

AGROECOLOGY STARTS WITH WOMEN FARMERS

Global Food Report 2026



ALLIANCE
SUFOSEC

Alliance organisations

Fastenaktion, SWISSAID, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse, Vivamos, Aqua Alimenta, Skat Foundation

Partner organisations

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Agnes Esinyen, farmer and entrepreneur, supervises the Kalemnyang seed bank in Turkana, northern Kenya. Photo: Christian Heuss, SWISSAID, February 2026

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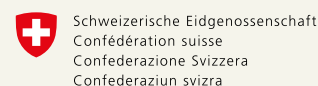
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FOREWORD



Flurina Derungs
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In 2025, approximately 645 million people were affected by hunger. 2.69 billion, nearly one in three people, cannot afford a healthy diet. This is a moral scandal. And it violates a legally enshrined right: the right to adequate food, enshrined in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Switzerland acceded in 1992. States that fail to take the necessary steps to at least ensure protection against hunger are in violation of international law.

Conflicts, the climate crisis, and economic uncertainty are intensifying the pressure on food systems. This makes the question of what works in the long term, and how this right can be enforced, all the more urgent. This is precisely where the Alliance Sufosec's Global Food Report 2026, the third report in this series, comes in.

Switzerland has a duty to act. Based on the constitutional mandate for foreign policy, the Federal Act on International Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid states as its goal to support developing countries "in their efforts to improve the living conditions of their populations". In particular, the law calls for promoting "the improvement of the food situation, especially through agricultural production aimed at self-sufficiency".

Together with its partner organisations, the Alliance Sufosec works in 28 countries of the Global South to promote sustainable food systems and combat hun-

ger, with co-funding from the Swiss federal government. The Global Food Report of the Alliance Sufosec combines practical experience with scientific findings. A survey of smallholder households shows the impact of agroecological approaches and the conditions under which they bring about lasting change. The findings are clear: where agroecology is implemented, hunger declines. Development cooperation works.

The UN has declared 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer. This draws attention to the central role of women in food systems. Our report shows where agroecological approaches reduce inequalities and where they increase women's workload as long as gender roles and power dynamics remain unchanged.

Geopolitical tensions and cuts to public development funding are exacerbating the situation. This is precisely why we need proof that joint efforts are making a difference. The Global Food Report 2026 provides that proof: collaboration with our partner organisations makes food systems more resilient and food more secure.

GREETING



Christian Frutiger

Assistant Director General, Ambassador,
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This report brings encouraging news. SUFOSEC's food insecurity surveys mirror the global trend of a slight decline in hunger for the first time in nearly a decade. This progress reflects the commendable efforts of many actors, including through SDC-supported initiatives such as the SUFOSEC Alliance, which strengthens food systems through climate-resilient agroecological production and inclusive value chains for nutritious food.

Yet hunger remains above pre-COVID levels and significant inequalities persist. Africa accounts for the largest share of people facing hunger. Globally, women and girls are disproportionately affected, and nearly one third of the world's population cannot afford a healthy diet. A diet that prevents hunger does not necessarily prevent anaemia, child stunting, obesity, diabetes and other forms of malnutrition. The challenge is no longer only access to enough food, but access to nutritious food. Too often calories are more available, but nutrition remains costly.

To sustain progress, we must make healthy diets more affordable through public and private investments in agricultural innovation, processing, storage, transport, and food loss reduction. These efforts require strong data evidence and shared global standards, such as the Minimum Dietary Diversity (MDD) indicator, adopted as a new SDG measure in 2025 through a coalition spearheaded by Switzerland.

Together, we must ensure that healthy diets are not a privilege, but a reality for all.

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

A photograph of three women farmers in a rural setting. The woman on the left is wearing a green headwrap, a pink patterned jacket over a yellow t-shirt, and an orange skirt, holding a large woven basket filled with dark compost. The woman in the center is wearing a white cap, a light orange t-shirt, a red and yellow scarf, and a purple skirt, holding a yellow watering can. The woman on the right is wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, a white sweater, and a red skirt, holding a wooden staff. They are standing in front of a tree and a hillside under a blue sky with clouds.

Compost from cow dung, organic waste and mulch: three farmers in Andina near Ambositra, Madagascar.

THE INVISIBLE FORCE AGAINST HUNGER

Background and perspective

The UN has declared 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer (1). In doing so, it is shining a spotlight on millions of women whose contribution to global food security still remains underestimated. In many rural regions, it is women who grow, process, and prepare a large portion of the food. Of the women working in agriculture worldwide, 49% are classified as contributing family workers, typically unpaid and without social benefits. For men, the figure is only 17% (2). Added to this are barriers and exclusion: limited access to land, advice, and credit.

This is precisely where agroecology comes in. The Alliance Sufosec and its partner organisations advocate for agriculture that works with nature rather than fighting it with synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. In doing so, it also takes social and cultural aspects into account, such as who has control over land, seeds, and harvests. The Alliance believes this presents an opportunity for women, as this approach is based on their knowledge and labour. Research from recent years confirms this assessment but leaves two questions unanswered: Does agroecology exacerbate the already heavy burden of unpaid family work? And do projects that promote agroecology truly address the root causes of inequality, namely, land rights, gender roles, and decision-making authority? The Alliance Sufosec is convinced that agroecology also has answers to these questions.

Knowledge, seeds and food

Agroecology is more than just a farming method. It combines ecological principles with the experiential knowledge of women and men farmers, social organisation, cultural context, economic empowerment, and the question of who has a say and a role in decision-making within a food system. Understood in this way, it is an effective tool for realising the right to food. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) summarises this approach in ten elements ranging from ecological foundations and



Seed keepers

Select, exchange, share: local seeds cost nothing and are immediately available again



Knowledge holders

Which crop varieties can survive a dry year, and how soil remains fertile

Key figures in household nutrition

Where women have a say in decision-making, there is measurably more variety on the table





Two women of the Nahavonmon group mixing liquid fertiliser, Guembé, Côte d'Ivoire.

social values to responsible governance and a solidarity-based economy (3). The UN Committee on World Food Security explicitly adds social networking, fair relationships, and co-determination over land and resources to these principles in its thirteen-point framework (4).

