



Eastern and Southern Africa
Small Scale Farmers' Forum
ESAFF - UGANDA



AGROECOLOGY SCHOOL
FOR JOURNALISTS AND
COMMUNICATORS

THE 1ST AGROECOLOGY CONFERENCE FOR JOURNALISTS AND COMMUNICATORS 2024

CONFERENCE REPORT



KAMPALA - UGANDA | 25TH JANUARY 2024

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ABOUT ESAFF UGANDA

Eastern and Southern Africa Small-scale Farmers' Forum (ESAFF) was formed during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in 2002 in South Africa. This was in an effort to create a Forum to bring together small-scale farmers into a social movement to influence favorable agriculture policies and practices at global, continental, regional, national and local levels.

ESAFF Uganda became operational in 2008 and has since become the largest small-scale farmer-led advocacy movement in Uganda. ESAFF Uganda works to enhance the SSFs ability to make informed decisions and participate meaningfully in development processes. ESAFF Uganda currently has a membership of a membership of 12588 small-scale farmer community organizations in 54 districts representing over 765,560 individual small-scale farmers of which 67 percent are women.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE OF THE CONFERENCE

ESAFF Uganda recognizes journalists and communicators as pivotal stakeholders in advancing the agroecology agenda. By enhancing their capacity and knowledge in agroecology, they can play a transformative role in raising awareness and fostering a deeper appreciation of agroecology among policymakers, consumers, and small-scale farmers. This effort positions agroecology as a cornerstone for building sustainable food systems and achieving food sovereignty, thereby shaping the national conversation on food systems toward Agroecological principles.

ESAFF Uganda believes that empowering journalists and communicators to champion agroecology in Uganda would inspire a societal shift toward the consumption of healthier, sustainably produced foods. This would not only expose the detrimental effects of industrial and conventional agriculture on the environment and public health but also contribute to improved health outcomes and economic opportunities for small-scale farmers, who are key producers of nutritious food.

In line with this vision, ESAFF Uganda, through its Agroecology School for Journalists and Communicators, hosted the 1st Agroecology Conference for Journalists and Communicators on January 25, 2024, in Kampala, Uganda. The conference brought together journalists and communicators to explore their critical role in amplifying the agroecology agenda and safeguarding our food systems.

ABOUT THE AGROECOLOGY SCHOOL FOR JOURNALISTS AND COMMUNICATORS

ESAFF Uganda developed the online Agroecology School for journalists and communicators with the principal objective of building a network of journalists and communicators around Uganda and Africa working with small-scale farmers to contribute to the national and continental transition to Agroecology through disseminating the right information.

The Agroecology School for Journalists and communicators comprises of four products i.e. The Online Agroecology Course for journalists and communicators, the Agroecology Post, the Agroecology Media Grant and the Regional Agroecology Media Workshops.

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

The inaugural Agroecology Conference for Journalists and Communicators employed a dynamic and participatory approach, incorporating keynote presentations, panel discussions, and experience-sharing sessions. These methods facilitated in-depth dialogue, knowledge exchange, and practical insights into advancing the agroecology agenda.

The conference brought together a diverse group of 50 participants, including journalists and communicators from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda, representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries, civil society partners, and members of the academic community. This blend of stakeholders enriched the discussions, fostering a collaborative environment for addressing key issues in agroecology and shaping strategies for impactful communication.



PROCEEDING OF THE CONFERENCE



1. KEYNOTE PRESENTATION:

The Media's Role in Protecting Citizens' Food Sovereignty in the EAC and Africa by Dr. Ivan Lukanda.

The Agroecology Conference for Journalists and Communicators featured an insightful keynote presentation by Dr. Ivan Lukanda from Makerere University, who underscored the pivotal role of the media in safeguarding citizens' food sovereignty within the East African Community (EAC) and across Africa.

Dr. Lukanda emphasized that approximately 70% of the global population relies on local ecological systems for food production—systems increasingly threatened by industrial agriculture dominated by corporate interests, often supported by government policies. He highlighted a significant gap in the flow of information to journalists and communicators, which impedes their ability to convey the urgency of these challenges effectively. Moreover, he pointed out that the urban-centric focus of many journalists limits their interaction with agroecology communities, resulting in a lack of understanding and coverage of agroecological principles and practices.

