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Women agriculturalists in Africa

From the **Editorial Board**

Small steps towards transformation

Agriculture forms the backbone of the economy in most African countries, with women playing an essential role. Figures indicate that women produce around 70% of Africa's food and constitute over half of the agricultural labour force, yet receive only 5% of extension support, have less access to programme benefits than men, own only one fifth of the land and receive less than 10% of financial credit. But does that make them helpless victims? The themed articles in this DevISSues suggest not.

Donna Andrews and Daniel Chavez highlight the photo exhibition of the Southern Africa Rural Women's Assembly Seed Guardians. The exhibition demonstrates the contribution of women small-scale farmers, peasants and producers to seed sovereignty. The RWA's seed guardians have saved local seeds for generations and play an essential role in contributing to biodiversity, social reproduction and rural economies.

Maya Krishnan explores the extent to which an inclusive soy agribusiness partnership in Kenya creates space in the value chain for women farmers and entrepreneurs. Demonstrating the importance of relationships to strengthen their position, Krishnan explains how women entrepreneurs take on roles as soy aggregators, enabling women soy farmers to organize themselves, access bigger markets and strengthen their bargaining position.

Also focusing on Kenya, Eunice Wangari Muneri spotlights pastoralist Maasai women. She examines how Maasai women have re-established social networks and used these to pool financial resources to assume decision-making roles and engage in income-generating activities.

Small steps, perhaps, but meaningful. The remainder of the issue has a similar focus on small steps. In the staff-student conversation, Georgina Gomez and Bernarda Coelho explore ISS' search for practice-oriented education. They discuss how finding a middle ground could help connect with 'practice' stakeholders to realize change. Small steps, they argue, may be a suitable way to connect ISS' critical attitude with a practice orientation.

Small but simple also features in the Focus article on the International Centre for Frugal Innovation, which recently celebrated its 10th anniversary. It is a beautiful example of the value of collaboration, reiterating the importance of relationships for success.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of DevISSues.

Dr Marijn Faling – DevISSues editorial board

Colophon

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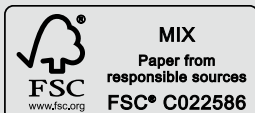
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Rector's Blog Blood and Water



I love cinema. It has been called 'world making' for a reason. It envisions different perspectives on what the world is and what it could be. All the stories that can be told in films and TV series refer to possible worlds, possible interpretations of reality. They invite us to consider whether we want to live in that version of the world. And if not, how to change it.

High school TV series are no exception. Their visions of the world are coupled with coming-of-age themes, deepening the question how we see the future world. Just like all cinema, they are deeply contextual. An interesting recent example is the South African Netflix series *Blood and Water*, a spin-off from the Spanish series *Elite*. Both are set in private schools catering to the whims and desires of the rich kids and their families. *Elite* shows more cultural and religious diversity, whereas *Blood and Water* is more diverse when it comes to ethnicity.

In both cases, the schools also provide scholarships, allowing a few students in from less affluent families. In *Elite* these are, for example, the children of immigrant shopkeepers. In *Blood and Water*, the 'poorer' kids are still at least from middle class families. In fact, poverty does not play a significant role in *Blood and Water*, even if it is a major issue in South Africa. In both series, crime is central to the plot. In *Elite* it is mostly violence among peers. In *Blood and Water* on top of that there are multiple cases of kidnapping, child trafficking and organized crime resulting in murder.

Much more interesting, however, is the role of parents and institutions in *Blood and Water*. Almost without exception, the parents are either criminal and end up in jail, absent, dead, or are so preoccupied with their own issues that they are not available for their children. Police officers are corrupt or incapable. Teachers and headmasters customarily abuse their power and privilege. And thus, young people are left to themselves to build their world.

That makes *Blood and Water* a grim portrayal of a society in which parents and 'parental structures' like institutions cannot be trusted. Psychologists would speak of insecure attachment, leading to anxiety, avoidance and aggression. For scholars of development, this reading of society asks which futures are conceivable and what can be hoped for, in a world without trust.

Ruard Ganzevoort, Rector ISS

Making sense of 'partnerships' in agriculture value chains:

What are the impacts on women farmers?

As 'partnerships' continue to be prioritized as a catch-all solution in development contexts, numerous scholars have tried to make sense of how partnership structures contribute to the desired positive social and economic outcomes that are often assumed to be inherent. Much depends on how decision-making processes are organized and who is included in the deliberation of partnerships. The details are equally important: how are people involved, when are they included and to what extent? Enhancing such deliberative capacity and building the deliberation spaces within partnerships has been identified as one way to create an enabling environment for inclusive development (Vellema et al, 2019). In this article, I reflect on the dynamics of developing deliberative capacity in partnerships through a case study of the deliberative space in a soy value chain partnership in Kenya, facilitated by a

partnerships incubator in sub-Saharan Africa.

This partnerships incubator operates in 10 countries across Sub-Saharan Africa to facilitate agribusiness value-chain partnerships. Through partnership facilitation, the aim is to achieve more equitable collaborations in agribusiness, increase nutritional outcomes for those most vulnerable and secure more sustainable value chains through cooperation with lead businesses called 'Business Champions'. In this case study, a soy value chain partnership in Western Kenya was utilized to explore deliberation within a partnership, its impacts on women farmers and the linkage to their inclusion in the soy value chain. In this example, the partnerships incubator worked closely with a local NGO in Western Kenya to engage with farmers, understand the local cultural contexts and ensure consistent dialogue with community groups.

In the case of Kenya, soy itself provided a unique opportunity for the inclusion of women farmers in the value chain. Most land in Kenya is owned by men, leaving women with very few opportunities to make decisions related to agriculture and farming. However, soy is easily grown in Western Kenya's second growing season; this means that while men typically focused on the first growing season, planting cash crops such as corn, women had more freedom to use the land in the second season and were able to exercise more choice and influence about crops. Many women farmers in Kenya chose to plant soy, specifically

because they understood its nutritional value and also because they realized the value-addition potential for soy products.

