

RESPONSIBILITY TO HEED THE CALL THROUGH A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: THE INFLUENCE OF INDIGENOUS WISDOM

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Abstract: The paper is in the form of a metalogue with the participants of a community of practice. Together we reflect on what it means to heed the call of the earth from Indigenous custodians of sacred rivers and forests in the Vhembe district in Venda, South Africa. The lead author is also the facilitator of a network and hub to inspire transformation in Venda. We discuss the expansion of an organisational network, which involves organic farmers, trainers from an international organic farmers organisation; and community engaged university-aligned researchers, who have all made a difference to food security in Venda. This is achieved through joining a community of practice which expands on indigenous knowledge networks. We show how an agroecology approach resonates with indigenous ways of knowing and that mutually enriching learning through using a metalogue approach enables systemic praxis (where people in their thinking and practice recognise their connectedness with one another and with the more-than-human-world). Our focus is on zero hunger and poverty and the importance of water and soil security.

Keywords: agroecology; re-generative power of performative research, metalogue, ecological justice, water and soil security, multispecies relationality, social justice.

1.INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE SCENE FOR INTERWOVEN VOICES

Norma: Our metalogue of interwoven voices, together perform alternatives to dominant social, political, and economic narratives and practices which are being disseminated across the globe concerning the meaning of “development”. We proceed to structure our paper by providing our differing (but interconnected voices). Our metalogue approach enables systemic praxis (where people in their thinking and practice recognise their connectedness with one another and with the more-than-human-world).

Janet: The paper is a metalogue with custodians, organic farmers and trainers who have made a difference to food security by investing in indigenous knowledge networks. We show how

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an agroecology approach resonates with indigenous knowledge and two-way learning using a metalogue enables systemic praxis. We explore United Nations bench marks of zero hunger and poverty and the importance of water and soil security. Our discussion of food security and climate change joins up the dots on the many social, cultural, political and economic factors which shape wellbeing as it relates to food and food security. Our discussion is set in the context of our appreciation that food shapes our lives and that we are what we eat and what we choose to eat. The work of Dzomo la Mupo (DLM) and Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) have been discussed elsewhere on earth jurisprudence wild law, multi-species relationships, rights of sentient voiceless (McIntyre-Mills 2022 a,b; Wirawan et al., 2023), but the focus here is on the stories of rationality and our mutual interdependence.

We are each of us walking colonies of beings in a shared habitat (Lethole et al., 2022; McIntyre-Mills 2021a,b,c,d; McIntyre-Mills et al. 2022,a,b,c) . It is useful at this stage to reflect on the content and process of our research to date. I think that the metalogue approach illustrates the entangled nature of content and process. The team already have much expertise, thus what we are doing is drawing out and sharing this expertise in respectful dialogues in our ongoing COP. There is no shift in expertise from indigenous knowers to academic knowers as the roles overlap or are alongside non indigenous knowers who use a multispecies relational approach and are informed by new physics, systemic, multispecies and re-generative literature⁸ as conceptualised and applied in transformative research projects (McIntyre-Mills 2021 (a-g); 2022a,b).

Mphatheleni: The considerations of a phenomenon or aspect taking into account broader physical views, social views and spiritual flow is an important outlook and this reveals the interconnectivity which facilitates holistic lenses of attention. McMillan, Stanga, Sharon and van Sell (2018) state that a holistic view means seeing systems as more than a sum of its parts: it includes the mind, body soul and the environment where the functions manifest. Furthermore, such a view recognizes that the disturbance in one part of the whole system, affects all the other parts (p. 282). In terms of the global dominant social, political, and economic narratives, the impact of this draws our attention to articular and raise our interwoven voices to express the due need of alternatives actions. The outlook of viewing life systems and gatherings like colonies of multispecies rooted on the environment (the whole of Mupo), attracts the attention of the need for holistic revival. The attention of the voices in communities and voices of in the academic sphere enables a holistic understanding wherein water security and food security are aspects viewed in their interconnection and interplay. We cannot solve water insecurity and solve food insecurity in separation. And on that note again, the natural environment, the soil, the climate the seasonal flows of food and water river source combine the interaction of human with multi species flow. That is what our voices attain as we reach the view of holistic social, cultural, dialogues of ideas, and economic factors which shape wellbeing. For us, when we describe wellbeing, wellbeing is in the interplay of the following attention flow.

