Nurturing Sustainable Landscapes through Strengthening Partnerships in Agroecology

CGIAR INITIATIVE ON Agroecology

Learning from agroecology fair held in the Mbire, Murehwa and Hwange districts of Zimbabwe

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Introduction

For many, attending a fair is synonymous with enjoyment: socializing with friends and family, exploring a variety of exhibits, collecting freebies, and enjoying local food. Yet, an often-overlooked aspect of fairs is their value as powerful learning platforms, especially for communities deeply rooted in agriculture.

Historically, the tradition of fairs stretches back centuries, with roots in Ancient Rome and medieval England. By the 1700s, agricultural fairs were formalized in Britain, where they evolved as spaces for farmers to showcase crops, livestock, and farming techniques. Today, agricultural fairs have become a global phenomenon tailored to local agricultural practices and communities, offering farmers opportunities to showcase their products, share knowledge, and build connections with other food system actors.

An agricultural fair is more than just an exhibition; it celebrates agricultural heritage and is an interactive platform for education and community engagement. These fairs include livestock, machinery, and farm produce displays alongside exhibitions on sustainable agricultural practices and innovations. Attendees gain hands-on exposure to new agricultural tools, techniques, and technologies while engaging in conversations and demonstrations covering various topics from crop management to sustainable farming practices and the adoption of mechanization.

In addition, agricultural fairs remain essential spaces for knowledge exchange, innovation, and promoting agriculture's role in economic and social development. They bring together farmers, agribusiness professionals, and organizations, fostering partnerships and encouraging collaboration within the agricultural sector. The Agroecology fairs held in Murehwa, Mbire and Hwange districts builds on this legacy, providing a vital platform for learning, sharing sustainable farming practices, and emphasizing the role of agroecology in creating resilient and sustainable landscapes through stronger partnerships. This report captures the essence and impact of the Agroecology Fair, demonstrating its role as a catalyst for knowledge-sharing and sustainable agricultural development, supporting ecologically responsible agriculture and strengthening community connections.

Background

Implemented through CIMMYT in partnership with ICRISAT, and the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development in Zimbabwe, the CGIAR-led initiative "Transformational Agroecology across Food, Land, and Water Systems." In short Agroecology Initiative has since 2022, hosted annual seed fairs, which evolved in 2023 into seed and livestock fairs. The seed fairs were a vehicle to bring knowledge to the smallholder farmers to empower them and to bring closer to home good resilient seed varieties through the engagement of seed companies at the fairs, a partnership that has since been cherished with farmers. Farmers also brought their landrace seeds to the seed fairs to showcase, exchange and even sell to each other and other stakeholders in attendance. Before the showcased seeds are sold and exchanged they were judged by the Department of Agriculture Rural and Development Advisory Services (ARDAS) formerly AGRITEX in the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development and overall winners in different categories were presented with prices.

In addition, the seed fairs evolved into a seed and livestock fair whereby the private sector would still come with their seeds which enabled farmers to have access to improved and locally adapted seeds. A livestock component was introduced and farmers showcased livestock such as cattle, goats, sheep and chickens. This showed the synergy between crops and livestock in building sustainable agrifood systems for smallholder farmers.

Furthermore, a component of small-scale mechanization at the fairs allowed farmers to witness different agricultural mechanization machinery suitable to them. The introduction of mechanization would not have been possible without partners like Kurima Machinery and ZimPlow who were willing to work with the initiative. Mechanisation was introduced to the farmers in the Agroecological Living Landscapes (ALLs) and farming communities via a service provider model to enable affordability of services and adoption and transitioning to agroecology. Mechanisation partners and experts exhibited machinery and gave

recommendations at the fairs. They advocated for the use of machinery among the farmers and this educated farmers on how they could reduce the labour aspect related to adopting agroecological practices. Mechanisation encouraged farmers to transition from conventional methods of farming to agroecological practices one of the practices being conservation agriculture.

In addition, the 2024 event has further expanded into an Agroecology Fair, reflecting the initiative's commitment to continuously enhancing the impact of these gatherings. With the coming in of The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) on board as part of the initiative in Zimbabwe, the event has also expanded into other regions in Zimbabwe starting this year with Hwange District in Matabeleland Province. The fairs ran under the theme, "Nurturing Sustainable Landscapes through Strengthening Partnerships in Agroecology." highlighting the importance of partnerships if the objective to nurture sustainable landscapes is to be achieved.