Ultimately, my research finds that space for deliberation seems to enhance women farmers' position and inclusion in the value chain. Several examples of this can be seen through the creation of 'Agribusiness Cluster Coaches' (ABC Coaches), a role created within the partnership structure that trains, teaches and provides critical services to farmers. These roles evolved from more traditional 'Training of Trainer' (ToT) functions, with a key difference lying in the compensation model. ToT roles were compensated by the organization itself; ABC Coaches were encouraged to fill important gaps in the value chain through market-based incentives. One example relates to buyers, who often want to buy soy in larger quantities than a single farmer can produce, meaning that aggregation of soy is required in order for farmers to access bigger markets and customers. An ABC Coach would be incentivized to aggregate soy because of the financial gain they would receive in providing this missing service, charging a slightly higher amount to the final buyer per kilo of soy. As this soy partnership has progressed in the last three years, the ABC Coach role has grown in importance, with Coaches increasingly providing the 'glue' needed to hold the partnership together and more deeply establish soy as an important crop in Western Kenya. In this case study, over half of the ABC Coaches were women farmers, most of whom had been growing soy at a small scale for



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'... women farmers in Kenya chose to plant soy ... because they understood its nutritional value and ... realized the value-addition potential for soy products'

their families for years before the value-chain partnership. In particular, the ABC Coach role strongly shaped the deliberative space, specifically through Coaches' ownership of key relationships and the decisions made regarding transparency of information both up and down the value chain.

To elaborate on this further, owning property and other tangible assets has often been seen as a metric for inclusion. However, what is less discussed are

intangible assets — in the case of this soy partnership, the deliberative space was deeply connected to value chain inclusion through the ownership of relationships. As the partnership progressed into its third year, women ABC Coaches were being transferred the ownership of key relationships, including with seed and fertilizer suppliers. The Coaches owned the contacts, communicated community interests and independently conducted meetings and negotiated terms without the supervision

or involvement of other partnership stakeholders. This transfer represents an important shift in the partnership structure; not only creating space for a more sustainable agribusiness value chain in the long-term, but also opening up space for women to take on additional leadership and relationship management roles that enable more direct communication of their needs with the actual decision-makers. Furthermore, this ownership was not always singular — in the case of relationships, there were always several ABC Coaches who shared the responsibility.

However, even while the ownership of these key relationships was shared, that level of access to deliberative space was only held by women serving as ABC Coaches. While the ABC Coaches benefit very directly from this transfer of ownership and increased authority, it is then incumbent on them to ensure those benefits are felt by the women farmers they represent. In some cases, decisions made by the women ABC Coaches may not have always represented all of the interests of other women farmers or enhanced the deliberative space. Interestingly, many soy farmers — though technically part of the soy partnership — were not aware of the details regarding the 'Business Champion' or final buyer, nor were they fully aware of the challenges related to the buyer off-taking their product. The ABC Coaches interviewed clarified that this was intentional — that problem-solving related to issues with the buyer was a burden held by them and the local support organization, and that full

information was intentionally not disclosed as it would impact farmers' decisions to continue planting soy in future seasons. A nuanced dynamic emerged: women ABC Coaches were selectively sharing information with other (mostly women) farmers, acting out of what they considered to be their best interests. But it was also out of their own personal best interests, given that their roles, and the financial benefit derived from them, would not exist without soy being planted. Would women farmers and community groups continue to plant soy if they realized the full extent of the challenges with the buyer?

And yet, despite the business incentive pushing Coaches to selectively share information, the narrative within the community was not one of solely competition or self-interest. Women farmers in Western Kenya were seizing the opportunities that soy provided, that they otherwise may not have had access to due to their gender. Women and community groups were starting soy value-addition businesses, tweaking and sharing recipes for soy products and building business relationships with local buyers. What emerges from this case study is an ecosystem within the soy agricultural value chain of women farmers and entrepreneurs operating

'...space for deliberation seems to enhance women farmers' position and inclusion in the value chain.'



creatively to make spaces for themselves, both independently and in groups, and also within and outside the structures of the partnership.

Ultimately, the existence of a partnership that has a focus on enhancing the value-chain inclusion of women farmers does not mean that all women farmers equally benefit, as can be seen in the examples of the ownership of relationships and information transparency from the ABC Coaches. However, these examples showcase the importance and influence of deliberative spaces and point to how partnerships can better design and consider deliberation when thinking about women's inclusion in the value chain. Having women in a leadership role that is incentivized by the market, such as the ABC Coach role, may limit their ability to represent other women farmers as it separates their interests from that of the larger group. For future partnership and programme designs, this challenge could be mitigated by having elections for the Coach role, or by including additional monitoring and evaluation metrics regarding the Coaches to better understand the long-term impacts of such roles. In this way, agribusiness partnerships can better ensure that the benefits derived from an enhanced access to deliberative space are not only felt by a small cross-section of women farmers.

References

Vellema et al. 2019 'Partnering capacities for inclusive development in food provisioning' Development Policy Review

Where are they now?



Sudeshna Mukherjee

Study programme Agriculture and Rural Development

Year of graduation 1996

Country of origin India

Current occupation Head Communications and Marketing @ Population Council Consulting

What made your time at ISS special?

ISS holds an important and special place in my life. For the first time in my life, I interacted with individuals from different backgrounds. This enriched the academic and social experience and fostered cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. Discourses and extracurricular activities helped me to respect diverse viewpoints, encouraged critical thinking and broadened my understanding of complex issues.

What is your best memory of ISS? The International Day celebration. It was an eye-opener. I enjoyed every moment of it.

What does ISS mean to you now? ISS is a springboard which has shaped my professional and personal journey. I feel part of a diverse yet connected community.



Wilbert Flinterman

Study programme Development Studies - Work, Employment and Globalization Major

Year of graduation 2010

Country of origin The Netherlands

Current occupation Senior Advisor, Workers' Rights and Trade Union Relations, Fairtrade International

What made your time at ISS special?

Learning from great thinkers about labour in a development context, my research internship in India, my contact with ISS staff and, of course, the fabulous community of students at the Dorus flat.

What is your best memory of ISS?

Accompanying Palestinian boys who were visiting ISS to watch a football match. Academically, I fondly remember working on my MA thesis supervised by Lee Pegler. He helped me to build a 'story'.