In practice, women are particularly visible in three roles:

Women as knowledge holders

In the Global South, women in particular know which crop varieties can survive a dry year, how to keep soil fertile, and which plants complement each other well in the field. They know which foods keep their children full longer and which plants can also be used to treat the sick. This knowledge is passed down through work, from one generation to the next, and is continually adapted to new conditions. A study from South Africa shows how traditional farming practices strengthen women's autonomy in agriculture

(5); research on gender and agriculture confirms this picture worldwide (6). For the Alliance Sufosec, this locally adapted experiential knowledge is therefore just as important as scientific knowledge. If it is overlooked, agroecology loses its practical foundation.

Women as seed keepers

In many places, women maintain their own seed networks: they select, exchange, and pass seeds on. Local seeds can strengthen food security. They are often much better adapted to local soils and climate, do not need to be repurchased every year, and can help communities recover more quickly after a drought or displacement. They therefore make families crisis-resilient in the short term and, in the long term, independent of purchased seeds and fertilisers. Seed sovereignty refers precisely to this right and ability to grow, exchange, and further develop one's own seeds. A well-known and well-documented example is the West African movement *Nous Sommes la Solution*, founded in Dakar in 2011. It is an alliance of rural women's organisations from several countries in the region, with its current focus on Senegal. There, women's collectives are reviving local seed systems and agroecological traditions, thereby strengthening their position in their communities (7, 8, 9). The Alliance Sufosec also works with women's collectives and solidarity groups and, through its international cooperation, specifically strengthens local organisations as partners on an equal footing and values their knowledge as an equal foundation. It has enshrined this approach in its own commitment statement (10).

Women as key figures in household nutrition

The best-documented impact of agroecology is on dietary diversity, that is, the number of different foods a family eats each day. Where women tend a home garden or cultivate their own plot of land, often with small livestock as well, a family's diet is measurably more varied (11). This effect is amplified when women also have a say in what is grown and what happens to the harvest: what the family consumes itself, what is sold, and how the money is spent. Two examples: in southeastern Nigeria, households that practise agroecology have a more varied diet and are less likely to go hungry (12). In Odisha, in eastern India, home gardens improve dietary diversity among women aged 15 to 49 (13).

It remains controversial how agroecological practices affect yield and productivity and whether they can be scaled up: the UN Committee on World Food Security notes that the data on this topic are incomplete and vary by region (4). Where synthetic fertilisers, pesticides, or high-yield seeds are phased out, yields may indeed decline in the short term. Over time, however, yields stabilise again as the soil becomes more fertile and crop diversity increases, and if one crop fails, the others continue to produce a yield. For the Alliance Sufosec, it is crucial that the impact on food security does not depend on the quantity of a single crop, but rather on the diversity of production and the extent to which women have a say in these decisions.

The additional workload paradox

Agroecology is not limited to fieldwork. Social organisation, networking, and participatory decision-making are equally integral to it (3, 4). The household survey in the next chapter demonstrates what the social dimension means for food security. In the field, however, agroecology is labour-intensive. This is due less to the methods themselves than to a lack of tools: there is hardly any equipment suited to agroecological practices because, to this day, research and investment have primarily focused on industrial agriculture (54). Thus, agroecology replaces purchased inputs with knowledge and, out of necessity, with manual labour: making compost, intercropping multiple crops in the same field, mulching the soil with plant residues, and tending to hedges and trees. This work falls disproportionately on women, who in many rural regions already bear the brunt of unpaid field and family work: caring for children, the elderly, and the sick; fetching water and firewood; and cooking (14, 15). Women-led farms are also less well-equipped. In a study from six countries analysed in the FAO report, women-led farms in five of those countries used fewer machines than farms led by men (2).

Therein lies a contradiction: the very practice that benefits women can also place an additional burden on them. On the one hand, there is better nutrition and greater influence within the community; on the other, more work and less free time. The extent of this additional workload depends not only on the practices themselves but also on how the programmes are designed. It is crucial that three things be taken into account from the outset: a more equitable dis-

tribution of household work, labour-saving tools and methods, and discussions between women and men about traditional gender roles.

From consideration to gender equality

The Alliance Sufosec and its partner organisations are convinced that the success of agroecology also depends on whether the roles of women and men change. The Alliance therefore pursues the goal of gender equality and relies on a gender-transformative approach to achieve it. This approach is intended not only to take different living conditions into account but also to transform unequal power dynamics and societal role models (16). To this end, women and men must be equally brought on board.

It is now possible to verify that this is more than a declaration of intent: the FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the UN World Food Programme (WFP), and the CGIAR agricultural research network have developed common metrics. These indicators show whether women actually have greater decision-making power and whether power dynamics and social norms are changing (17).

In academic discourse, there is criticism that women in agricultural development cooperation research and programmes are often viewed primarily as a means to an end: as a lever for better nutrition or greater environmental protection, rather than as holders of their own rights (18). For the Alliance Sufosec, gender

equality is both a goal and a prerequisite. It empowers women in their rights, takes into account their diverse lived realities, strategies, and strengths, and involves men as indispensable partners in this transformation process.

The Guéra project in Chad, for example, illustrates how this can happen in practice. When women there became economically independent, it triggered fears among men as they saw their role as head of the household threatened. The risk of gender-based violence increased. In response, the project specifically engaged with the men and made it clear to them that the economic empowerment of women makes the entire household more resilient to crises (19). The findings from the learning process between 2021 and 2024 are based on discussions and observations within a single project. However, the Alliance considers these findings to be transferable and recommends involving men and critically examining entrenched gender roles. This is because gender roles that have developed over generations do not disappear within the duration of a single project; they are particularly persistent in traditional, male-dominated societies.

Regional contrasts

Research and practical examples reveal varying regional priorities. While they do not allow for definitive conclusions about entire continents, they do highlight the conditions under which agroecology empowers women or places an additional burden on them.



“We have learned to make natural plant protection products and bokashi compost, a fermented fertiliser made from organic material. The families in our community have chosen me to represent them in the training sessions. I then pass on to them what I learn there.”

Edelmira Vásquez, smallholder farmer and agroecological adviser, Honduras

In parts of **Latin America**, the interplay between agroecology and women's movements has given rise to a distinct approach focused on gender equality. Unpaid family work is openly addressed and redistributed, and men are approached as allies (20–22). This is encapsulated by the concept of “re-existencia”. It refers not only to food security but also to women's self-determination.

In several **African countries**, women are strongly organised at the grassroots level, while their influence on national policy remains limited. Women's collectives are driving agroecological innovations and preserving local seeds (7, 12), while governments have only just begun to enshrine agroecology in laws and programmes (23, 24). Kenya is an exception: in 2024, the country adopted the National Agroecology Strategy for Food System Transformation 2024–2033, one of the few national agroecology strategies on the continent (25).