1. To appreciate a mission of life to sustain and regenerate all life forms.
2. To appreciate and understand the ecological calendar.
3. One should create the ecological calendar to be able to recognise how to act so as to lead to good health, peace, and food security., while being in touch with Mupo. To draw the calender is also to be able know what to do and when to do what it in proper time. Food shapes our lives in a form of letting food sovereignty flow from our sense

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of connectedness with the spirit of Mupo. Furthermore, as Janet also has noted, we are what we eat and what we choose to eat as it relates to food and food security.

4. In short, the attention of Dzomo la Mupo is to protect Nature in all its forms. This engagement emphasises the creation of intergenerational learning.

2. OUR METALOGUE WITH CUSTODIANS

Norma: Yes, this paper is focussed around our way of activating an alternative to capitalist farming practices symbolised by the so-called Green Revolution (originated in the 60s and 70s), which continues to be presented in dominant discourses as the answer to questions of food security. While promising increases in crop production, this “revolution” in effect replaces forms of traditional food production linked to cultures rooted in fostering a harmonious/balanced relationship between human beings and nature, where humans are seen as part of, and not distanced from, the rest of nature (Altieri, 2012; Riva & Silva, 2022; Shiva, 1991; Romm, 2014; Wright, 2014). Besides subverting the ancient sense of spiritual connection between humans and the more-than human world, as Riva and Silva indicate (2022, p. 4), the Green revolution served the interests of wealthy farmers who had the money to benefit from the “modernization” process, buying heavy machinery and relying on monocultural crop production with an excessive use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers and transgenic seeds, with genetic modification of seeds through biotechnology. These agricultural inputs in turn are produced by multinational corporations interested in profit-making through their investments financed by global financial capital. As far as small-scale farmers are concerned, the corporations producing chemical pesticides, fertilizers and infertile seeds continue to market these as “magical” farm inputs that increase crop production, but meanwhile create a dependence of small farmers on them as well as a destruction of their environment in the form of pollution of rivers and seas and soil degradation, which in the short and long run impacts on their livelihood and health, while creating ecological devastation (Wright, 2014).

It is in this context that we set our metalogue discussion in this paper based on our stories which all revolve around our common concern with exploring together ways of knowing and of being/living that support planetary regeneration, while nurturing a (spiritual) sense of intimate connection with all that we encounter –as also described by Mabunda and McKay (2021). We concentrate on the work of our growing community of practice (COP) in which we as researchers/practitioners have all been involved (albeit in different ways) – mainly with reference to the work being undertaken and expanded led by the organisation founded in 2007 by Mphatheleni Makaulule (first author of this paper) called Dzomo la Mupo (Voice of the Earth) set up as a community-based organisation in Venda, South Africa (<https://www.thedzomolamupo.org/>).

Mphatheleni: In my Masters dissertation I explored the indigenous uses on Luranga (pumpkin plant) as a way to bring out the impact of separations of knowledge while drawing attention to human needs of food as body nourishment in a form of food to eat, where humans appreciate their interconnections with nature as a whole. The holistic approach is supported by the Afrocentricity outlook, as Molefe (2009) presented in a question that what would be the natural response in the social, psychological, religious and including history about Africans if there had not been intervention of colonialism or enslavement. The discussion of food security in the indigenous uses of pumpkin plant was a way of presenting an alternative voice to reveal that food security should be viewed as multi-functional and with the

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interconnections to different spheres apart from plating it for harvesting to eat. The wellbeing of humans is accompanied by not only physical body needs when we look for development – unlike the modern development that does not embrace a holistic flow.

The exploration exposed the interrelated functions of *Luranga*; they provide nourishment, material products, including the ecological course, as well as for spiritual and psychological identity, particularly associated with womanhood identification. This is the relevance of the Vhavenda reviving their indigenous uses of pumpkin plant.

Through observation and listening to participants, the results show system-attention of the interconnectedness from their explanations, for instance *Luranga* was or is not used as food source alone, on the other hand it is used and valued for other multiple functions apart from physical needs such as nourishments. On the segment cycle, the holistic functioning was seen in different ranges, which the findings revealed the interconnection which supplement each other through the cyclical flow. The uses mentioned below are describing the indigenous uses which Vhavenda has been valuing towards *Luranga*.