What does ISS mean to you now? ISS is the place that allowed me to live among a wonderful, diverse community, reside in beautiful The Hague and make a crucial change in my career to be where I am now.



Heideliza Roba Batausa

Study programme MA Development Studies Major in Agriculture and Rural Development

Year of graduation 2001

Country of origin Philippines

Current occupation Faculty Member, Economics Department, School of Education, Arts and Sciences (SEAS), National University (NU) Baliwag, Bulacan, Philippines

What made your time at ISS special?

The varied interactions among people. My classmates were also friends. I also miss the discussions in the student lounge.

What is your best memory of ISS?

I would have to say the International Day. We were able to showcase our own country to the rest of the ISS community.

What does ISS mean to you now?

A very productive and meaningful interlude because I didn't only enrich myself professionally but also personally. It would be very difficult to find any school in the world that has such diversity as ISS. More power to you guys always!

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all
alumni!

Did you study at ISS would you like to be featured in DevISSues? To tell us what you loved about ISS, what it meant to you and how it impacted your life? **It's easy!**

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back to
deissues@iss.nl
We'll see you in the next issue!





Dr Eunice Wangari Muneri is a doctoral researcher at the **Institute of Development Studies in the UK**



Maasai pastoralist women's agency in **navigating climate variability** and **gender inequality**

The intersection between climate variability, gender inequalities and socio-economic vulnerabilities is a pressing issue, particularly for communities such as pastoralists that depend on natural resource-based livelihoods. Although pastoralists have long-standing traditional responses to variability (Mehta et al., 2019), these responses have been undermined by the frequency and intensity of weather events coupled with their socioeconomic vulnerability. Pastoralists tend to be marginalized by the state due to the long-held misconception that their livelihood is outdated and requires modernization. As such, top-down land-use changes from communal lands to neoliberal forms of conservation (Bedelian et al., 2024) fragment livestock resources, hinder mobility, weaken social relations and exacerbate gender inequalities by dispossessing women without compensation. As such, women bear the brunt of these changes due to uneven distribution of labour, unequal

resource distribution and exclusion from strategic decision-making (Wangui et al., 2018). Climate change impacts exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities, resulting in women being disproportionately affected, raising the need to address these inequalities.

Prevalent narratives often depict Maasai women as thoroughly subordinated, without rights and considered as property. While this may hold true in some cases, the dangers of portraying women as passive victims by overlooking their agency, undermining their achievements and not recognizing them as agents of change, have been widely discussed in feminist literature (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). This scholarship calls for the recognition of women's agency in responding to climatic and non-climatic changes. In this article, I foreground how Maasai women in the Mara ecosystem use their agency to mobilize strategies that navigate the complex interplay of climate change and deep-rooted discriminatory gender norms.

Revitalizing social networks by re-creating commons

The role of social networks as a coping mechanism for pastoralists has garnered significant scientific attention. Maasai women draw on social networks to perform their roles of shelter construction, caregiving, collecting water and firewood, and sharing food during droughts. However, the conversion of land use effectively disrupted these social bonds, as vulnerable individuals such as divorced, widowed and poor women were completely dispossessed of land. Married women also faced geographical displacement as they relocated to live in their husbands' allocated lands in new areas; as one woman aptly expressed, 'I only realized we were poor when we moved to live on our own'. This sentiment reflects the loss of social support systems and the material depravity that often accompany such displacement.

My research reveals that women are actively re-establishing social networks

Left: A young man is discussing the purchase progress in the men-dominated livestock market with my female research participant. Aitong, 21 November 2019. © Eunice Wangari Muneri

and reclaiming agency through a phenomenon referred to as re-creating the commons (Archambault, 2016). Central to creating these commons are women leasing land from male landowners and building cultural villages. These villages serve as either primary or secondary homes for the women. In these villages, initially created as part of larger neo-liberal conservation initiatives in the region, women assume decision-making roles and engage in income-generating activities to strengthen their financial autonomy.

These villages strengthen the previously experienced social bonds as women share responsibilities, including providing guidance in carrying out tasks, as shown in the image below, and sharing resources during droughts.

Beyond the neoliberal drivers of these villages, women have proactively initiated efforts to strengthen their social networks in diverse ways. By pooling financial resources, the women engage in welfare-based projects that not only

Below: Women milking cows at the cultural village, with an older woman guiding a teenager. Talek, 22 November 2019. © Eunice Wangari Muneri



'...women are actively re-establishing social networks and reclaiming agency through a phenomenon referred to as re-creating the commons.'

address immediate needs but serve as adaptation strategies amidst climatic events like droughts. For instance, the women joined forces to purchase water storage tanks, which are essential for mitigating the impacts of droughts on water availability in households. Purchasing such tanks is unaffordable for individual women, and they hardly qualify for loans from commercial banks due to a lack of collateral. Pooling resources illustrates how women navigate institutional barriers to raise funds. Similarly, by addressing water scarcity through collective action, women demonstrate a proactive response to droughts, emerging as active agents of change in their communities.

Transformative gender relations around livestock control in New Commons

Through the re-creation of the commons, social networks are re-established and gender and generational relations are transformed, especially the control over resources. Livestock trade remains a highly gendered activity in the community, with women being openly dismissed from trading centres. Men refuse to engage with women in livestock trade discussions, insisting on speaking with fellow men. Despite this, women in the cultural villages employ strategic tactics, such as sending young men to purchase or sell livestock on their behalf, as shown in the image top left. They thus decide whether, when and which livestock is sold or bought, challenging traditional gender roles.

As droughts intensify, there is a notable shift in livestock ownership dynamics, with men increasingly asserting control

over traditionally women-owned livestock – sheep and goats (shoats) – due to their minimal feeding requirements. Despite this dispossession, women use their agency to support themselves by turning to alternative ventures such as chicken rearing and beekeeping, which are not subject to traditional gender norms surrounding livestock ownership. These ventures are viable income-generating activities for women, offering economic empowerment. Despite cultural taboos associated with chicken consumption, women leverage these ventures to supply local and high-end restaurants, tapping into tourism-driven markets.