Studies from **South Asia** illustrate the risk of additional workload particularly clearly. Women play a central role as seed keepers and as those responsible for home gardens (13), but they bear a particularly heavy burden. In addition, it is not only gender that determines opportunities, but also social and ethnic background, so, for example, the caste system in India. Who truly benefits from agroecological programmes therefore depends on whether these programmes also reach the poorest and most disadvantaged women.

Gender-equitable agroecology cannot be transferred from one region to another as a one-size-fits-all model. The challenge differs everywhere: in Latin America, it is about securing and expanding what has been achieved; in Africa, it is about translating practice into national policy; and in Asia, it is about specifically reducing the burden on women. Across all contexts, the overarching goal is to reach women who face multiple forms of discrimination, that is, who are disadvantaged simultaneously due to gender, poverty, ethnic origin, or caste.

Women shape a large part of the agroecological transformation. However, whether this transformation also benefits them is not decided solely in the fields. What matters is whether women have control over land, labour, income, and harvests. Agroecology only achieves its full potential when it transforms not only farming methods but also power dynamics.



Mumias, Kakamega County, Kenya

SUFOSEC HOUSEHOLD SURVEY 2025



A farmer spreading compost on her beds,
Fodoniton, Côte d'Ivoire.

DIVERSITY IN THE FIELDS, STRENGTH IN THE COMMUNITY

Women smallholder farmers in the Kenyan highlands, seed keepers in Niger, women agropastoralists in the Horn of Africa, women farmers in self-organised farming networks in India, and guardians of Colombia's páramo high moors. They all live in constant uncertainty about whether there will be enough food. This is due to food systems that keep farming families in a state of dependency, trade structures that drive down producer prices, and the climate crisis with its droughts and floods.

This is where the partner organisations of the Alliance Sufosec come in. Rooted in their regions, they currently work in 28 countries on three continents to strengthen local food systems through agroecological methods, together with women and men smallholder farmers. They help to reduce dependencies: by enabling smallholder farmers to reproduce their own farmer-saved seed and to produce fertilisers and plant protection products locally. They also support farmers' cooperatives and women's solidarity groups, where women farmers join forces, share knowledge, extend credit to one another and gain access to the local market.

Since 2021, the Alliance has been tracking, through its partner organisations, how food security is evolving in its projects. The data are collected annually using the

same core instruments, at the end of the dry season, when food supplies are at their lowest. As a result, repeated measurements are available for 16 projects. They show a significant decline in food insecurity. This chapter explores the reasons behind this trend and why it has not been achieved everywhere.

Hunger remains a reality, but it is on the decline

The food situation of a family is measured using the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES). Eight questions record whether a household lacked money or supplies for enough food over the past year. Moderate food insecurity means that a household had to skip meals or eat a less varied diet (26). Severe food insecurity means that entire days passed without food.

The results of the Alliance Sufosec household survey show that food insecurity remained widespread in 2025. In the median of the 39 project regions, 44% of the households surveyed are affected by moderate or severe food insecurity, and 6% by severe food insecurity. Translated to a village of one hundred families: 44 families did not have enough to eat last year, and in six of those 44 families there were days with no food at all. The survey included 12,366 households in

Household survey 2021–2025

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of survey countries	17	17	15	14	16
Number of project regions	42	38	37	30	39
Number of households surveyed	14,556	10,733	9,908	8,639	12,366
Households with moderate or severe food insecurity, in % (median)	72 %	65 %	57 %	54 %	44 %
Households with severe food insecurity, in % (median)	24 %	15 %	14 %	7 %	6 %

Table 1: Key figures from the Sufosec household survey, 2021 to 2025. The figures refer to all project regions for the respective year.

16 countries, selected as a sample from approximately 74,000 households supported by the alliance’s partner organisations. Data are not collected in all of the alliance’s programme countries, but where the partner organisations are able to carry out the survey every year.

The Alliance continues to operate largely in fragile contexts in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, which are marked by conflict and political instability. The project regions are not alone in this: the Global Report on Food Crises 2026 reports that in 2025, 266 million people in 47 countries and territories worldwide were affected by high levels of acute food insecurity. That represents 22.9% of the analysed population (40).

Five years, 16 projects compared

Since 2021, the food situation has improved markedly in many of the projects supported. Comparing each project with its own baseline, moderate and severe

food insecurity fell by an average of 20.5 percentage points, from an average of 61% to 41%. Severe food insecurity fell from 22% to 11%. The range is wide, from a decrease of 55 percentage points in Niger (Fabidji) to slight increases in three projects. The comparison over time covers 16 projects in which the FIES was collected in 2025 and at least twice more since 2021, each time at the end of the dry season. Depending on the project, the first measurement dates from between 2021 and 2024.

Individual project trajectories show how substantial the progress can be. In the Kenyan project regions of Nyahururu and Machakos, the share of affected households falls steadily over four years, while the national FAO reference values for Kenya rise slightly over the same period. The FIES-based country values published by the FAO serve as the reference; as three-year averages they indicate the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population as a whole

Changes in moderate and severe food insecurity, 2025 compared to the first survey year