Norma: Meanwhile, our COP continues its work of expanding possibilities for modes of knowing and of being that support sharing of ideas and of practices towards holistic wellbeing in line with an Indigenous worldview. In terms of this worldview, as Ngara (2018) succinctly states “there is no separation between matter and spirit, the individual and community, human and nature. All of existence is an expression of relationships, interactions and balances between energies, powers and spirits” (2018, p. 14). Ngara notes that our ways of relating to one another and to what they take to be “the world” itself already impacts on the formation of the world. This is what is meant by the saying that we live in a *participatory universe* where we are all participants in world shaping and never simply spectators. (2018, p. 14.) Some authors call this a performative perspective as it highlights that *we perform the world as we speak* – through the words we use, the stories we tell, the relationships we form, etc. (Escobar, 2016; Inoue, Ribeiro, Gonçalves, Basso, & Moreira, 2023; McIntyre-Mills, 2021; Romm, 2021; Wright, 2014). As McIntyre-Mills expresses it, “we change the world as we research it [ideally collaboratively and ideally in collaboration also with Mother Nature]” (2021, p. 1288).

Janet: As a COP we are reflecting in this paper on how the agroecological approach of DLM, PGSA (PGS in South Africa), the work of Vhonani at Univen, and Unisa, with the help of colleagues at UnPad (in Indonesia) and University of Adelaide has progressed food security. This paper is mapping some of our progress as seen through our different perspectives. We should also not forget that changes in other services (such as attending school, clinics, or buying food or other items for the home, for example) has been made possible as a result of increases in organic harvests. The more disposable income generated through the entrepreneurial projects named when we visited the communities in October 2022, and the continued work of Univen through Vhonani with her support for social entrepreneurship, all augur well for showing actual practices that support human along with more-than-human wellbeing. I think too that we should emphasise here that saying ‘no’ to mining and the destruction of water sources has resulted from action by the network. Other actions include linking with Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) via Stef Swanepoel⁹ who helped inspire

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our work on setting up a co-operative and also linking us with the organic farmers network which resulted in the support from two very committed women Butshabelo Mabunda and Constance (Connie) Mbodi¹⁰. The work of colleagues at the University of Adelaide¹¹ and Universitas Padjadjaran¹² on bamboo and community engagement to support a circular green economy also helped protect organic gardens in Venda thanks to the outreach work on protecting water sources, saving seeds, planting trees, making fences to protect gardens and promoting biodiverse corridors.

As a COP we all learn from each other and from other sources (such as nature's classroom (McIntyre-Mills et al., 2022) and academic organisations, such as the International Society for Systems Sciences (ISSS) and other professional associations to which we are linked and we continue to share and learn so as to enrich our perspectives and actions. At the outset it is worth explaining to our readers that the metalogue approach builds on the work of Gregory Bateson (1972) and Norma Bateson (2021) to foster an “ecological mindset” and to work with the rich, warm contextual data (cf. <https://batesoninstitute.org/warm-data/>). Our metalogue approach enables us to pay special attention not only to face to face or zoom conversations, but also to reflection on recordings and interpretations. This engagement enables learning as we become aware that our words and the way we express them can themselves make a difference. This is the crux of the performative idiom referred to in this paper. (See also McIntyre-Mills, 2021e; Romm 2021; Rosiek, Snyder & Pratt, 2020.)

Norma: This is why we need to be careful of the language we use – for example, language such as *development* can carry meanings which shape how we think and act. We acknowledge in this process that multiple knowledge configurations exist, and that academic-led knowledge cannot claim more expertise than knowledge produced outside the academy. We also do not pretend that knowing can be distanced from action. Hence, we also recognise that through our metalogue (and the actions that accompany it) we inspire one another and help to “perform” (shape) new worlds – new in relation, for example, to the agribusiness model for promising food security which permeates dominant narratives throughout the globe and which poses a threat to traditional ways of life and ways of farming.