The main objectives of the Agroecology Fair were to:

1. Raise awareness in communities about adaptable and improved seed varieties.
2. Create linkages between input markets and farmers.
3. Facilitate the exchange of local seed varieties, livestock breeds, and knowledge across districts.
4. Provide feedback to Food System Actors (FSAs) on the technologies tested.
5. Provide a platform for development partners, academia, research, private sector, and government departments to showcase and share their work on agroecology with communities
6. Exchange knowledge and highlight the diversity of Zimbabwe's agricultural sector with visiting farmers, partners, and researchers from Kenya.

Proceedings

Murehwa

In Murehwa, the Agroecology Fair was held in Ward 4 at Muchinjike Secondary School and it was attended by over 400 people. Mr Leonard Munamati, the Acting Chief Director in the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, served as the guest of honour. Chief Mangwende and Mrs. Mufori, Acting District Agricultural Extension Officer (DAEO) for Murehwa District, were also present. The fair's Master of Ceremonies, Mr Chimbwanda, introduced the attending partners and welcomed guests, with Mrs Mufori recognizing other government stakeholders. Other notable attendees included Headman Nheweyembwa, Councillors Takaendesa and Mabambe, Mr Tangirai from the District Development Coordinator's (DDC) office, and Pastor Stewart Mawoko from the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, who offered both the opening and closing prayers.

Image 1. *(left) shows Mrs Mufori Acting District Agricultural Extension Officer for Murehwa District addressing attendees at the Agroecology Fair.* ***Image 2.*** *(right) shows invited stakeholders enjoying the fair, including Mr Munamati, the guest of honour.*

Images courtesy of the AE-Initiative in Zimbabwe

The 2024 fair in Murehwa hosted diverse partners, including departments from the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), which are: CIMMYT Breeding and Nutrition, CIMMYT Conservation Agriculture (CA), and CIMMYT Mechanisation working together with USAID and Feed the Future, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), ICRISAT, Hamara Chicks, PHI Commodities, the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), BioHUB Trust (BHT), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Kurima Machinery and Technology, and Zimplow Limited. Also participating were representatives from the Resilience Building through Agroecological Intensification in Zimbabwe (RAIZ Project), Harvest Plus, Easi Seeds, and SeedCo. and farmers from the two Mbire ALLs brought their seed savings to the fair, joining those from Murehwa's Ward 4 and 27 ALLs.

The seed and livestock diversity on display was impressive considering the poor harvest due to the El Nino induced drought. The crops on display local maize landraces, millet, sorghum, lablab, cowpea, pigeon pea, groundnuts, bambara nuts, and various indigenous fruit tree seeds and fruits landrace varieties. On livestock farmers displayed chickens and locally adapted goats and cattle and improved breeds. Farmers were allocated two hours to tour the stands, engaging directly with partners and each other, fostering a rich environment for learning and knowledge exchange. Concurrently, the seeds and livestock showcased were evaluated by judges.

Images 1 to 4. *Showcasing the different horticultural vegetable produce, landrace seeds and livestock exhibited by farmers at the Murehwa Agroecology Fair.*

The Agroecology Initiative team showcased innovative agroecological technologies codesigned with farmers and tested within the ALLs, and shared yield data and farmer feedback of technologies. The section highlighted the impact of these innovations on smallholder farmers within Murehwa district. Among the innovations, the Azolla pond display generated considerable interest. Farmers were intrigued by the potential of Azolla as a protein-rich supplement for chickens, addressing a key nutritional need, especially for those raising poultry without access to poultry protein supplements.


Image 1. *(left) Shows Taurai Zingwena a research associate with CIMMYT and the AE Initiative explaining to farmers yield data and farmer feedback on AE technologies.* ***Image 2.*** *(right) Shows the AE-I walk-through exhibition with technology description, yield data results and farmer feedback of technologies.*

Livestock farmers engaged actively with ILRI's stand, which focused on forage crops suited for livestock feed. ILRI has been a partner since the seed and livestock fairs, and their knowledge of livestock feed formulation is of great importance. Given the drought impacts of an El Niño year on landscapes, the relevance of fodder crops like lablab, mucuna, and brachiaria grass and livestock feed formulation was emphasized, highlighting the importance of crop-livestock integration in agroecological systems.