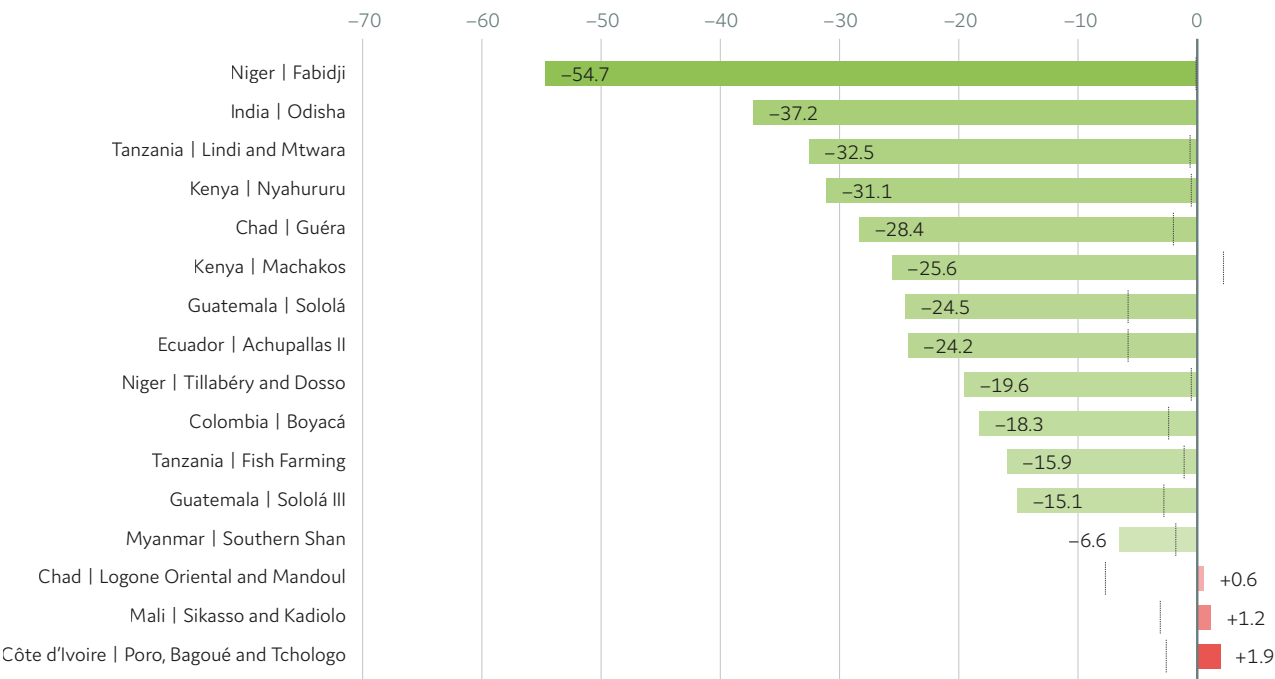


Figure 1: Change in moderate and severe food insecurity across the 16 projects with repeated FIES measurements, with the first measurement taken by 2025, expressed as percentage points of the proportion of households surveyed. In 13 of the 16 projects, food insecurity declined, by an average of 20.5 percentage points. The vertical line shows, for comparison, how much the national FAO reference value changed over the same period, a three-year average for the total population of the respective country (42); the FAO does not report figures for India.

Making the impact visible: key findings from the Sufosec household survey



The change is measurable

The FIES was measured repeatedly across 16 projects. When comparing each project to its own baseline, food insecurity decreased on average by a good 20 percentage points. Where six out of ten households did not have enough food to eat at the time of the first measurement, the figure is now four. While just over one in five households suffered from acute hunger back then, the figure is now about one in ten.



Agroecology works when many practices come together

The more agroecological practices a household employs, the less likely it is to experience food insecurity. The 2025 survey now shows that the social dimension contributes just as much to food security as diversity in the field.



Measured for the first time

At the median across the 40 project regions, 69% of the women surveyed meet the minimum dietary diversity standard. This figure serves as a baseline for future comparisons.



Hunger remains a reality

In a typical project region in 2025, a good four out of ten smallholder households are affected by food insecurity; in 6% of all households, there are even days when they go without food entirely (median across 39 regions).



Diversity and community reinforce one another

The difference is most pronounced when households do both: grow a diverse range of crops and organise themselves into groups. Where neither of these things happens, about 55% of households are affected by food insecurity; where both are combined, the figure is only 41%, that is, about 14 percentage points lower.



"My youngest daughter suffered from anaemia. Through the project, I learned that plants like rosella hibiscus can help treat it. Since I've had my own vegetable garden, I've also had more money left over because I hardly have to buy anything at the market anymore."

Carolyn Wamalwa, smallholder farmer, Kenya

(42). In the Tanzanian project in the southern regions of Lindi and Mtwara, moderate and severe food insecurity fell sharply by 2025, from 48% to 16%. The national reference remains virtually unchanged at around 57 to 58%.

There are, however, also counter-trends. In Chad (Logone, Mandoul) food insecurity rises by 0.6 percentage points, in Mali (Sikasso) by 1.2 and in Côte d'Ivoire (Poro, Bagoué, Tchologo) by 1.9 (Figure 1). In the surveyed region in Chad, food insecurity is consistently above the national average. In these countries, the projects of the Alliance Sufosec operate under particularly fragile conditions. In Chad, community-level data indicate that conflict and seasonal variation

in access to land and water are among the central drivers of food insecurity, documented at community level for Chad (52). Comparable findings are available from other crisis contexts (29). In the majority of the projects, food security improves significantly, in 13 out of 16.

Why the combination matters

Agroecology is the shared approach of all the projects examined here. It aligns farming with local natural cycles: diversity in the fields instead of a few crops, healthy soils instead of purchased inputs, farmers' knowledge and cooperation instead of dependence on external suppliers. Agroecology is therefore not a

How the Alliance measures and how to read the figures

FIES (Food Insecurity Experience Scale): eight questions validated by the FAO per household regarding access to food, administered by locally recruited individuals (26).

Agroecology score: 22 practices across five dimensions, ranging from crop rotation to collaboration within the village, based on the FAO's TAPE tool (41). Each practice is worth 2 or 3 points, depending on how much it changes the farming system. The maximum is 60 points (51). A household is considered to practise diverse agroecology if it applies practices from at least four of the five dimensions and achieves at least 30 points.

MDD-W (Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women): if a woman consumes foods from at least five out of ten food groups within a 24-hour period, her diet meets the minimum standard for diversity. The indicator measures diversity, not quantity. Which local foods belong to which group is defined for each survey country (27, 28).

Odds ratio: the percentages from the statistical model are odds ratios, not proportions. Because food insecurity is common, these values are larger than the difference between the proportions. The text therefore speaks of odds, not risk.

Agroecological practices and food insecurity in three projects (2025 survey)