To bridge this gap, Dr. Lukanda proposed a multi-faceted approach for journalists to enhance their reporting on agroecology. He urged them to:

1. Draw on indigenous knowledge to provide contextually relevant narratives.
2. Utilize investigative skills and scientific evidence to present compelling, fact-based stories.
3. Frame agroecology as a solution to climate change by highlighting its role in promoting resilience and sustainability.

By adopting these strategies, journalists can play a transformative role in raising public awareness, influencing policy, and advocating for a food system that prioritizes sustainability and food sovereignty for all.

2. SMALL-SCALE FARMERS' PANEL DISCUSSION: The Role of Media in Transitioning to Agroecology

During a vibrant panel discussion, small-scale farmers shared their perspectives on the media's role in driving the transition to agroecology. They explored how the media has embraced agroecology as both a science and practice, highlighted women's critical roles as custodians of agroecology, and addressed key gaps in media coverage of food sovereignty issues.

Irene Nakijoba expressed optimism about the growing interest of journalists and communicators in agroecology. She commended the media for responding positively to calls for capacity building, citing the successful enrollment of journalists in short courses on agroecology. She emphasized that these trained professionals are poised to significantly enhance media coverage, raising public awareness and understanding of agroecology.

Margaret Masudio highlighted the increasing momentum of women's participation in agroecology, driven by initiatives like the women's forum. She noted a shift in how the media portrays women's substantial contributions to agriculture and agroecology, which were historically underrepresented. Stories documenting women's efforts are now being published more widely, demonstrating growing recognition of their roles. Ms. Masudio also applauded the adoption of technology by women in agroecology, enabling them to share their experiences and practices more effectively.

Mr. Hakim Baliraine provided a broader context, emphasizing that food sovereignty—introduced by La Via Campesina (LVC) in 1996—centers on the right of people to access healthy, culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable practices. He urged the media to critically examine and expose instances where industrial agriculture violates these rights.

Mr. Baliraine outlined key areas where the media can amplify its impact:

- 1. Advocating for justice for policymakers to create equitable and supportive agroecological policies.**
- 2. Identifying offenders who undermine food sovereignty through harmful practices.**
- 3. Promoting agroecology as a pathway to self-sufficiency, empowering communities to produce their food sustainably.**
- 4. Highlighting agroecology's role in ecosystem and biodiversity conservation, ensuring resilience against environmental and climatic challenges.**

The panelists collectively underscored the media's transformative potential in shaping public discourse and policies, driving a shift towards agroecology and sustainable food systems.

3. SUMMARY OF THE PLENARY SESSION

The plenary session featured an engaging exchange between panelists and participants, addressing key questions and concerns related to agroecology. Below are the main highlights:

1. Commercializing Agroecology and Persuading Conventional Farmers:

Participants inquired about the scalability of agroecology and strategies to encourage conventional farmers to adopt these practices. The ESAFF Uganda Chairperson debunked myths and misinformation hindering agroecology adoption, citing successful large-scale agroecological practices in northern Uganda, including sorghum, millet, and coffee cultivation without chemical inputs. Ms. Irene Nakijoba, a small-scale farmer, added that organic pesticides and fertilizers, created by farmers themselves, can be effectively applied on a large scale while preserving biodiversity and ecosystems. Both speakers emphasized the crucial role of trained journalists and communicators in documenting and publicizing these success stories to inspire broader adoption.

2. Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Farming Communities:

Responding to a question on ESAFF's efforts to tackle GBV, Ms. Margaret Masudio highlighted the initiatives of the women's forum, which has conducted numerous awareness campaigns. She also showcased the use of the Gender Action Learning System (GALS)—an innovative community tool designed to address GBV and empower families at the grassroots level.

3. Caution Against Imposters in Agroecology:

Panelists cautioned journalists and communicators to remain vigilant against individuals falsely claiming to practice agroecology while engaging in conventional farming methods. They urged the media to thoroughly verify claims and seek clarity about products to ensure the integrity of agroecological practices is maintained.