Farmers and stakeholders witnessed the power in strengthened partnerships to nurture sustainable landscapes through the number of mechanization partners. Demonstrations of various machinery were led by CIMMYT's mechanization department, in partnership with USAID and Feed the Future, AE-I service providers (SPs), ZimPlow and Kurima Machinery. Kurima machinery introduced a foot pump irrigation system for those doing kitchen gardens and in horticulture. The initiative's SPs and partners also demonstrated tools like the hay baler for crop residue, a chopper-grinder for livestock feed, a basin digger/earth auger to streamline conservation agriculture planting and the multi-crop thresher, capable of threshing both maize and traditional grains, which impressed farmers by offering significant time savings. For Murehwa the irrigation system was a good innovation because in the region most farmers are into horticultural farming. CIMMYT mechanisation introduced a peanut roasting machine to value-add peanuts into peanut butter.

ICRISAT, a major partner of the initiative, attending the Agroecology Fair under the initiative for the first time, advocated for small grains like millet and sorghum, which are well-suited to dry climates and mature quickly, addressing food security concerns amid climate variability challenges.


Image 1. *(left) Shows a researcher from ICRISAT explaining to farmers and stakeholders the different traditional grains on display and how to value add at their stand.* ***Image 2*** *(right) Shows researchers from ILRI explaining to farmers the importance of livestock feed formulation.*

Through CIMMYT Breeding and Harvest Plus, farmers learned about the nutritional benefits of orange maize, a vitamin A-fortified variety. Demonstrations included value-added products like cakes, buns, fritters, muffins, bread, samosas, and maheu (a type of liquid porridge) made from orange maize, showing the maize's versatility when mixed with white flour. The support from breeding and nutrition encouraging adoption of biofortified maize among smallholder farmers was a great partnership at the fair for their nutritional benefits.

Image 1. *(left) Shows HarvestPlus and CIMMYT breeding and nutrition researchers showing farmers some of the food products that can be made using orange maize.* ***Image 2.*** *(right) Shows Dr Nyagumbo from CIMMYT demonstrating the advantages of conservation agriculture.*

Furthermore, the presence of CIMMYT researchers in conservation agriculture (CA) at the Agroecology Fair showcased the importance of nurturing partnerships in agroecology. By conducting a demonstration focused on soil aggregation, which is a critical aspect of improving soil health and fertility, which is a critical aspect in agroecology, the advantages of CA on soil were shown. By demonstrating how CA practices, such as minimal tillage and crop rotation, enhance soil structure, CIMMYT emphasized the role of organic matter in fostering soil aggregation. Well-aggregated soils improve water retention, reduce erosion, and promote better root development, all of which are vital for sustainable farming.

Representatives from ADRA, one of the key collaborators and convener of the AE working group in Zimbabwe and one of the partners who worked with the AE-I in organising the first SADC Regional Agroecology Conference attended the fair and presented their work in agroecology and how they have been making significant strides in promoting agroecology in Zimbabwe, particularly as a response to climate change challenges faced by smallholder farmers. They talked about their work in which they have supported farmers in adopting sustainable practices that combine local knowledge with scientific approaches to improve agricultural resilience. These methods include soil conservation, water harvesting, agroforestry, and integrated pest management, all aimed at enhancing soil fertility and reducing the dependence on chemical inputs. This is in line with what the initiative in Zimbabwe is also doing while championing on-farm research to scale for bigger landscapes.

Image. *Mr Mazhawidza from ADRA addressing attendees at the Agroecology fair, giving a summary of the work that they have done in agroecology in different districts in Zimbabwe.*

SeedCo and EasiSeeds both companies made a notable contribution by showcasing their wide range of seed varieties suited for the agroecological conditions of Murehwa district. As key players in the seed and agricultural sector, SeedCo and EasiSeeds highlighted their seed varieties, crucial for smallholder farmers in Murehwa. The company's presence at the fair provided farmers with a valuable opportunity to access quality seeds. Through direct engagement with farmers, the companies were able to promote their commitment to enhancing food security and climate resilience through innovative seed solutions. Additionally, their participation aligned with the fair's theme of strengthening partnerships as they have always supported and attended the fairs and their presence aligned with the fair's goal of fostering knowledge exchange among agricultural stakeholders, making it a vital resource for both seasoned and emerging farmers.