In the setting which we discuss in this paper, there have been concerted efforts of the South African government to work with a large cluster of Chinese conglomerates to set up what is called a Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone (MMSEZ) in Vhembe, which is a megaproject proposed to be implemented through investments by these conglomerates coming into the area, mainly for the mining of minerals, but also for industrialised

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agriculture. It has been planned in co-operation with the South African government, which has been intent on pushing it through. (Karim, 2023.) DLM has been active for many years – along with other environmental organisations – in trying to stop this project, by pointing to its inevitable destructive effects on sacred forests and rivers and the livelihoods of the local people. One of the recent initiatives in which DLM was involved was a film created to point to the dangers of allowing this project. (The film is called: MMSEZ Promise of Progress and the Peril - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naEho-yFSdk>.) Interestingly the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which had formerly agreed to help support the planned project has now recognised its likely destructive effect on the indigenous communities and on the environment – and has pulled out of supporting it, as noted by Carnie, 2024 (<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-02-25-limpopo-heavy-industry-plan-on-shaky-ground-as-un-agency-rethinks-support/>). At this point the MMSEZ still hangs in the balance – but there may be shifts in the direction of stopping the project. Mphatheleni's vehemence in this regard is well expressed in the film that was produced as a way also of educating the community in regard to the need for resistance against this project.

Mphatheleni: Yes, the purpose of creating the film was to raise the voice of the marginalised communities as the MMSEZ development plan is undermining the affected communities' voices. Earth life Africa is also involved in the collaboration on amplifying community voices. The film helped to create that space as communities were looking for ways to increase awareness of global developments plans that want to destroy the biodiversity-sensitive areas. (www.earthlife.org). The intention and meaning of DLM is to bring out the voices, voices on speaking for Nature, Mupo voices; and we make these a loud voice so that the awareness can spread to bring attention to destruction of the habitat of environment.

The idea that we foster through DLM is not to see the Earth as resources for *human* wellbeing, but to have a completely different, spiritual relationship with all that we encounter. We explore practical efforts to do the actual way of caring about multispecies and spiritual presence of creative life forces which express the spirit of Mupo. In doing this work, we meet many people who become collaborators with whom we share a common vision; and this assists us to go back and see that in our ancestors' way, we have to have wellbeing and not only for *human* being but for all that we now call multispecies (as referred to by McIntyre-Mills 2021 a,b,c,d, 2022). And in our ways of doing ecological mapping and drawing our ecological calendar, it is not only about the needs of the human being where we do cultivation to seek food and to seek health for ourselves. It is wellbeing of multispecies and of the climate and the soil, and harmony towards nature. We differ from an anthropocentric approach regarding spirituality in that we learn the path of spirituality as the way of our ancestors – which is not for human being alone. We do not pray alone for human beings. It is for all species and life including of animals and plants and so on. In order to understand and appreciate this we need to revive our ceremonies that accompany our spiritual path.

The problem is that creating rights on papers – even rights of the waters, forests, animals, plants etc, means that we create human laws and policies that still disconnect and separate ... a distance still is there. To do action in caring about the ecosystem, we need to continue spiritual ceremonies. While of course we acknowledge the rights of all beings and life forces to exist, in an Indigenous worldview the question of rights does not emerge because *we already feel interconnected with all of creation*. Hence when we do ecological mapping, we learn with elders, youth, parents and children about how to draw a map of interrelationships, including the Earth and up to the stars and moon and including the level of insects and small

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grasses etc. on Earth. We learn about the importance of nurturing the wellbeing of the multispecies and harmony towards nature – we learn about spirituality – which is about the welfare of everything.

Norma: Yes, this is the kind of point that you also expressed at the Earthrise meeting of 24 February 2024, with Rutendo Ngara chairing, where other people also indicated that the notion of rights of nature as introduced in some governments' constitutions already implies that there has been a rift created between humans and nature, and now this needs to be corrected via the law. This is similar to what Riva and Silva (2022, based in Brazil) are arguing when they point to how legal forms can become a barrier to agroecology understood in a non-anthropocentric sense.

Mphaheleni: The ecological mapping and calendar that I learned also through my stay in the Amazon where I was taught by Indigenous leaders there, is a way of expressing this. We have learned this in Venda too through our ancestors and elders who follow the path of spirituality. That is the point of involving the youth in ecomapping activities – to help them to appreciate this too.