Women's land ownership through collective action

In Kenya, women own a mere 7% of the land, despite its centrality in rural livelihoods, especially as climate variability affects the quality and quantity of natural resources. Despite the country's constitution recognizing women's land inheritance rights, sociocultural constraints persist (Nzioki, 2022). To circumvent these constraints, my research revealed how women utilize self-help groups as a collective action platform. For instance, a group of eight middle-class women saved diligently for a year to acquire a 2-acre parcel near an urban centre, strategically avoiding scrutiny from cultural gatekeepers who may have questioned their land ownership as women. Their choice of location for land acquisition reflects women's strategic decision-making informed by cultural contexts. By pooling finances and jointly purchasing land, women challenge gender biases and exercise agency in securing property rights.

The eight women leased the land to a group of three women running a girls' boarding school. The importance of education as a response to climate variability is increasingly recognized in the community (Archambault, 2017). By recognizing that education improves livelihood prospects, women have shifted their focus towards supporting girls' education as an adaptation strategy. As

such, women across ages and classes are adopting innovative ways of retaining girls in school. Climate variability, especially droughts, has been linked to increased school dropouts among girls due to heightened domestic responsibilities and early marriage (Archambault, 2017). By leasing out their land to establish a boarding school, not only did the women generate additional income but also demonstrated their commitment to fostering educational opportunities and mutual support among female community members.

Conclusion

In this article, I shift the narrative about Maasai pastoralist women from one of victimhood to one of empowerment. The cases exemplify that despite their

'...women use their agency ... by turning to alternative ventures ... which are not subject to traditional gender norms surrounding livestock ownership.'

disadvantaged positions, women are agents of change who use their agency in innovative and collective ways. Recreating the commons has not only improved women's economic prospects but also enhanced their social networks, enabling them to purchase assets through pooling resources. New gender and generational relations are also emerging

in these commons, which enable women to navigate discriminatory social norms around livestock ownership. Similarly, women challenge social norms regarding property ownership and simultaneously support girls' retention in schools. By understanding how women mobilize their agency in the face of intersecting challenges, we gain valuable insights into their strategies, which can inform gender-responsive adaptation policies and interventions, thus promoting gender equality in Kenya and beyond.

A full list of references is included in DevISSues online.

New publications

Social accountability initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon

Edited by Sylvia Bergh and Ward Vloeberghs, this open access book details how citizen-initiatives in Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon have made national authorities more responsive, transparent and effective in their service delivery.



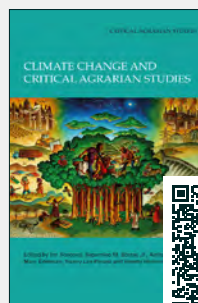
Gender, sexuality and social justice: Unpacking dominant development and policy discourses

Edited by Silke Heumann and Camilo Antillón Najlis, this book brings together young scholars from Latin America, Africa and Asia to challenge dominant assumptions on sexuality in development discourse, policy and practice and proposes alternative approaches.



Climate change and critical agrarian studies

This open access publication edited by Ian Scoones, Jun Borrás et al. investigates the narratives and strategies of climate change and examines the institutionalized responses in agrarian settings.



Becoming a young farmer. Young people's pathways into farming: Canada, China, India, Indonesia

This open access book edited by ISS alumna, Sharada Srinivasan, focuses on youth who are aspiring to be farmers. It is a response to concerns about the generational sustainability of smallholder farming worldwide.



The Rural Women's Assembly (RWA) is one of the world's most innovative and dynamic social movements. RWA is an independent and self-organized network of small-scale women farmers and peasant producers from across the Southern Africa region. In 2009, 250 women came together and established RWA with the slogan Guardians of Land, Life and Love. A decade later, with a membership of over 150,000 women, their chant has been expanded to Guardians of Land, Life, Seeds and Love.

Guardians of Seed, Land and Life

The Southern Africa Rural Women's Assembly Seed Guardians exhibition

The Rural Women's Assembly's seed journey

This photo exhibition is a window to the lives and struggles of the seed guardians of the Rural Women's Assembly. It documents their invaluable contribution to food and seed sovereignty and struggle to ensure the recognition of women small-scale farmers, peasants and producers in policy frameworks that protect the rights to seed, land and food.

Maletsie Ramaema (52), with her teenage daughter and a friend. Ha-Ramokoroane, Maseru, Lesotho. ©Donna Andrews & Daniel Chavez



Donna Andrews is a Senior Researcher at the Ethics Lab of the University of Cape Town and ISS MA alumna.



Daniel Chavez is a Senior Researcher at the Transnational Institute in the Netherlands and an ISS MA and PhD alumnus.

RWA is firmly rooted in struggles to protect local seeds and local knowledge against corporate capture. They fight for land, climate justice and food sovereignty and against all forms of patriarchy, working to build conscious women's leadership and confidence to stand up and speak for themselves.

In 2020, RWA embarked on a seed journey across seven of its ten member countries – eSwatini, Lesotho, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe – to audit which local seeds its members had in their possession. This initiative ran over nearly two and a half years, despite the Covid-19 pandemic. One significant outcome of that journey was the identification of over 500 RWA seed guardians who play an important and often unrecognized role in preserving seed. Another outcome was the uncovering of local seeds that were on the verge of extinction due to extreme climate change – droughts, floods and cyclones – and aggressive corporate practices and government policies which did not favour rural small-scale farmers' protection of local seeds.

The Southern African guardians have saved seeds for decades. Their mothers and grandmothers had saved seeds passed across generations to preserve a social practice that, besides having cultural significance, ensures food sovereignty. The guardianship of local seeds allows plants to thrive without toxic inputs and away from corporate control, contributing to defending biodiversity and overcoming environmental and social crises in a region devastated by the convergence of climate change and failed market-driven policies.

The Seed Guardians' exhibition

As a follow-up to the seed audit research project initiated in 2020, RWA proposed to three researchers to produce a documentary photography exhibition. This exhibition aims at giving expression to and recognition of RWA members as key protagonists of their own herstories and seed narratives. It offers an insight into the changing landscape (political, socioeconomic, cultural and environmental) of a region under-researched and stereotyped, shining a spotlight onto the women who hold, care and share seeds in harmony with the environment in sustainable ways.