Key Takeaways from the session

1. Agroecology is viable on a commercial scale and offers sustainable alternatives to conventional farming.
2. Media coverage of successful agroecological practices is critical in changing mindsets and inspiring adoption.
3. ESAFF Uganda is actively combating GBV in farming communities through awareness campaigns and tools like GALS.
4. Ensuring authenticity in agroecological practices is essential to maintain credibility within the movement.

The discussion concluded with a call to action for greater collaboration among farmers, media, and stakeholders to champion agroecology as a transformative solution for sustainable food systems.

4. PANEL DISCUSSION:

Challenges in Publishing Agroecology Stories

During a panel discussion, journalists shared their experiences and the challenges they face in publishing stories about agroecology, shedding light on editorial resistance, funding limitations, accessibility issues, and knowledge gaps.

Insights from the Panelists

1. Editorial Resistance and Perseverance

Zuena Khatib, from the third cohort, recounted her struggles in having agroecology-focused articles accepted by her editor, who deemed them unsuitable for their media house. Despite the rejection and the dominance of conventional agricultural stories, Zuena persisted. She took the initiative to convince her editor to enroll in a course on agroecology, a challenging but ultimately successful effort. Armed with the knowledge she gained from the course, Zuena shared her insights with her editor, gradually influencing their attitude toward agroecology-related content. Zuena highlighted the importance of creating strategies to raise awareness among editors about the significance of promoting agroecology. Her perseverance paid off when she secured a position at a media house dedicated to promoting agroecology, demonstrating how targeted advocacy can change perceptions and open new opportunities.

2. Funding and Access Limitations

Jackson Okata, from the third cohort, highlighted the lack of funding for agricultural stories in Kenya as a significant barrier. Without financial support, particularly from NGOs, journalists often struggle to document agroecology practices in rural areas. He also pointed out that journalists, predominantly based in urban centers, face challenges accessing rural communities where agroecology initiatives are thriving. This geographical gap limits comprehensive storytelling and reduces visibility for agroecology. Another challenge he mentioned is the difficulty of connecting with agroecology experts, which hampers journalists' ability to provide well-rounded and credible stories. This deficit in expert input often leads to rejections by editors due to insufficient depth and detail.

3. Agroecology as an Emerging Concept

Taibot Marko, from the first cohort, noted that agroecology remains a relatively new concept in journalism. While its adoption is gaining traction, journalists need deeper understanding to effectively communicate its principles and benefits. Taibot shared the unique challenges he faces working with refugee communities, where awareness of agroecology is minimal. This lack of knowledge makes it difficult to gather compelling stories. Furthermore, some farmers lack sufficient information about agroecological practices, resulting in incomplete narratives that fail to meet editorial standards.

Key Takeaways from the session

1. Journalists face significant hurdles in promoting agroecology, including editorial biases, funding shortages, and access challenges.
2. Increasing awareness among editors and media houses about the importance of agroecology is essential for fostering acceptance and coverage.
3. Establishing connections between journalists and agroecology experts can enhance the depth and quality of stories, making them more appealing to editors.
4. Capacity-building initiatives, such as agroecology courses, are crucial in equipping journalists with the tools to overcome these challenges and amplify agroecology's reach.

The panelists expressed optimism that as awareness grows and journalists deepen their expertise, agroecology reporting will see greater acceptance, paving the way for meaningful impact in transforming food systems.

5. EXPERIENCE SHARING FROM JOURNALISTS AND COMMUNICATORS FROM COHORT 1 AND 2 OF THE AGROECOLOGY SCHOOL FOR JOURNALISTS AND COMMUNICATORS.

The alumni of Cohorts 1 and 2 shared inspiring success stories showcasing the transformative impact of agroecology education on their careers and communities.

1. Brenda Iwala – Cohort 1 (then with the Farmers Media, Uganda)

Brenda Iwala, a graduate of Cohort 1, shared her remarkable journey of success after embracing agroecology principles. Equipped with knowledge from the course, she ventured into the production and sale of organic manure, catering to local farmers. Her efforts paid off when she pitched her agroecological practices to stakeholders in Luuka District, securing a position in a related project. Brenda's story is a testament to how agroecology can be practically applied for both personal and professional growth.