Vhonani: At the University of Venda, we have recently (January 2024) reconfigured the Community Engagement Directorate to include Inclusive Innovation and Entrepreneurial Orientation, mainly because traditional learning and teaching models have been largely exclusive and silo'd. We will continue to forge strong links with DLM and the rest of the community also through the strong relationship that Mphaṭhe and I have developed through the years of her Masters study at Univen. One of the initiatives that we have been supporting is the intention of ecomapping learned by Mphaṭhe in the Amazon and shared in our context, to draw attention to how our traditional Indigenous ways of knowing are spiritual at root. We have set out to build a relationship between the university and the community involving elders, university researchers, students, community members, etc. We have been documenting people's learning from the ecomapping events and other events that have been organised for intergenerational learning in keeping with the spirit of Mupo. The ecomapping workshops are a fantastic way to get communities involved in thinking about the connections between how we as humans do things and the impacts of climate change and the issue of climate change as a global issue. It is a way of creating a sense of connection between our ways of living and climate change consequences. It is also a way of developing conversations around this – and also around how Indigenous Knowledge Systems are embedded in agroecology. PGS has also been very helpful in contributing their know-how in relation to soil management and organic pesticides and collection and preservation of Indigenous seeds. This is joined with practices learned from elders and Indigenous farmers through their historical sharing of experiences and ongoing experiments in responsiveness to nature's classroom. This all develops enthusiasm to look after nature.

We are furthermore at Univen trying to create an environment where creativity on the part of our students and the community flourishes, so as to create tangible societal and economic impact – but not in terms of conventional economic models based on maximising profit-making. The entrepreneurship is socially geared and also geared to regenerating the ecosystems of which we are a part. We are hoping through all our efforts not only to contribute to community development but to develop ideas that contribute to global knowledge advancement about sustainable and viable ways of living which appreciate our connection to nature. That is, we are hoping to impact on the global landscape through showing how a thriving human and more-than-human world can be fostered. Meanwhile, my

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plenary address at the ISSS conference held in the Kruger National Park in South Africa in June 2023 (where Janet initiated the process through the president of the society who then invited me to do the plenary) was an opportunity to share some of our African concepts of Ubuntu with an international audience. The panel discussion that was also held at the same conference, where many members of our COP were present and which we treated as a ceremony, was one of the highlights of the conference named by the ISSS president (see <https://www.iss.org/2023-kruger-memories2/>).

Patricia: Besides other initiatives that I have been involved in to foster the spirit of DLM, I recently set up a group concerned with the preservation of the wetlands that exist very near the University of South Africa's regional office in Ekurhuleni (Gauteng Province), where I am regional manager. I noticed, inspired by DLM's educating me about the importance of wetlands, that we have a large wetlands area just outside our regional centre. What I have done so far is involve the Sakhile Community who are keen on learning more about the wetlands. They are a community engaging in small-scale agriculture and small business entrepreneurship. Janet educated us on the significance of using organic food, although we are uncertain about how to effectively promote our items. This is where we are hoping to also obtain some further ideas from PGS, which has been very helpful to various communities in Venda where DLM is based. As you know PGS in South Africa has been active in training farmers in expanding their knowledge of organic ways of making fertilisers, natural pesticides (through using plant materials) and creating seed banks of organic and also of resilient seeds. This is part of their mission to encourage organic farming but also to foster an awareness in the community and society about the importance to the health of people and the planet of going the organic way. As far as the wetland near the Unisa regional office in Ekurhuleni is concerned, the Sakhile community group has shown interest in learning more about the wetland and water more generally. On 9 March 2024, I arranged for an environmental justice activist (Ferrial Adam) to present at a workshop to help the community to become citizen scientists in learning how to use testing kits to test the quality of water as a way of improving water security.

All in all, there have been so many activities that we have all (in our growing COP) have created, that together we create ripples towards regenerative living. This is a collective effort. It follows on from traditional rural places, where people used to engage in communal ploughing to assist one other. The collective ploughs one field at a time, alternating between one another or two fields simultaneously, until all individuals are accounted for. A similar approach is used in the stokvel arrangement, with the exception being that it operates in monetary terms. But the money is collected based on trust that when members need it, it will be available for each of them in turn – as part of a kind of participatory microfinance system.