The seed guardians and the seeds themselves tell multiple and often overlapping stories: endurance and resilience; struggles for land; complex social relations and patriarchy in rural areas; gender-based violence; migration, labour patterns and social discord; climate change; rural food systems and work that provides, feeds and nurtures local livelihoods. In many ways, the seed embodies the struggle for freedom, autonomy and sovereignty of rural women, small-scale farmers and peasant producers. It is a testimony to the unseen daily work being done by RWA and its significant contribution to ensuring and enhancing biodiversity, social reproduction and rural economies.



The exhibition gives a concrete face to the seed guardian, where she comes from and how she sustains life, her family, her community and the planet. It seeks to depict not a static context nor a one-dimensional view, challenging the usual portrayal of a rural woman as helpless and poverty-stricken. The pride of the seed guardian is evident when she tells her story of how protecting the local seeds has enabled her to send her children to school, build her home and become economically self-reliant.

The images and texts celebrate the quiet and silent activism of the RWA seed guardians and the seeds they hold. Each seed protected, harvested and sown is not necessarily perceived by the guardian as some big political act against big agribusiness, but is a small stone in the boot that is trying to control the African countryside. Each individual act of the seed guardian becomes a collective wave of solidarity across the region.

'... the seed embodies the struggle for freedom, autonomy and sovereignty of rural women, small-scale farmers and peasant producers.'



1. Benenia Jeche (47). Makoni, Zimbabwe.
 2. Thoko Dlamini (62), on the left, with Lonhanhla Mthethwa (61). Mbeka, Shiselweni Region, eSwatini.
 3. RWA members holding local seeds. Suurbraak, Western Cape, South Africa.
 All photos ©Donna Andrews & Daniel Chavez

The photo exhibition opened in Geneva in October 2023 as part of the mobilizations around the UN Binding Treaty. The exhibition toured Scandinavian cities and is now (May 2024) at ISS, before travelling to other locations in Europe, Africa and the Americas. The opening of each installation includes a workshop in which local seed guardians and RWA researchers speak about the significance of seed guardianship at the local, regional and global levels.



the corporate takeover of land, the enclosure of farmers-managed seeds and the loss of agrobiodiversity.

Why a photo-documentary exhibition?

In summary, the photo-documentary exhibition has four objectives:

- Make the contribution of the women seed guardians in Southern Africa to food sovereignty visible.
- Provide counterhegemonic narratives to the view that large-scale, technology-driven and corporate-controlled seeds are the only guarantee for the reliable supply of food across the world.
- Demonstrate that seed sovereignty rests with local seed guardians, who are mainly women small-scale farmers, peasants and producers, in Africa and throughout the Global South.
- Engage with policy frameworks that protect the rights to seed, land and food, such as UNDROP (UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants); UNDRIP (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People) and civil society-driven campaigns around the Right to Food and the UN Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights.

The photo exhibition is a window to the lives and struggles of almost 600 seed guardians in seven countries. It has been conceived as a tool that contributes to the advocacy efforts of the Rural Women's Assembly, based on the direct involvement of RWA members in all the stages of research fieldwork and design and management of the exhibition. The exhibition supports RWA's efforts to influence public policy in a political context in which the right to save seeds is denied, with the guardians constantly facing the risk of prosecution for infringing seed patents. The images and texts that make up the exhibition aim to show who the custodians of the food system are, highlighting the resistance to

The team in charge of the co-design and co-production of the exhibition are three activist-researchers: Dr Donna Andrews, a South African political economist and feminist theorist, currently a Senior Researcher at the Ethics Lab of the University of Cape Town, a former convenor of the RWA Feminist School and an ISS MA alumna; Dr Suzall Timm, a South African criminologist focusing on regulation in the urban and rural informal economy, and a Lecturer at the Department of Anthropology and Development Studies of the University of Johannesburg; and Dr Daniel Chavez, a Uruguayan visual anthropologist and political economist based in the Netherlands, a Senior Researcher at the Transnational Institute and an ISS MA and PhD alumnus.

Use the QR code to
 browse the digital version
 of the photo exhibition



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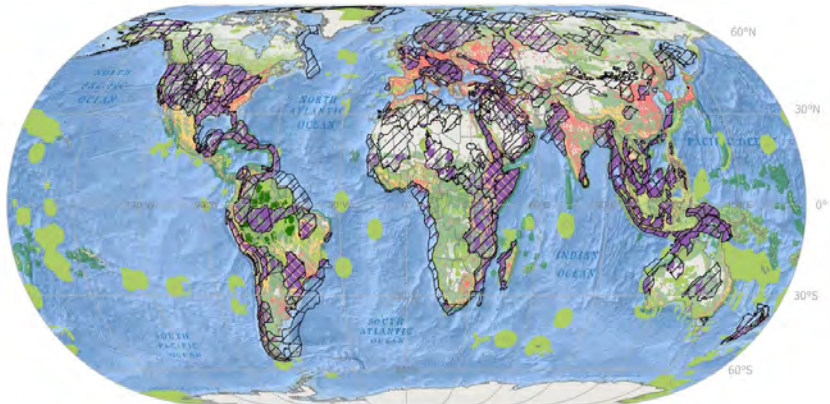
Jun Borrás appointed Erasmus Professor staff



Professor Borrás was awarded the prestigious position during EUR's Dies Natalis. The Professorship is awarded to distinguished scientists who are dedicated to research that creates real-world impact and aligns with the university's strategic goals and core values.

'Atlas' of oil reserves best left untapped research

Professors Lorenzo Pellegrini and Murat Arsel co-author article introducing an 'atlas' showing which oil reserves are best left untouched to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.



Gaza/Israel file research

A collection of outputs produced by ISS researchers commenting on and providing background and context to the current situation in Gaza.



Meet & Greet for future students education

ISS is organizing a series of Meet & Greets around the world for students interested in studying at ISS. Use the qr code to check out which countries we'll be visiting.



Dr Zemez Shigute joins organization fighting tuberculosis staff



Dr Shigute was invited to join the KNCV Board of Trustees. This Dutch organization has been fighting tuberculosis worldwide for over 100 years.