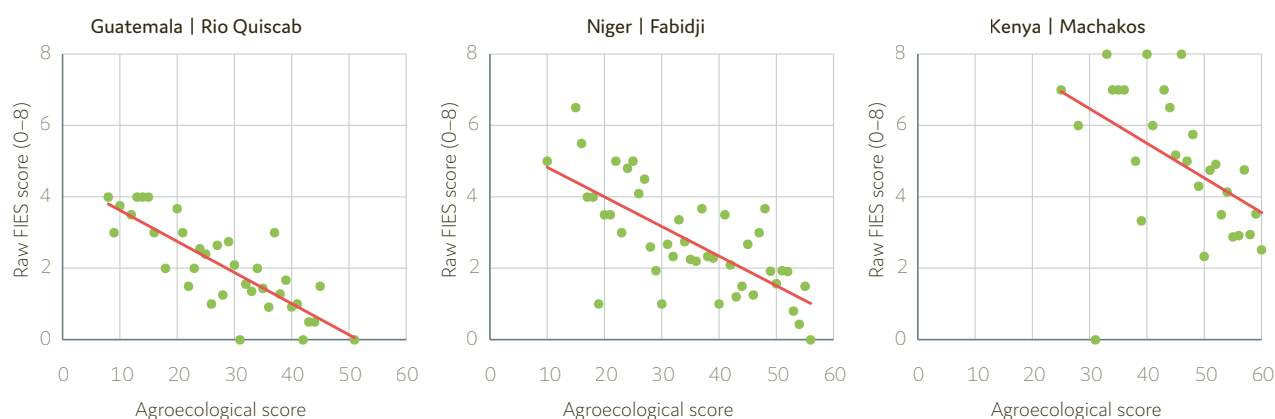


Figure 2: The higher a household's agroecology score (22 practices, maximum 60 points), the lower its FIES raw score (scale 0 to 8): Guatemala (Rio Quiscab), Niger (Fabidji), and Kenya (Machakos). A lower raw score indicates greater food security. These three projects are representative of those in which the correlation has been statistically confirmed. Each point represents the average FIES raw score of all households with that particular score; the red line indicates the linear trend line. Survey conducted in 2025; household-level data: www.sufosec.ch/en/eb2026.

fixed recipe but an interplay of practices that each household shapes differently. The household survey captures how far a household has come with the agroecology score, which brings together 22 individual practices (see box p. 16).

What matters for food security is not the individual practice but how practices work together. The alliance therefore does not evaluate individual practices on their own, but assigns them to five dimensions. The survey has covered four of them since 2021: **bi-diversity** (crop rotation, crop and animal diversity, agroforestry), **soil health** (including intercropping), **reduced use of agricultural inputs** (doing without synthetic fertilisers and pesticides or replacing them with organic alternatives, local rather than hybrid seed) and **integration of crops and livestock**. Newly added is the **social dimension of agroecology**. It includes the exchange of knowledge among smallholder farmers, the joint purchase of fertiliser and seed, shared work in the fields and microcredit through solidarity groups.

The five dimensions bring together what the FAO describes in ten elements and the UN Committee on World Food Security in thirteen principles: an interplay of ecological diversity, reduced use of external inputs and farmer self-organisation (3, 4, 30, 31).

Three practices that almost everyone uses

Among the 22 systematically recorded practices, three show the highest rates of application: crop rotation (82%), locally adapted seed (81%) and the diversification of crops (79%). The application rates come from the 29 projects in which the agroecology score was collected. All three practices broaden the basis for production and nutrition without additional inputs and cushion crop losses.

Within these dimensions, there are significant differences. When it comes to a reduced use of agricultural inputs, locally adapted seeds are the most common practice: households use their own, site-specific seeds instead of commercially purchased varieties. Within the same dimension, the partial switch to organic fertilisers and pesticides (49 and 50%) is significantly more widespread than the complete elimination of synthetic products (26 to 37%).

Practices that combine crops and livestock are used by 58% of households. Grazing practices are considerably rarer: controlled grazing, the restoration of degraded pasture and sustainable pasture management range from 24 to 29%. This is partly because such practices are only relevant for households that keep livestock and manage pasture.

“We used to grow vegetables, too, but it’s only since I started a kitchen garden that we’ve been harvesting at least five different varieties – more than we need. We sell the surplus at the market. Participating in these projects has completely changed my life.”

Sangita Baspane, smallholder farmer, Nepal



In contrast, the social dimension, that is, practices related to cooperation among households, is strikingly uniform in its distribution, with all five practices found in 46 to 66% of households. When women and men smallholder farmers come together to form solidarity groups, knowledge about farming methods, food issues, and market prices is generated and shared. Mutual trust also grows, and women and men smallholder farmers tackle production and risk issues together.

Diversity in the field reduces risk

Since 2021, the households supported have been applying considerably more agroecological practices. In 2021 the average was 4.5 practices per household, in 2025 it was 8.9. Counting the newly recorded social practices, the figure for 2025 rises to 11.9 of the 22 possible practices. Reports from the projects indicate that once households take up agroecology, further practices often follow quickly. Crop rotation, intercropping, farm-saved seed and composting complement one another. Today, 64% of households combine practices from at least four of the five dimensions.

The statistical analysis is based on 8,252 households, for which both data on agroecological practices and FIES scores are available. **The result is clear: the more agroecological practices a household employs, the lower the risk of food insecurity.** With each additional practice, the odds of being affected decrease by about 3% (32).

This pattern is also evident in individual project regions. In Guatemala (Rio Quiscab), Niger (Fabidji), and Kenya (Machakos), the more agroecological practices

a household employs, the lower its raw FIES score, that is, the number of the eight FIES questions it answers “yes” to (scale 0 to 8, Figure 2).

For biodiversity, too, a stable relationship emerges across all measurement years from 2021 to 2025: the more biodiversity practices a household applies, the less likely it is to be affected by food insecurity. For each additional biodiversity practice, the odds of moderate or severe food insecurity are about 14% lower. For two additional practices, the calculated difference is around 27% (32).

The findings thus confirm well-established research results: diverse crops, crop rotation, and agroforestry, that is, growing crops among trees and shrubs, limit crop failures caused by pests, provide micronutrients from one’s own garden, and make farming systems more resilient to climate shocks (30, 31, 33).

Community is just as impactful as diversity

In 2025, the study measured the social dimension of agroecology for the first time. The most important new finding of the survey is that the social dimension on its own also shows a relationship with greater food security. Households that join forces with others and work together are less likely to be affected by food insecurity. With each additional form of cooperation, the odds of being affected fall by about 15%, and those of acute hunger by about 9% (32).