At the fair, farmers actively engaged in buying and selling seeds, they took full advantage of the opportunity the nurtured partnerships brought to access quality varieties from the participating seed companies. They were able to purchase seeds directly from these companies, ensuring they had access to improved and resilient varieties for the upcoming planting season. In addition to buying seeds from the exhibitors, farmers also participated in seed exchanges with one another. This exchange not only helped farmers access a broader variety of seeds but also promoted the preservation of indigenous crop varieties, which are well-suited to the local climate. Through these activities, the fair became an important platform for strengthening the local seed network and enhancing food security in the district.

Toward the end of the fair, farmers were awarded different prices that ranged from seed vouchers, shovels, rippers, and hoes to motivate them.

Image 1. *(left) Shows agriculture extension officers judging farmer seed exhibits.* ***Image 2.*** *(right) Shows a female farmer being presented with her prize by the guest of honour after her seed exhibit won.*

In closing the gathering Mr Munamati who was the guest of honour highlighted that the different partners and food system actors have continuously gathered at these fairs to share their work and showcase the far-reaching impact of agroecology. He also urged the actors present that it is only through the collaborative efforts of partners and farmers, that a sustainable future is built.

Mbire

In Mbire, the Agroecology Fair took place in Ward 2 at Angwa Truckstop under the theme "Nurturing Sustainable Landscapes through Strengthening Partnerships in Agroecology." Mr Nyarugwe from the District Development Coordinator's (DDC) office served as the guest of honour, with Chief Chisunga also in attendance. The fair attracted over 490 farmers, partners, and stakeholders. It was a particularly unique event, marking the first Agroecology Fair in Mbire and featuring visiting farmers from Kenya as part of the Agroecology Initiative's International Network of Agroecology Living Landscapes (INALL) exchange visit program. These visitors had the opportunity to experience the fair and learn from Mbire farmers about their local crops, trees, fruits, livestock breeds, seed-saving practices, and strategies for managing human-wildlife conflicts.

Images. *Showcasing some of the goats (left) and cattle breeds (right)showcased at the Agroecology Fair in Mbire.*

Image 1. *(left) Shows farmers and stakeholders from Kenya who had come for an INALL exchange visit touring the ICRISAT stand and getting an explanation on traditional grains.* ***Image 2.*** *(right) Shows the farmers and stakeholders from Kenya sharing laughter at the CIMMYT seed breeding and HarvestPlus stands at the Agroecology Fair in Mbire whilst ready to snack some orange maize food products.*

Given the importance of livestock in Mbire District, the presence of the veterinary department, a first for the fair, was a significant achievement and the beginning of a great collaboration. Social services were also represented, spotlighting gender-based violence prevention and contributing to Work Package 5 (WP5) on gender and youth affairs. Other notable first-time participants included Agrowth, though under PHI Commodities which has attended some of the fairs, and Henn Chicks, reflecting the growing recognition and strengthening of agroecology partnerships. Additional partners included Agriculture Rural and Development Advisory Services (ARDAS), CIMMYT Mechanisation and Breeding Departments, BioHub Trust, RAIZ Project, ICRISAT, IWMI, PHI Commodities, EasiSeeds, K2, SeedCo, ZimParks, the Forestry Commission, and the Grain Marketing Board.

Images showing new exhibitors at the fair. ***Image 1.*** *(top left) Shows Mr Mugabe from PHI Commodities and Agrowth interacting with farmers who want to know more about contract farming.* ***Image 2.*** *(top right) Showcases social services personnel educating farmers on gender issues.* ***Image 3.*** *(bottom left) Shows the veterinary department setting up its stand.* ***Image 4.*** *(bottom right) Shows HennChicks distributing brochures to farmers detailing their products and services.*

Images showing agribusinesses and seed companies at the fair in Mbire ***Image 1.*** *(top left) Shows Agrowth stand with farmers who want to know more about contract farming.* ***Image 2.*** *(top right) Showcases EasiSeeds marketers at their stand ready to welcome farmers.* ***Image 3****. (bottom left) shows SeedCo marketing personnel interacting with farmers buying seed.* ***Image 4.*** *(bottom right) Shows a K2 seed display stand.*

The event commenced with participant registration by ARDAS staff and AE-I team members. Mr Museruka opened with a prayer, and after honouring the chief, Councillor Chaukura gave the welcoming remarks. Taurai, an agricultural economist and research associate, presented an overview of the AE-I project to the attendees.