In Memoriam

As an ISS community we send our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of those former students and staff who have passed away in recent months.



Fortunata Mdachi
ISS alumna Fortunata Mdachi from Tanzania sadly passed away in January. She graduated from the Labour & Development MA specialization in 1994.



Rosmary Wanjala
ISS alumna Rosmary Wanjala passed away in February 2024. She graduated from ISS in 2006.



Grace Gasana
Alumna Grace Gasana from Rwanda sadly passed in December 2023. Grace was in the MA programme at ISS in 2011 and served as Scholas President.



David Gibson
David Gibson passed away in March 2024. He graduated from ISS in 1986, specializing in Public Policy and Administration.



Desi Indrimayutri
Former student Desi Indrimayutri from Indonesia passed away on 15 April. Desi was a graduate of the Public Policy and Management programme 2006-2007.



Judith Treanor
Former staff-member Judith Treanor passed away in April. Judith was part of the Development and Change team for many years.



Endang Lestari
We were saddened to hear of the passing away of ISS alumna Endang Lestari. Endang was part of the 2007/2008 batch in Women and Gender.



Mathew Kurian
Mathew Kurian sadly passed away in November 2023. He successfully completed the PhD programme at ISS in 2003.



Frank Kokori
Former trade union leader, Frank Kokori sadly passed away in December 2023. Frank was part of the Labour and Development specialization in 1985.

Research grants Zeynep projects

Dr Zeynep Kaşlı has been awarded two research grants to work on issues related to migration, displacement and emplacement.



PhD defences PhD



Libby Leher

26 April 2024

The political-development nexus of economic peace in the Middle East: Paris Protocol to the Oslo Accords



Blas Regnault

7 March 2024

Oil price trends and fluctuations: An alternative approach to the global petroleum market



Kim Tung Dao

8 February 2024

The holy triad? Religion, globalization and sustainable development



Yazid Zahda

18 January 2024

Palestine: A case of neoliberalization. The nature and implications of Palestinian national development plans (1994-2023)



Birendra Singh

14 December 2023

In search of grassroots frugality: Everyday learning and experiential knowledge to navigate water uncertainties in the Bundelkhand region, India



Daniela Andrade

12 December 2023

'Export or die': Agriculture, capital accumulation and class struggle in Brazil



Yanbai Li

8 December 2023

Essays on institutions, inequality and the resource curse



Marina Cadaval Narezo

27 November 2023

'World'-travelling with professional indigenous women of Mexico: Collective weavings



Trevor Murai

22 November 2023

Operationalization Human Rights Based Approaches: Experiences of civil society organizations in Zimbabwe



Natalia Lozano Arévalo

17 November 2023

Girls' and young women's experiences of harm post Human Papillomavirus vaccination



Richard Toppo

10 November 2023

Countering and contesting hegemonies: Identity-politics and Adivasi social movements in Jharkhand, India



Benedict Yuygsah

26 October 2023

Bargaining with social protection: The political economy of social protection expansion in Africa in the context of broader struggles for development policy autonomy



Gina Ledda

19 October 2023

Heterogeneous participation of developing countries in global value chains

About the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus International Centre for Frugal Innovation

'In a world where excess seems to be the norm, the concept of frugality stands out like a beacon of simplicity'

In a world where the boundaries of conventional innovation strains against the looming spectres of climate change, overconsumption and exclusionary price points, transformative solutions are not just aspirational or desirable, they are necessary and urgent. On this basis, long term colleagues Professor Peter Knorringa (ISS), Professor Cees van Beers (TU Delft) and Dr André Leliveld (Africa Studies Centre Leiden) established what

was then called the Centre for Frugal Innovation in Africa (CFIA); combining their diverse academic backgrounds and regional expertise to carve out a space where the technical and social aspects of innovation trajectories can be re-evaluated and reworked to be more robust and inclusive.

This need clearly extended beyond the African continent and beyond economically marginalized communities.

In recognition of this, in 2021 the CFIA became the International Centre for Frugal Innovation (ICFI). In the decade since its foundation, the centre has evolved into an important hub for research, education and knowledge exchange within this budding discipline, linking it to a variety of themes and international societal challenges. Over the years, the centre has established an international network with hubs in Kenya and India, where groups of researchers collaborate with firms, local governments and civil organizations. The Kenyan Hub (Nuvoni Centre for Innovation Research), for instance, is a crucial partner and – as an example – hosts the ICFI urban development programme.

Frugality as a virtue and frugal innovation

As the name indicates, at the base of frugal innovation lies frugality, an ancient value rooted in different spiritual traditions that has transcended physical, time-related and cultural boundaries. Monks and religious people all over the world practice it in different forms of asceticism, self-restriction or 'voluntary simplicity'. Alongside frugality as part of spiritual ethos and practices, it also features as a rational and practical value in many ancient traditions. There is also a connection of frugality to prosperity and



LEARN Sensory Walk Prof. Shuaib with LDE Dean, Wim van den Doel.
©Know Your City (KYC) TV

material welfare made explicit within the works of Benjamin Franklin, Adam Smith, Alfred Marshall and Max Weber. The latter advocated that private frugality as a virtuous way of accumulating capital by saving would increase national wealth and offset wastefulness. In the immediate post-war era onward, frugality emerged as a vital value in Dutch and broader European contexts.

This ethos prioritized mindful resource allocation, simplicity in products and a rejection of wastefulness, as well as fostering a 'do-it-yourself' mentality, promoting sustainability, resourcefulness and self-sufficiency. In essence, the association of frugality with Dutch identity reflects a commitment to responsible stewardship of resources and resilience in the face of adversity. In today's interconnected world, the value of frugality takes on renewed significance as we confront the pressing need for sustainability and responsible consumption. While advancements in technology and globalization have granted more people access to material wealth in some parts of the world, this trajectory is not sustainable in the long run. The ethos of frugality offers a forward-looking perspective, urging us to reassess our relationship with resources and the

environment. Despite the allure of abundance, it is necessary to acknowledge that unchecked consumption is not without consequences, leading to ecological degradation and social inequality – to name a few. Therefore, embracing frugality is not a return to austerity; by adopting frugality as a

'Frugality ... embodies a mindset of mindful spending, resourcefulness and contentment with less.'

principle, we not only contribute to sustainability but also enhance our lives in manners beyond monetary acquisition.