Diverse, biodiversity-friendly cultivation also makes a difference. For each additional biodiversity practice, the odds of food insecurity fall by about 14%. How households work together therefore matters just as

Combinations of agroecological dimensions

Combination of agroecological dimensions	Odds ratio	95% CI	Significant
Combinations of two dimensions			
Biodiversity + social dimension	0.58	0.49–0.68	•
Soil health + social dimension	0.74	0.63–0.87	•
Biodiversity + soil health	0.75	0.62–0.92	•
Soil health + reduced use of agricultural inputs	1.39	1.10–1.75	•
Reduced use of agricultural inputs + integration of crops and livestock	1.17	1.04–1.32	•
Soil health + integration of crops and livestock	1.15	1.03–1.30	•
Reduced use of agricultural inputs + social dimension	0.84	0.72–0.99	•
Biodiversity + integration of crops and livestock	1.08	0.96–1.22	
Biodiversity + reduced use of agricultural inputs	0.87	0.70–1.09	
Integration of crops and livestock + social dimension	0.94	0.84–1.06	
Combinations of three dimensions			
Biodiversity + soil health + social dimension	0.68	0.59–0.79	•
Biodiversity + reduced use of agricultural inputs + social dimension	0.73	0.62–0.84	•
Soil health + reduced use of agricultural inputs + integration of crops and livestock	1.15	1.03–1.30	•
Soil health + reduced use of agricultural inputs + social dimension	0.86	0.74–1.00	
Biodiversity + integration of crops and livestock + social dimension	0.90	0.80–1.02	
Biodiversity + reduced use of agricultural inputs + integration of crops and livestock	1.09	0.97–1.23	
Biodiversity + soil health + integration of crops and livestock	1.08	0.96–1.21	
Reduced use of agricultural inputs + integration of crops and livestock + social dimension	0.95	0.84–1.07	
Biodiversity + soil health + reduced use of agricultural inputs	0.93	0.77–1.13	
Soil health + integration of crops and livestock + social dimension	0.96	0.85–1.08	

Table 2: Combinations of agroecological dimensions and their association with moderate or severe food insecurity (2025 survey, n = 8,252). Values below 1 indicate lower odds, values above 1 higher odds of being affected. The combination of biodiversity and social practices has the strongest impact. CI = confidence interval.

Distribution of food groups consumed in the MDD-W indicator (2025 survey)

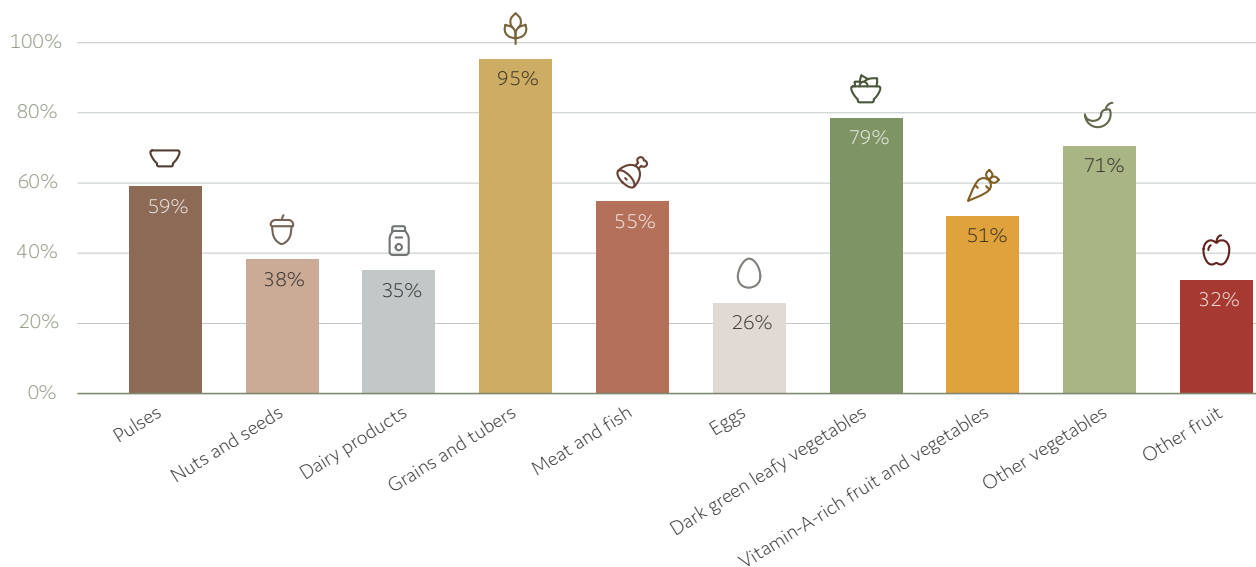


Figure 3: Distribution of food groups consumed in the MDD-W indicator (2025 survey, percentage of women surveyed who consumed the respective food group in the past 24 hours).

much as what grows in the fields. This underlines the multidimensional character of agroecology, where agronomic skill and social practice strengthen local food systems. The finding is consistent with international research on agroecology (31, 34, 37, 39, 50) and with the practical experience of the local partner organisations of the Alliance Sufosec.

The relationship becomes clearer still among households that both farm diversely and work together with their neighbours. Of 100 households that neither organise in groups nor farm particularly diversely, about 55 are affected by food insecurity according to the study. Of 100 households that do both, only 41 are. That is 14 households fewer, around a quarter fewer affected. In a village of one hundred families this means in specific terms that in 14 additional households there is enough to eat, without any additional resources from outside.

This carries all the more weight because hunger also depends on prices, conflict and the weather, that is, on factors over which smallholder farmers have little influence. In the statistical model this corresponds to odds of 0.58 to 1 (odds ratio 0.58). No other combination in the survey shows such a marked difference (32).

One possible explanation lies in shared knowledge: agroecology replaces purchased fertilisers and synthetic pesticides with the exchange of experience and skill. For many smallholder farmers this knowledge becomes accessible through exchange and networking, and only then can it be put into practice. Diversity in the fields also spreads the risk as, if one crop fails because of pests or drought, the remaining crops carry the harvest.

The data also raise questions. Among households that combine soil health practices with a reduction in agricultural inputs, the odds of being affected are about 39% higher in the data. Similar patterns emerge for combinations with livestock: around 17% for reduced inputs plus livestock, around 15% for soil health plus livestock (32).

The available data do not allow this finding to be explained conclusively. The most plausible explanation is a selection effect: such combinations are found more frequently among households that already farm under particularly difficult conditions. The transition phase may also play a role, when purchased inputs fall away before soils and diversity deliver. The higher values do not show that these practices are harmful.

Because 20 combinations were examined in total, individual values that are only just significant should also be read with caution. The central finding is unaffected: biodiversity and the social dimension are consistently linked to greater food security.

Seven out of ten women meet the minimum standard

Dietary diversity has so far been little documented in Sufosec projects. The 2025 survey therefore asks for the first time not only whether there is enough food on the plate, but also how varied women's diets are. This gives an indication of the quality of their nutrition.