A core objective of the fair-bringing seed companies closer to farmers was highlighted as companies like K2, EasiSeeds, and SeedCo presented seed varieties tailored to Mbire's agroecological region their presence further highlighting the nurtured partnerships the initiative has with these seed companies. Farmers from the ALL and surrounding wards eagerly attended the fair, taking advantage of this opportunity to access high-quality seeds.

The European African Seed Initiative (EasiSeeds) captivated farmers with its range of seeds, including resilient maize varieties, open-pollinated and hybrid vegetable seeds, and pasture seeds. Their smaller packaging options were particularly attractive, allowing farmers to purchase quality seeds within their budget.

Following the seed presentations, farmers toured the various stands, including an AE-I walkthrough display featuring the initiative's innovations, technologies, and district-specific results from trial plots. The interactive display provided insights into farmer feedback and technology evaluations. The display also had a glimpse into the partners that the initiative is working with like IWMI, ICRISAT, BioHUB Trust, PHI, Hamara Chicks and the Ministry of agriculture.

Among the partner stands, Henn Chicks showcased their Hennbro chicken, a dual-purpose breed suitable for both free-range and commercial production, reaching 2.5 kg within nine weeks. This and their high-yielding layer chicks offered appealing options for smallholders, enhancing household food security and income. The agribusiness presented itself as a possible potential partner for the initiatives chicken business model with Hamara Chicks in Murehwa if it is to be replicated in Mbire.

PHI Commodities presented its Agrowth farming scheme, a corporate model financing wheat, maize, soybeans, and sorghum production. Despite challenges posed by the recent drought, that affected the business model in the previous cropping season

the scheme still showed potential as a sustainable business model, and Mr. Mugabe from PHI outlined their work with farmers in Mbire and their continual partnership with the initiative.

The partnership with ICRISAT and the amount of knowledge and research they have in traditional grains and working in arid and semi-arid landscapes in Zimbabwe is of great importance in the initiative. Their presence was vital for promoting drought-tolerant traditional grains like millet and sorghum, which are well-suited to Mbire's dry climate. These grains improve food security and are ideal for sustainable farming systems, supporting resilience to climate change.

The CIMMYT Breeding Department together with HarvestPlus engaged farmers with food items made from orange maize, illustrating its nutritional benefits. CIMMYT Mechanisation also demonstrated machines such as a peanut roaster, peanut butter maker, and an earth auger, showcasing tools that ease labor for smallholder farmers. Kurima Machinery, a long-time partner, presented a multi-crop thresher and irrigation pumps, which are valuable for garden irrigation.

Image 1. *(top left) Shows the HarvestPlus biofortification banner setup at the fair.* ***Image 2.*** *(top right) Shows the CIMMYT Mechanisation team explaining to farmers the machines on display.* ***Image 3.*** *(bottom left) Showcases a farmer operating the irrigation foot pump from Kurima Machinery while other farmers are watching.* ***Image 4****. (bottom right) shows IWMI researchers having discussions on water management with farmers and stakeholders at their stand.*

The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) played a central role as a key partner in the Agroecology Initiative, emphasizing the need for sustainable water management in arid and semi-arid regions. With Mbire's unique climate challenges, IWMI's presence highlighted the importance of water-smart practices for resilience in agriculture. Through interactive discussions with farmers, IWMI provided valuable insights into managing limited water resources sustainably, enhancing crop productivity, and reducing vulnerability to climate variability. Their expertise offered practical, actionable solutions for the farming community in Mbire, aligning closely with the fair's theme of "Nurturing Sustainable Landscapes through Strengthening Partnerships in Agroecology." By supporting the Agroecology Initiative as a partner, IWMI reinforced the critical link between water resource management and sustainable agricultural landscapes.