Frugal innovation is an alternative perspective that can profoundly change the ideas of what innovation could be. Not only in terms of tangible end-products but also in terms of sources of knowledge, business models, actors involved, governance and the institutional and policy environment.

About smart, simple and affordable solutions, its main premise is that extreme resource constraints inform the process, outcomes and value of innovation. It is a multidisciplinary approach to innovation that goes beyond a focus on technology to integrate entrepreneurial, environmental and socioeconomic considerations. As part of this, local ideas, knowledge and resources are highly valued. It is about doing more, for more people, with fewer resources.

ICFI's goal is to generate and exchange scientific and experiential knowledge to understand how frugality and frugal innovation can help address major global societal challenges and to contribute to positive outcomes for society. ICFI analyses how and when frugality and frugal innovations contribute to positive environmental, social and economic outcomes for society and what this implies for the roles of various societal actors such as innovators, designers, (social) entrepreneurs, commercial firms, policy makers and consumers/end-users. Technological and research projects are used to investigate the development of scientifically sound frameworks that lead to a more effective use of frugal innovations and technologies.



Students on the Minor course ©Carla Puttinger



MittiCool clay refrigerator that works on the principle of evaporation.
©MittiCool

10 years of ICFI

Research on frugal innovation has the potential to bring innovation as (inclusive) appropriation into sharp focus because it shifts the burden of explanation away from technology and design success alone to include the human factor and application contexts.

Verstuyts, M.J., & Sluiter, I. (2023).

In November 2023, ICFI celebrated its journey over the past decade as a research and education institute in the rapidly expanding field of frugal innovation. During a full day of presentations and workshops, ICFI brought together scholars from the three partner universities – Leiden, Delft, Erasmus (LDE) – spanning various fields such as anthropology, business administration and engineering. The diverse range of sessions covered the chapters of *The Handbook on Frugal Innovation*, which was officially launched by handing a first copy to the President of the Executive Board of Leiden University, Annetje Ottow.

The Handbook on Frugal Innovation contains contributions from a wide range of experts reflecting the versatility and immense potential of a frugal mindset and frugal practices – both in terms of geographical diversity and disciplinary backgrounds – and it promises to be an invaluable resource for academics, policymakers and students seeking a deeper understanding of frugal innovation.

Education and exchange: The Leiden-Delft-Erasmus East Africa Urban Research Network (LEARN) and the ICFI minor

Education and exchange lie at the heart of ICFI's mission, exemplified by initiatives like the minor in Frugal Innovation for Sustainable Global Development and the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus East Africa Research Network (LEARN). In November 2023, the inaugural LEARN symposium took place in Nairobi, hosted by Nuvoni and LDE Global. LEARN is an emerging research network that brings together multifaceted international academics, policymakers and civil society actors with a primary focus on fostering the coproduction of actionable, practical and impactful urban research. A total of 54 participants from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Burundi and the Netherlands attended the symposium with the goal of curating a space for knowledge co-production, open learning and reflection on urban systems and their lateral linkages. Though in its infancy, the network continues to grow; it is planning several hybrid cross-city dialogues scheduled over the course of this year and hosts the LDE Global Urban Uncovered podcast. However, LEARN is not only about 'frugal' – it also shows how the infrastructure that was built over the last years by ICFI is also of value for other initiatives by the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus Universities.

The minor 'Frugal Innovation for Sustainable Global Development' is an

exclusive educational initiative tailored for third-year bachelor students from Leiden-Delft-Erasmus Universities. The unique aspect of this minor lies in its ability to blend theoretical learning with hands-on fieldwork in the form of a 12-week internship where students can challenge preconceived ideas about innovating and actively learn from partners on the ground. Internship providers are mostly located in the Global South and consist of non-profits (Dutch and local), NGOs and academic research centres. Students undertake a varied array of field assignments, addressing specific societal challenges by applying their growing expertise in social, entrepreneurial and technological domains.

In conclusion, the breadth and depth of activities undertaken by the International Centre for Frugal Innovation underscore the versatility and comprehensive nature of frugal innovation. Frugality, as demonstrated through ICFI's initiatives, transcends mere penny-pinching or deprivation; it embodies a mindset of mindful spending, resourcefulness and contentment with less. Through its multifaceted approach to research, education and knowledge exchange, ICFI exemplifies the transformative potential of frugal innovation in addressing pressing societal challenges. By fostering collaborations and empowering individuals to creatively navigate resource constraints, ICFI contributes to broader efforts to shape a more sustainable and equitable future.

ICFI



Nuvoni



**International Centre
for Frugal Innovation**
Leiden-Delft-Erasmus Universities

Dr Georgina Gomez and ISS alumna Bernarda Coello discuss the necessity and requirements of practice-oriented education at ISS

Practice-oriented education at ISS

Bernarda (B): Hi. I'm Bernarda and I currently work in the private sector on impact investment.

Georgina (G): I'm Georgina Gomez, I've been working as a lecturer at ISS since 2009. I'm convinced of ISS' potential to change the way we do, not only think about, development, but I often wonder how well prepared our graduates are for that challenge.

B: I believe we're well prepared, especially when it comes to applying critical thinking within NGOs and the government. However, my experience of working in the private sector has been challenging. My main struggle has been understanding how to communicate about development in a way that doesn't come across as utopian or too theoretical. For instance, I had to de-construct my own ideas of seeing the private sector as 'evil' as the private sector has a huge potential to develop a long-term approach to some development-related challenges.

G: Perhaps ISS has such a negative view of the private sector because there's little contact with it and a lot of assumptions. Yet a great deal of the funding, interest and the main drivers of development these days are in the private sector or their foundations. For ISS to be more influential and effective, we should come

to terms with private sector employers for our students.

B: Yes, such employers are creating strategies to work specifically on development-related matters. I see a huge potential to bring a responsible understanding of development into this sector. There are only a few courses in the MA programme that provide us with this more practical approach; the local development course comes to mind. This course took me out of my 'ISS comfort zone' when I had to look into a societal problem and come up with a financially sustainable solution.

