and respect for cultural values. The artisanal training design offers personalized mentoring to ensure each participant experiences profound transformation.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

With a graduation cohort of 60 students, each annual session enrolls approximately 10 individuals, predominantly comprising nutritionists (51%), followed by other health professionals (38%), and diverse fields (11%). Participants and their subsequent program beneficiaries have reported transformative experiences across several dimensions.

Participants report improved self-awareness, greater presence, reduced self-judgment, and an overall increase in self-compassion. There is also a noticeable cognitive shift, with participants adopting more balanced perspectives and moving away from dichotomous thinking. Many have also reported lifestyle changes, including a renewed interest in diet management and enhanced culinary skills.

On a broader scale, participants report heightened motivation for self-care, leading to career shifts, improved personal relationships, and more meaningful engagement with their communities. Professionally, they have seen improvements in their practice, with deeper listening skills, reduced judgment, and better alignment of their values with their work. This transformation is evident not only in participants' lives but also in the ripple effects on their families and communities, who notice positive changes in food consumption habits, including a shift towards organic foods and away from ultra-processed products.

LEARNINGS

One of the main challenges was adapting mindfulness and dietary concepts to Brazil's local realities. Ensuring participants had continuous support after the program was also critical to their long-term success.

The program's success shows that personalized mentoring plays a crucial role in fostering profound transformations, but scaling this level of individualized support will be a challenge as the program grows.

The online format has already made the program accessible nationwide, but plans are underway to expand it to international audiences with English and Spanish versions. There's also an opportunity to develop a module focused on early childhood education, potentially extending the program's impact into new areas and age groups.



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Case Study 19

[1] Moray, an agricultural experimentation center of the Incas with microclimates that allowed the cultivation of more than 250 species.

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