2. Muhoozi Mourice – Cohort 2 (then with the Watchdog Uganda)

Muhoozi Mourice, currently with the Uganda Tourism Board, and a cohort 2 alumnus linked his role to insights gained from the agroecology training. He explored the relationship between conventional farming and non-communicable diseases but encountered challenges in getting his work published. Undeterred, Muhoozi found support from one of the staff at Daily Monitor, who appreciated and published his article. Additionally, he launched an online platform to share agroecology-related content, overcoming the barriers posed by traditional media and expanding his reach.

3. Steward Bua – Cohort 2 (from Radio Wa)

Steward Bua, a participant from Cohort 2 working with Radio Wa demonstrated the power of collaboration. Together with other cohort members, he developed an agroecology-focused radio program highlighting indigenous seed preservation. His program featured a farmer who successfully marketed indigenous seeds and trained others, fostering community-wide impact. Steward acknowledged the challenges posed by electronic media's reliance on advertisements for chemical-intensive agriculture but emphasized the importance of promoting coexistence between agroecological and conventional approaches.

4. Scovin Iceta – Cohort 2 (from the Daily Monitor)

Scovin Iceta, from West Nile and a Cohort 2 graduate, shared a transformative journey sparked by a field visit to Masaka District during the course. Inspired by the trip, Scovin began rearing birds and integrated agroecological practices into local initiatives. He contributed to a school feeding program for a vulnerable children's school in Bukedea, promoting sustainable farming practices. Scovin's efforts highlight agroecology's potential to foster community engagement and meaningful change.

Key Takeaways

The alumni stories illustrate the diverse applications of agroecology—from entrepreneurship and media engagement to community transformation. Their experiences underline the importance of innovation, resilience, and collaboration in overcoming challenges and advancing agroecology for sustainable development.

7. AWARDING OF CERTIFICATES TO THE JOURNALISTS AND COMMUNICATORS OF THE THIRD COHORT.

In a memorable and celebratory ceremony, certificates were awarded to the accomplished journalists and communicators of the third Cohort from the online agroecology course at the school. The event marked the culmination of their learning journey, with recipients expressing heartfelt gratitude for the invaluable insights and skills gained throughout the course.

One distinguished graduate delivered a heartfelt speech, commending ESAFF Uganda for its dedication to curating comprehensive course materials and providing resources that enriched their understanding of agroecology. The graduate reflected on enrolling in the course with the initial aim of enhancing reporting skills and agroecology knowledge. However, the experience surpassed expectations, leaving participants not only equipped with technical expertise but also deeply inspired to champion agroecological practices in their professional and personal lives.

The ceremony underscored the transformative impact of the program, as participants emerged as advocates ready to amplify the agroecology agenda and contribute to sustainable food systems.



8. CLOSING REMARKS

Closing Remarks by the National Coordinator, ESAFF Uganda



Ms. Nancy Mugimba, National Coordinator of ESAFF Uganda, delivered heartfelt closing remarks, expressing deep appreciation to the journalists who applied for and successfully completed the course. She celebrated the enriching experiences shared by alumni from previous cohorts and commended the resilience and ingenuity of participants in overcoming challenges to champion agroecology. Ms. Mugimba acknowledged the journalists' critical role in amplifying agroecology's voice, emphasizing how their contributions strengthen ESAFF Uganda and elevate the nation's stature in sustainable agriculture.

She extended special thanks to the Course Coordinators for their meticulous planning and dedication, and to the ESAFF Board for their guidance in ensuring the program's success. She also recognized key partners, including the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) representatives, Sir Bob Sunday George and Commissioner Mr. Alex Sewankuba, for their steadfast support.

Looking ahead, Ms. Mugimba shared ESAFF Uganda's vision for growth, including plans to introduce a specialized training package for editors. She stressed the importance of patience and persistence in achieving these goals and expressed optimism for the future. In her closing words, she expressed profound gratitude to the organization's partners, including Humundi (SOS Faim), Agroecology Fund, and Thousand Currents, whose support enables ESAFF Uganda to continue advancing agroecology practices.

Closing Remarks by the Chairperson, ESAFF Uganda



Mr. Hakim Baliraine, Chairperson of ESAFF Uganda, passionately called on journalists to actively engage with ESAFF farmers and agroecology schools, urging them to document and share compelling stories on agroecology. He emphasized the importance of creating awareness among stakeholders such as policymakers, academia, and small-scale farmers, all of whom play a vital role in advancing sustainable agricultural practices.