If I want to summarise how I have felt connected with an inspired by, and in turn inspiring, our expanding COP, I can mention the following:

Since we started our community-engaged project via Unisa connecting with a community in Venda, I have been a team leader of the action learning approach to support a green circular economy. We are working together with DLM, University of Adelaide (Australia), Universitas Padjadjaran (Indonesia), University of Venda (Univen), and the PGS in South Africa. The purpose of DLM (mentioned above) is to promote the balance of multispecies and intergenerational knowledge. Since its inception in 2007, it is now comprised of a range of different communities (Vuvha, Vhutaṅda, Tshidzivhe, Vhutaṅalu, Mudzidzi, Mulodi,

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Mulambwana. Through Janet's connection with PGS we have been able to draw on their vast knowledge, based on the promotion of organic food for human consumption. It starts with preparation of soil, indigenous fertilizers and the marketing of organic products (which are guaranteed as organic by PGS using specific criteria).

My involvement in this COP started on 11 April 2021 when I met Mphaṭhe Makaulule. The purpose was to fill the gap I was feeling after I lost my son. During the meeting, I also shared that Unisa needed a community to work with as a community-engaged project we wished to set up, only to find out that she is a community leader (of DLM). The same Sunday we met the Tshidzivhe community and we presented ourselves that we intended to work with them. I conducted focus group interviews with the community. Subsequently various members of the then COP team (which has now grown) had several webinars and hybrid presentation with the community members. Some of the points of dialogue was to share the roles of different community members and researchers.

One of the highlights of our COP was the 5 days trip in October 2022 in Venda that we organised: It involved Unisa (Pat Lethole, Norma Romm, Viwe Luxomo, Fhaṭuwani Makahane¹³, Enid Pitsoane, Moipone Masalesa) and Janet McIntyre (University of Adelaide and University of South Africa). As part of the 5-day trip, we also had a panel discussion at Univen. Different community members of DLM, PGS, Unisa researchers and Univen participated in a dialogue, facilitated by Vhonani Netshandama. The dialogue covered sharing of intergenerational knowledge, promoting of organic food and also some of our draft article writing was shared with the community members. The following day we went to the Tshidzivhe community site, where different communities attended the full-day event/workshop. The workshop was inclusive of young people (Univen and from the communities) and old. The conversations were focused on the learning through involvement in DLM and PGS and the social-ecological enterprises that had been set up in various communities; and we also dealt with teenage pregnancy by communicating with parents to give them support not to give up on them. We then travelled to Muloḍi community where they shared with us how Bamboo growing was used to protect the water fountain and now it is cemented around and it has been negatively affected. Norma and Janet advised them of the importance of involving the Makhadzi in resolving the matter (which was later followed up by Mphaṭhe). This is because Venda people have a high regard for Makhadzi and the role she plays in the public sphere and the society (Matshidze, 2013). We then travelled to Tshidzi (hosted overnight) and did the same with Mabveṭe community.

At the moment, as I indicated above, we are working together with Sakhile community. We intend inviting PGS and DLM to conduct further workshops.

Butshabelo: In response to your asking me in one of our virtual meetings about how my journey into PGS began, I can say that it began on 15th Sept 2015 with four team members (Audrey Wainwright, Shadrack Mhlanga, Alan Rosenberg and Mama Lucy) who were members of the Bryanston Organic Market PGS in Bryanston in Gauteng Province).

The time I met them I had already been working for Dzunde Farmers Development Co-operative Limited which is an Agricultural training institution based in Polokwane as their Training Manager of conventional farming practices and not organic practices. Once I met those four enthusiastic people at that very moment after 15 minutes of meeting them, I made a decision to become an Organic Activist. From that day I resigned from my well-paying job

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and I followed the Organic Sector. In January 2016 I was admitted to do Organic Leadership Course for the whole year and the course was offered by IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movement) Academy and the institution is based in Bonn, Germany. The course was for the whole year online as well as two face-to-face sessions which were held in Tanzania and Uganda.

In April of 2016 I was admitted to 17 Shaft Training Institution which was then based in Crown Mines in Johannesburg, Gauteng Province to study Agroecology, where I learned the importance of organic farming methods/practices as well as Leadership from May of 2016 – and graduated at the end of August the same year. In 2017 I was admitted to participate in the Master Course of Organic Leadership Course Class and the face-to-face session was held at Geosan Province aka the Organic Province in Seoul, South Korea. In 2018 I attended the Creating Market Linkages Course for Smallholder Farmer and GlobalG.A.P, which was sponsored by GIZ (The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit). In 2021 I attend the TOTOT (Training of Teams of Trainers) offered by IFOAM Organic Academy also sponsored by GIZ.