Farmers engaged in the buying and selling of seeds. They bought and exchanged seed with fellow farmers and they also bought from trusted seed companies. The initiative introduced a voucher system to reward farmers who buy seed to

encourage them to purchase seeds from the various companies, making quality seeds more accessible. Furthermore, just as in Murehwa, an essential aspect of the fair was recognizing the exhibiting farmers, by giving them prices, which fosters and encourages continuous improvement of the farmers.

After the fair, the acting DDC Mr Nyarugwe thanked the community, the policymakers, the partners who came to the fair and CIMMYT for facilitating the exchange visit between Kenya and Zimbabwe. He thanked the initiative for bringing farmers and partners of the AE-I in Kenya to their district and he felt honoured with such a gesture.

Hwange

The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) organized and hosted the Hwange Agroecology fair held on the 31st of October 2024 at Jambesi business center in Ward 7 of Hwange District. A total of 250 participants who included farmers, partners, and stakeholders attended the fair. The key organisations that participated at the event include CIMMYT, the Forestry Commission, Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA), ARDAS, Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) and Jambezi Small Grains Producers Association (JASPRO). The event showcased various traditional or local seed varieties, small livestock, livestock nutrition products, timber and non- timber forest products and a diverse range of local food dishes and beverages. Mr. Simon Muleya, the Hwange District Development Coordinator, graced the event as the guest of honour.

The event was officially opened by the master of ceremony Mr. Mandla Mpofu. The proceedings began with the national anthem, led by Nejambezi Secondary School learners, followed by a prayer from Mr. Nyoni, a local pastor. This was followed by welcome remarks from the local village head, Mr. Aaron Sibanda. Mr. Alec Magaisa from ICRISAT provided an overview of the CGIAR Agroecology Initiative and the fair's objectives. ICRISAT highlighted that under the agroecology initiative, the organization is building upon an ongoing study in Hwange, which is being implemented supported by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), to evaluate the effectiveness of various agroecological practices, including cattle and goat mobile kraaling and the use of compost for soil fertility improvement. The mobile kraaling technology is vital in nutrient recycling, soil P^H amelioration and is more efficient and less labour intensive compared to the traditional method of manure application. Conventionally, manure application involves the digging of manure from foxed kraals, transportation to crop fields, heaping the manure then apply it by broadcasting it and then incorporate it into the soil by either digging or ploughing.

Participants then had the opportunity to tour exhibition stands and witness demonstrations on preparing local dishes and various agroecological practices. These demonstrations included mobile kraal technology showcased by ICRISAT, tree planting techniques demonstrated by the Forestry Commission, and basin digger technology presented by CIMMYT. One local farmer, Mr. Munsaka, was so impressed by the basin digger that he requested to purchase it from CIMMYT, and the organization obliged.

Image 1. *(left) Shows ICRISAT staff explaining to stakeholders and farmers about their exhibits at the ICRISAT exhibition stand taking.* ***Image 2.*** *(right) Shows the CIMMYT staff explaining about their biofortified maize varieties and food products.*

Image 1. *(top left) Shows diverse seed, food, livestock feed, timber and non-timber forest products showcased by farmers at the Hwange agroecology fair.* ***Image 2.*** *(top right) Shows various traditional dishes prepared by farmers.* ***Image 3.*** *(bottom left) Shows timber crafts produced by farmers.* ***Image 4.*** *(bottom right) Shows rabbits, as a small livestock enterprise that local farmers are venturing into.*

Images 1 & 2. *(top right & left) Shows ICRISAT staff demonstrating the goat mobile kraaling technology.* ***Image 3.*** *(bottom left) shows the CIMMYT team demonstrating the basin digger.* ***Image 4*** *(bottom right) Forestry commission staff demonstrating tree planting procedures.*

Following the tours and demonstrations, several speakers shared insights. Taurayi Zingwena from CIMMYT highlighted the broader CGIAR program and its activities and successes in Zimbabwe. Dr. Thokozile Ndhlela emphasized CIMMYT's role in developing adaptable maize varieties and the benefits of biofortified maize varieties. Mr. Daniel Nkomboni from CNFA highlighted key agroecological practices being promoted in Hwange under the AMALIMA Loko project, including the restoration of soil, water, and plant resources within the watershed and encouraged farmers to participate in Amalima Loko programmes. Zenzele Ndlovu from ARDAS emphasized the importance of considering seasonal forecasts when planning cropping programs for the coming season and the benefits of cultivating adaptable crops such as sorghum and pearl millet. The Veterinary Department, represented by Dr Zanele Matatu emphasised that farmers should supplement their livestock with survival feed in order to reduce cattle poverty deaths as a result of the drought. In his keynote speech, the guest of honour, Mr. Simon Muleya, underscored the agroecology fair's crucial role in celebrating the achievements and potential of agroecology. He highlighted

the platform's importance in facilitating knowledge sharing, experience exchange, and partnership building to accelerate the adoption of agroecological practices and drive transformative change.