'I had to de-construct my own ideas of seeing the private sector as "evil".'

G: Several alumni have commented that some of the materials taught at ISS are too remote from the needs of many employers and sometimes even alienate them. We don't always position ourselves to acknowledge that there's a world out



there that doesn't think like us and rejects the way we think. I wish we could frame a message that can appeal to more people.

B: Indeed. Major societal changes often stem from radical approaches, but translating these radical theories into conversations in a way that resonates with peoples' understanding and realities is challenging.

G: I feel that even the theoretical words we use can stop the conversation and work against the objective we're trying to achieve, to be transformative. Do we make people feel unsafe?

B: Certainly. I had to learn to be meaningful to the private sector; instead of trying to push the agenda in an activist way, I had to meet them in the middle and understand how we use language to present the relevance of taking development matters seriously.

G: I agree with you, but I take it a step back, to first see the value of communicating with this broader public.



'translating ... radical theories into conversations in a way that resonates with peoples' understanding and realities is challenging.'

B: Yes, because in the end we may reconcile. So instead of starting conversations with radical positions that could close doors, we could try to first understand the positionality and privileges of the audience we are talking with. It's about being more aware of when to be activist.

G: So, how to translate our critical thinking into action? One of the conversations we're having at ISS is to implement a practice-oriented specialization. We think it would make our students more employable, more in touch with the realities in the field and better at translating aspirations into courses of action.

B: I recognise that. I was involved in supporting a company working on financial inclusion but there was no clear understanding about the societal problem they were solving. They only talked about software. I remembered the ethnography course at ISS and asked the COO to walk me through his day. By listening to him, I realised that they were working on financial health, creating software that ensures that people

receiving microcredit don't fall into debt. Then I could translate the potential of their software into an impact narrative that supported them.

G: So practice orientation at ISS could mean educating graduates to transform the world by finding the middle ground with others. And this goes far beyond simply including tools and frameworks in our courses that students can use in a workplace.

B: Yes, those are skills that you can learn on the job. Employers don't expect you to tick all the criteria but they will check that you're open to learning.

G: The implication is that employers will hire people who can learn; those with their feet on the ground, who use accessible communication, are team players and who can embrace the insights and outsides of a particular position quickly.

'However radical, all change starts with a first step.'

B: And being able to engage with uncomfortable parties and people. It's a matter of considering how and when to communicate what and to whom to continue creating impact.

G: So a practice-oriented ISS graduate could also educate patiently and in a soft voice. In my experience, there's often good will among some private sector actors which simply needs a bit more guidance.

B: Yes. With the private sector, we need to engage in a different way to change things from the inside.

G: However radical, all change starts with a first step. Perhaps a practice-oriented specialization would be one that builds the capacity to see and reproduce small steps. To show the research, the evidence.

B: Yes. Start by going back to the basics to evaluate the next small step. An example of this is ISS' local development course.

G: Thanks for the compliments. We feel very proud when we see that we've been able to support someone's personal growth. It reminds us of meaning. And thanks for sharing your experiences.

Development and Change

Development and Change is an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal devoted to the critical analysis and discussion of current issues of development. It was established by the ISS in 1969, in response to the perceived need for a multidisciplinary journal dealing with all aspects of development studies.

Volume 55, Number 1, January 2024

The geopolitical economy of international inequality
Alan Freeman

Subcontracting linkages in India's informal economy
Surbhi Kesar

Intimate extractions: Demand dowry and neoliberal development in Dhaka, Bangladesh Katy Gardner

Changing trees, enduring forests: Institutional bricolage, gradual change and community forestry among Yucatec Mayans in Mexico Noe Manuel Mendoza Fuente, Andrei Martin

Heterogeneity and labour agency in artisanal and small-scale gold mining in Democratic Republic of Congo Sara Geenen, Divin-Luc Bikubanya

Indigenes, settlers and citizens: Multiple and conflicting subjectivities in nation state making
Ibrahim Abdullah

NGOs and civil society at the end of the world Jim Igoe

Working Papers

The ISS Working Paper series provides a forum for work in progress which seeks to elicit comments and generate discussion. The series includes academic research by staff, PhD participants and visiting fellows, and award-winning research papers by graduate students.

The lingering legacy of slavery.

Farrell, C. ISS Working Papers Series no. 723.

Interspecies relations in peasant animal husbandry in the Orvietano.

Italy: Exploring collaborative survival. Caracciolo, M. ISS Working Papers Series no. 722.

The impact of public banks on Brazilian development.

Faria Oliveria, A. ISS Working Papers Series no. 721.

Contradictions on the path towards just and sustainable food worlds: Alternative food initiatives and food (in)justice in the Netherlands.

Vetter, J. ISS Working Papers Series no. 720.

Is China's demand shock in the raw materials market exporting a natural resource curse?

Li, Y. ISS Working Papers Series no. 719.

STUDENT LIFE



Having fun during the annual ice-skating trip to De Uithof with Kaleidoscope and the Welfare Office. Photo by Amina Said



Above: Students from the Social Policy for Development Major went to Berlin and visited various organizations including Friederich Ebert Stiftung and the Berlin Hospital Movement.



Current MA students help the Marketing and Communications team with the Erasmus/EUR Master Open Day in Rotterdam.



Annual trip to the flower park Keukenhof with Kaleidoscope and the Welfare Office. Photo by Eva Broer



Scan the QR code to learn more!



Top
10
reasons to
choose ISS

Your pathway to global success

- 1.** We have no application fee at ISS
- 2.** We guarantee housing for our students
- 3.** All our programmes are taught in English
- 4.** We assist incoming students with their visa application
- 5.** We have our own scholarships that you can combine with the Early Bird Discount
- 6.** We have a student airport pick up service and you receive a goodie bag with some essential (and sweet) items
- 7.** You gain immediate access to an alumni network that works at almost every level of development around the world
- 8.** We offer six different majors as part of the MA in Development Studies with the possibility to further specialize and customize your study
- 9.** With over 50+ nationalities of both students and staff, you'll learn from an abundance of international perspectives
- 10.** Academic staff are easily accessible to students both in classrooms and for critical discussions in the university bar!