The MDD-W is a minimum measure standardised by the FAO for the dietary diversity of women between 15 and 49 years of age, that is, of childbearing age (see box p. 16). At the level of a population group it is regarded as a proxy for micronutrient intake (27). This brings malnutrition into view: those who eat almost nothing but cereals take in enough calories but too little iron, vitamin A and zinc. Experts call this hidden hunger. It hits women particularly hard, because their need for iron and folic acid is higher during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

In 2025, the household survey collected the MDD-W in 40 project regions. In the median, 69% of women reach the minimum standard. That is, on the previous day they had eaten foods from at least five of the

ten groups. For regions marked by poverty and fragile food systems, this is a high value. Large regional differences are nonetheless apparent. In Central America 89% of women reach the minimum standard in the median, in South America 88%, in South and South-East Asia 87%. In East Africa the figure is only 58%, in Central Africa 56%, in West Africa 54%.

The ten food groups are consumed with varying frequency. Grains and tubers appear on the plates of nearly all women surveyed (95%), while leafy green vegetables are eaten by four out of five. At the lower end of the spectrum are eggs, dairy products, and fruit. A good quarter of the women had eaten an egg the previous day (26%), and about a third had eaten fruit or dairy products (Figure 3). This is due less to gaps in knowledge than to availability, seasonality, and purchasing power, factors that vary from region to region. This is not a problem unique to individual project regions. Worldwide, 2.69 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet; in Africa, two-thirds of the population (55).

More practices, a more diverse diet

The 2025 household survey makes it possible for the first time to examine the relationship between agroecological practice and dietary diversity: each additional agroecological practice is associated with an around 25% higher chance that a woman in the household reaches the minimum standard (32). At



"At half past five, I get up and go to the school garden. Watching a plant grow from seed to a vegetable ready for harvest gives me a real sense of responsibility. Many people think of farming as work for the uneducated. I still want to become a woman farmer, even though I know the path won't be easy."

Ally Majidi Makundi, final-year secondary school student, Tanzania

Agroecological practices and dietary diversity among women in three projects (2025 survey)

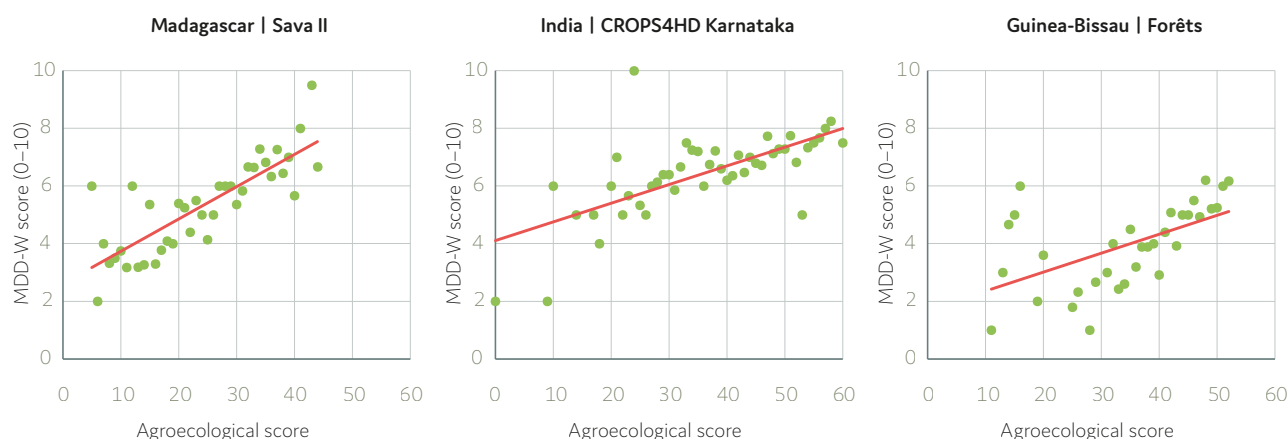


Figure 4: Relationship between the agroecology score and dietary diversity among women (MDD-W) in Madagascar (Sava II), India (CROPS4HD Karnataka), and Guinea-Bissau (Forêts). As the agroecology score increases (22 practices, maximum 60 points), more women meet the MDD-W minimum standard of five out of the ten food groups. The three projects are representative of those in which the correlation has been statistically confirmed. Each point represents the average MDD-W score of all women with the respective agroecology score; the red line indicates the linear trend line. Survey conducted in 2025; household-level data: www.sufosec.ch/en/eb2026.

the level of the project regions, this relationship is apparent for example in Madagascar, India and Guinea-Bissau (Figure 4).

In the projects in Mali (SKBo), Kenya (Diocese of Machakos), Guinea-Bissau (Forêts) and Colombia (Conectando Páramos), women's diets are more diverse the more social practices their household applies. Where households exchange knowledge, work together and extend credit to one another, it is therefore not only food security that rises, but dietary diversity as well.

One possible explanation for this finding is that what grows in the household's own garden and fields goes straight onto the plate and broadens the range of food available. More money may also be available. Those who farm more diversely are more likely to generate surpluses for sale, and those who have to buy less fertiliser, pesticide and seed spend less. Both widen the scope to buy at the market what the fields do not provide, such as dairy products or fruit (35, 36, 38, 49).

Three implications for programme work

First: where agroecology has been practised for years, hunger is on the decline. A single practice changes little; it is only through the combination of multiple practices, in the field and within the community, that food insecurity decreases. Women and men farmers

are gradually transitioning their farming practices, learning from one another and from local organisations that share their region's agroecological knowledge. This takes years, not just one growing season. Projects designed to permanently improve food security and dietary diversity must be planned for the long term.

Second: women need more than technical knowledge to grow and eat a wider variety of foods. Agroecology is more than just a farming method: organising into groups, knowledge sharing, and managing resources collectively go hand in hand with greater food security. In households that adopt more agroecological practices and organise themselves into groups, women are more likely to meet the minimum dietary diversity standard. Such groups do not need to be created from the outside, as they already exist in the form of village structures, self-help groups, and solidarity groups. But they need expert advice and support, as well as the freedom to act and make decisions. This is what the Alliance means when it speaks of localisation.

Third: in fragile contexts, agroecology alone is not enough. Hunger is not declining everywhere. In projects in Chad, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire, food insecurity is increasing slightly despite agroecological efforts. In those places, conflicts, climate shocks, and seasonal access to land and water have a greater impact

than agroecological efforts. Agroecology remains the foundation there as well. However, it is effective only when development cooperation, peacebuilding, and humanitarian aid work in tandem.