Image 1. *Shows the guest of honour, Mr. Simon Muleya presenting his keynote speech with Mr. James Dhlomo (right), the Hwange ARDAS acting DAEO and Zenzele Ndlovu (left), the Provincial ARDAS crops officer following proceedings.*

Image 1. *(left) Shows the guest of honour presenting prizes to farmers who had outstanding exhibits.* ***Image 2.*** *(right) Shows ICRISAT staff and farmers presenting gifts to the guest of honour.*

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Agroecology Fair in Murehwa, Mbire and Hwange provided a powerful reminder of the vital role agricultural fairs play in fostering knowledge exchange, innovation, and community engagement. By creating a space for farmers, agribusiness professionals, and other stakeholders to come together, the fair exemplified the theme, "Nurturing Sustainable Landscapes through Strengthening Partnerships in Agroecology." Through the exhibition of sustainable farming practices, crop diversification, livestock and small-scale mechanization, the fair emphasized how agroecology can contribute to the development of resilient, ecologically responsible landscapes. The events highlighted the importance of partnerships, bringing together diverse actors from local seed companies, research institutions, development partners, agribusinesses, government stakeholders and farmers themselves to share knowledge, resources, and strategies for more sustainable and inclusive agricultural practices. By strengthening these connections, the fair showcased how collaboration can drive positive change in the agricultural sector and contribute to the creation of more sustainable, thriving landscapes for future generations.

Appendix

A key message from Dr Vimbayi G. P. Chimonyo CGIAR Agroecology Initiative Zimbabwe lead, on the Agroecology Fair in Murehwa.

A Catalyst for Knowledge Exchange

In the dynamic world of agriculture, fairs serve as vital platforms for smallholder farmers, facilitating essential vertical knowledge exchange and fostering multi-stakeholder participation. These events are not just gatherings; they are vibrant ecosystems where farmers, seed companies, researchers, and agricultural organizations converge to share insights, innovations, and best practices.

This year International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) International Water Management Institute (IWMI), and ICRISAT came together with partners like (ARDAS) Agritex, PHI, The Hamara Group, International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) BioHubTrust as part of the CGIAR #AgroecologyInitiative to host the first-ever Agroecology Fair in Murehwa district, in Zimbabwe. Under the banner "Nurturing sustainable landscapes through Strengthening partnerships" the event had more than 1500 farmers participating and several seed and machinery companies and representatives for the research and donor community attending.

One of the most impactful aspects of these fairs is the opportunity for farmers to engage in interactive sessions. Quizzes, games, and "look and learn" activities create an engaging environment that stimulates curiosity and deepens understanding of agroecological practices. This interactive approach not only enhances learning but also encourages farmers to adopt sustainable practices that improve resilience against climate change.

Moreover, fairs bring seed companies closer to farmers, bridging the gap between supply and demand. Also, through farmer seed exchanges, local landraces can be preserved and promoted, ensuring that farmers have access to seeds that are well-adapted to their unique environments. This exchange not only strengthens local biodiversity but also reinforces community ties among farmers promoting strong social networks.

The Agroecology Living Landscape (ALLs) exchange visits between Mbire and Murehwa exemplify how these interactions can lead to meaningful interactions and cross-learnings. Supported by the CGIAR's #AgroecologyInitiative, with CIMMYT, IWMI, and ICRISAT as implementing partners in Zimbabwe, these exchanges foster a holistic approach to agroecology, emphasizing the importance of local knowledge and practices in agricultural transitions.

Fairs are more than just events; they are crucial catalysts for knowledge exchange among smallholder farmers. By promoting collaboration, facilitating access to resources, and enhancing learning through interactive activities, these gatherings empower farmers to thrive in an ever-evolving agricultural landscape. Let's continue to support these initiatives for a sustainable future in agriculture!

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