Participating in the global space made me to commit more to the organic sector as I realised that my beloved country South Africa *is the only country in the world where its people are consuming GMOs on daily basis as maize is our staple food.*

With my hands-on training practices, I go to the field in order to go out and to re-teach all the people who had learned from me in the past, now about organics so they will not use chemicals. I realised that I have to change and redo what I had done by going back to the people with organic lessons. *What I wish for my Limpopo Province is to make sure that it goes back to its glory of producing food to the country and the neighbouring countries as it was known as the Fruit Basket of the country South Africa.*

Space in this paper does not permit a full discussion of all my involvements in the organic sector, but in short, I have worked with:

- Nkomo Village which is found in Greater Giyani Municipality in Mopani District of Limpopo Province;
- Makhuva Village which is found in Greater Giyani Municipality in Mopani District of Limpopo Province;
- Lebowakgomo Township which is found in Polokwane Municipality in Capricorn District of Limpopo Province;
- Polokwane Town which is found in Polokwane Municipality in Capricorn District of Limpopo Province; and
- Dzumo la Mupo (DLM) in Tshidzivhe Village in Makhado Municipality in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province.

I became involved with DLM organisation in the following way:

The Bamboo Co-operative and Organic farmers based at Tshidzivhe village in collaboration with Dzumo la Mupo showed their interest in becoming the family of PGS by approaching the Sustainable Institute; and Stefanie Swanepoel linked them with PGS South Africa. The conversation between PGS South Africa and the above organisation started in March 2022 and the first Zoom meeting was held on the 11th April 2022 and Sasha of PGS SA recommended that I (Butshabelo) should interact with the DLM organisation as they are also operating in Limpopo Province.

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After the Zoom meeting I started coordinating with Ms. Mphatheleni Makaulule the founder of DLM and the 1st meeting was scheduled for the 23rd June 2022. The preparation for the hosting of the 1st meeting was successfully coordinated by Makhadzi and her team and it was held at Sedzazwau Conference Centre in Thohoyandou at Thulamela Municipality in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province.

The first meeting was a face-to-face where Theoretical Sessions on the following topics were introduced to DLM members:

1. What is GMO and what effects it has to people and the environment?
2. Indigenous Knowledge
3. Introduction to PGS
 - 3.1 What is PGS?
 - 3.2 How PGS works?
 - 3.3 Six Elements of PGS
 - 3.4 Ten features of PGS

After the 1st meeting, we agreed to start with training members on Compost Making. Compost Making demonstrations were done successfully at Vuvha Seville Village at Nzhelele (Makhado Municipality) in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province on the 12th of July 2022 and 42 DLM members attended the session. DLM as you know have members from various communities the above training has been successful as now DLM members who were trained in Compost Making have started teaching each other on the subject so practices are spreading like wild fire and many have even started selling compost to communities at large. It was heartwarming for me to hear how the various communities in Limpopo through DLM reported on the helpfulness of the PGS training in our October 2022 meetings in the Tshidzivhe and nearby communities. I am so proud of what DLM has achieved. We had a meeting at Univen and one woman brought her organically-created compost to sell. I had showed them how to make it. The results are now showing.

Fortunately, there has been a small shift in the Department of Agriculture in that they are now even supporting some organic seed banks that we have been creating in various parts of the country – PGS is now educating some staff from the Department of Agriculture. Meanwhile, sometimes when people from the Department of Agriculture who are not trained in organic farming try to offer non-organic seeds and fertilisers to people whom I have met and trained in the communities, they refuse to use them.

Our big challenge in the country now is the Department of Agriculture which year in and year out buys and gives farmers free seeds and fertilisers (non-organic ones), but fortunately our farmers group do not accept these freebees. Many of these people are involved with DLM and PGS are aware of the destructive impact of these practices.

N.B.: The above few stories are part of my success stories and people continue to call me via phone calls for advice and mentoring in the sector.