Addressing Sir Bob Sunday George, Mr. Baliraine urged MAAIF to tap into the expertise of trained journalists, advocating for their special recognition in reporting agricultural issues. He highlighted the media's pivotal role in shaping narratives that promote agroecology.

Mr. Baliraine also proposed forming a dedicated association or network of agroecology-focused journalists. This initiative, he explained, would build a movement of knowledgeable advocates committed to advancing agroecology. He encouraged participants to develop strategic workplans, roadmaps, and innovative approaches aligned with the course's insights to further agroecology awareness and adoption.

Remarks from the Guest of Honor, Commissioner, MAAIF



Sir Bob Sunday George, representing Commissioner Mr. Alex Lwakuba, congratulated the graduates of Cohort 3 and conveyed warm greetings from Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF). He encouraged journalists to align their work with government initiatives, such as the Parish Development Model, highlighting the benefits awaiting those who actively engage with such programs.

He thanked ESAFF Uganda for considering training journalists, as they are the mouthpiece of the different issues that are happening across the country. He noted that the training on Agroecology would not only entice and tickle discussions on Agroecology and sustainable farming practices but will also influence policy developments in favor of Agroecology.

Sir Bob further advised journalists to avoid direct comparisons between conventional farming and agroecology. Instead, he encouraged them to focus on promoting the numerous benefits of agroecological practices in their reporting. By doing so, he suggested, they could effectively advocate for sustainable farming practices and inspire wider adoption.

9. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO JOURNALISTS AND COMMUNICATORS

1. Commit to Continuous Learning and Adaptation:

Overcoming obstacles in reporting on agroecology requires persistence and a commitment to learning. Journalists should actively seek opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills, ensuring they remain equipped to navigate challenges and achieve success in this vital field.

2. Turn Rejections into Learning Opportunities:

Rejections from editors should be viewed as stepping stones rather than setbacks. Journalists are encouraged to engage with editors to understand the reasons behind rejections, identifying areas for improvement. This feedback-driven approach can lead to more polished and impactful stories.

3. Embrace Resilience in Storytelling:

Resilience is at the heart of effective journalism. Every assignment should be seen as a chance to grow and refine storytelling techniques. By investing effort in transforming agroecology narratives into compelling, relatable, and engaging stories, journalists can captivate diverse audiences and elevate the discourse.

4. Leverage Electronic Media for Agroecology Stories:

Journalists in electronic media, particularly radio, should innovate by creating dedicated environmental or agroecology-focused programs. If mainstream platforms lack space for such stories, these initiatives can provide a vital avenue for showcasing agroecology and amplifying its reach.

10. KEY CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

Strategic Solutions for Challenges in Agroecology Reporting: Journalists collaborated to develop strategies for overcoming challenges in publishing agroecology stories. These include building strong relationships with experts, utilizing multimedia tools to enhance storytelling, and finding creative ways to navigate editorial barriers.

Commitment to Advocacy and Awareness: Journalists pledged to actively promote agroecology by highlighting key issues such as policy developments, grassroots movements, and success stories. They also committed to engaging their editors, advocating for prioritizing agroecology coverage within their media houses.

11. CONCLUSION

The Agroecology Conference for Journalists and Communicators served as a landmark event in the push for sustainable farming practices and transformative food systems. Through in-depth discussions and experience sharing, the conference highlighted the critical role of media in integrating agroecology into public discourse, protecting consumer rights, and empowering small-scale farmers.

Despite challenges in media coverage, the conference showcased inspiring success stories from alumni, reflecting the tangible impact of agroecology on communities and livelihoods. The event concluded with a renewed commitment to advancing agroecology, as expressed by the National Coordinator, who outlined ambitious plans for the future. With strengthened resolve and collaborative efforts, the conference set a clear path toward fostering a healthier, more sustainable future for all.

GALLERY







SUPPORT OUR WORK

To technically or financially support this wonderful venture of the Online Agroecology School for Journalists and Communicators, please write to the National Coordinator of ESAFF Uganda at



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