Enid Pitsoane: In relation to the Makhadzi, to which Pat and Butshabelo referred earlier, the Makhadzi is an aunt, a sister to the chief (Kgosi) who are now called Senior traditional leaders. Makhadzi plays a key role as an advisor of senior traditional leaders in any tribe. The Traditional leaders consult with her on every decision and action that has to be taken

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concerning the community. If Makhadzi does not agree or approve of any suggestion made nothing can ever take place. She is a respected elder and advisor of the traditional leader. The role of Makhadzi should be cascaded down to women in the society so that they can also be respected and listened to. When it comes to the first ladies, they play a minimal role for as long as their husband are still alive.

I have spoken to women whose husbands were senior traditional leaders and had lost them, they are disgruntled about how they are being treated by the uncles of their husbands when their husbands pass away. Many cited mistreatment and being denied of their responsibilities as queens by uncles. The uncles will assume a role of chieftaincy during the time of their mourning. However, during that time the uncle will change everything into his name in government to earn the salary without supporting the family of the rightful heir and even their knowledge. The women in the traditional tribes are still experiencing oppression. Their voices are often not heard, and still looked down at. It is time for women to stand together and raise their voices and claim what is rightfully theirs. Women are equally capable of ascending the throne of power by becoming leaders of their respective tribes (Chauke; 2015).

Our responsibility as COP is, *inter alia*, to advocate for the rights of women so that they can be empowered to fend for themselves and their families. Our COP focuses on sharing knowledge with the women in communities to tap into their skills and make a living out of what they have at hand. Women are also empowered and assisted to register with universities and colleges to further their studies. These women are encouraged to register a cooperative company with the work they are involved in and this further enables them as a community of women to work together as a group and use their different talents to generate income. The women we are working with are involved in crop farming, bead making, and dress making; together they are encouraged to form a cooperative and open a business account. Once their cooperative company is registered as such, they are likely to get contracts which will generate money for them while they also contribute to the community through their skills. The company can also grow into a legacy for their children which generates sustainable income.

Norma: Yes, I remember Mphaṭhe once drew attention to the way people often use the word *poverty*, without recognising how people can experience wellbeing in their community. Even words such as *development* must be carefully used so that the word does not offer a monovision of development but includes pluriversality (see also Ntshandama & Nevhudoli, 2021, p. 42). We need to be careful of the way words impact on the world (for example, when development is linked to continued growth instead of to regeneration). Mphaṭhe has tried to fervently point out that the community resistance against mining is linked to an understanding that this is not development, but indeed destruction! (See again the use of film to portray and express and share this message - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naEhoyFSdk>.)

Janet: We focus on ways to link the systemic governance of water with a circular green economy to foster engagement spanning upstream villages, midstream flood plains to coastal villages and marine environments. We also raise the potential of undertaking multi-stakeholder engagement and the creation of a multi-stakeholder co-operative that could be scaled up with communities in line with Jakowi's one village, many enterprises approach (in Indonesia). In the forthcoming volume *Affirmative Intervention to support Multispecies Relationships* (McIntyre-Mills, 2024), I cite the 2023 IPCC synthesis report for policy makers, which stresses that global warming poses an existential risk:

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“This report recognizes the interdependence of climate, ecosystems and biodiversity, and human societies; the value of diverse forms of knowledge; and the close linkages between climate change adaptation, mitigation, ecosystem health, human well-being and sustainable development, and reflects the increasing diversity of actors involved in climate action.”

The loss of farm land and destruction of the water sources is caused by development at the expense of habitat on which human beings and other species are dependent.

3. CONCLUSION

In this paper we presented a metalogue in order to showcase our way of interacting with one another (and with others), taking also into account a responsiveness to the voice of Mupo. In this way we express our sense of relationality/connectedness in our common existence. We highlighted how our agroecological approach which we advocate is fundamentally *non-anthropocentric* in orientation. Furthermore, it fits in with what Pimbert, Moeller, Singh and Anderson would consider to be:

“... an alternative paradigm for agriculture and food systems that is simultaneously: (a) the application of ecological principles to food and farming systems that emerge from specific socioecological and cultural contexts in place-based territories; and (b) a social and political process that centres the knowledge and agency of Indigenous peoples and peasants in determining agri-food system policy and practice”. (Pimbert et al. 2021, p. 3)

Ramdas and Pimbert stress that (genuine) agroecological practices are based in grassroots people’s movements, which aim to “build countervailing power to advance food sovereignty and challenge the global capitalist corporate agribusiness food and farming regime” (2024, p. 3).

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