Five years of impact measurement by the Alliance Sufosec

Five years of data collection, consistently using the same core instruments, with a total of over 56,000 households surveyed. The study's strength lies in its scope and local roots: it collects data at the same point in the season every year, draws a new, representative sample annually from the project households it monitors, and uses culturally and linguistically adapted instruments. The results were published in the 2022 and 2024 nutrition reports (47, 48). This report continues the series with the 2024 and 2025 surveys. More in-depth findings are provided by the ongoing Sufosec Impact Study, whose results will be available in 2027.

Data spanning five years reinforce the Alliance Sufosec's conviction that agroecology is an answer to the crisis in food systems. Crucially, it cannot be broken down into individual elements but functions as a whole. Agronomic, social, and economic practices are intertwined, and decision-making power lies locally with the people who make their living from agriculture.



“In my fields, I grow various types of millet, oilseeds, and legumes according to the principle of Akkadi Saalu, a traditional South Indian intercropping system. This diversity improves soil health and ensures my family's food security. As a woman farmer, I am also an entrepreneur, a learner, and a protector of nature.”

Bibi Jan, smallholder farmer, India

KENYA IN FOCUS



Agnes Nzesya in her intercropped field in Makueni:
sorghum, sunflowers and maize.

MY SEEDS, MY FOOD, MY FUTURE

The Sufosec household survey identified a robust pattern across 12,000 households on three continents: the more diverse the agriculture, the lower the food insecurity. The social dimension is equally clear in 2025: households that join forces with others and manage their resources collectively are less likely to be affected by food insecurity. The two factors have the greatest combined impact. What these figures mean in everyday life is evident in Kenya, one of the Alliance Sufosec's priority countries.

Two keys, one fortune

A heavy metal box sits on the wooden table in the shade of the mango tree, secured with two padlocks. Pius, a teacher at the district school and secretary of the group, reads aloud the minutes from the previous week. About twenty people are listening, almost all of them women. Agnes and Joyce, the two trustees, stand up, take their keys, and each open a lock. The treasurer, Rosemary, counts the money aloud, while Pius reconciles it with the books. Inside the box are 230,000 Kenyan shillings (about 1,400 Swiss francs), the solidarity group's assets.

Pius calls on the members one by one. Mika. Winfred. Agnes. Joyce. Jacqueline. Elizabeth. Rosemary. Anastasia. Ruth. Each places 75 shillings (just under CHF 0.50) on the table, the weekly contribution. Three members pay a fine for being late. Then come the loan requests: 20,000 shillings for school tuition, 30,000 for a sick family member. The group reviews the applications and votes on them. Afterwards, the repayments are made. Finally, Pius closes the box; the two trustees each attach a lock and secure it.

"Outside, you pay 30% interest," says Pius. "With us, it's 5%. It's our own money." The group started small, with 20 shillings a week; deposits rose as trust grew, first to 50, now to 75. In the fields, the group also acts as a unified whole: a shared nursery for seedlings, mutual aid, and shared knowledge about seeds, chicken farming, and pest control. The women and men farmers are no longer on their own.



Cash box and account book: the weekly meeting of the solidarity group in Makueni.

Almost all the men are absent this morning. They are rarely in the fields during the day: many work or look for work in the cities, often in Nairobi. The women shoulder the burden of the transition to agroecology, managing the savings account, and raising chickens in addition to their family responsibilities and the daily task of fetching water. Recognition from the men often only comes once the results are visible, when the garden yields a harvest and money starts coming in. This is precisely the "additional workload paradox" that Chapter 2 identifies: the very practice that empowers women can increase their burden as long as men and gender roles are not taken into account.



Rebecca Kyalo and Matato with freshly harvested root and leafy vegetables on their farm in Makueni.

maize and beans,” says Rebecca. “We had to buy our vegetables.” Today, the yields cover the family’s needs, and whatever’s left over brings in money. This also includes about one litre of milk a day from the two cows, which Rebecca can sell to the school next door. The impact of the food forest is also reflected in the household survey: with each additional agroecological practice, the likelihood that women will have a sufficiently diverse diet increases by about a quarter. Kenya is one of the few countries in Africa with a national agroecology strategy, which the Ministry of Agriculture adopted in 2024.

Seven layers

On a terraced hillside in the Makueni district lies the farm of Rebecca Kyalo and her husband Matato. When we arrive, it is raining, and Rebecca and Matato have been waiting for us before planting the spinach seedlings in the bed. Now time is running out. Using a short stick, Rebecca pokes hole after hole into the wet soil, spacing each seedling diagonally, 30 centimetres apart. “This gives us better control over pests,” she says, without looking up.

Ever since Rebecca joined the solidarity group “The Wild Hares”, she has stopped using insecticides, opting instead for ash water against soft-bodied pests and eggshells and salt grains against snails. Matato is also a member of a solidarity group, but a different one. “Together, we bring more experience to our small farm,” he says with a laugh. His commitment is by no means a given. “Only about a third of the men support their wives with farming at home,” says Regina Kamau, director of Utooni, a partner organisation of Fastenaktion in Kenya. For over twenty years, the organisation has been building sand dams in the region’s small rivers: concrete weirs behind which the river water remains trapped in the sand during dry seasons. Without these dams, there would be nothing to harvest in Makueni except in years with good rainfall. Utooni also advises farming families on transitioning to agroecological farming.

Matato and Rebecca lead us into their food forest. “It’s planted in seven layers,” they explain: windbreak trees at the very top, followed by mango and citrus trees, shrubs like pomegranate, herbs and root vegetables, climbing plants, and squash at ground level. Each layer has a purpose. “We used to grow only



Rebecca Kyalo planting the spinach seedlings in the wet, mulched soil.

Eighty chickens in one go

Agnes Nzesya is a member of the Upendo group in Makueni. Her focus is on chicken farming. For her family she keeps native breeds, whose meat is better and which grow more slowly. For the market she keeps Sasso breeds, a fast-growing line for meat production. She keeps 85 of these birds in addition to 20 native ones. They produce about 50 eggs per day. In November alone, she sold 80 chickens in one go for 80,000 shillings (just under 500 francs).

Agnes grows the feed herself: sorghum, sunflower seeds, and maize meal. "When they hear that I've sold chickens, they call right away," she says of her children in Nairobi. As a widow, she runs the operation on her own, using the income to support two adult children who can't find steady work in the city, as well as her grandchildren's education. A portion of the proceeds goes into the solidarity group's shared savings account.



Agnes Nzesya feeding her Sasso chickens in a closed run in Ukia, Makueni.



The local breeds roam freely around the farmyard.

Kenya, a priority country

Kenya is one of two programme countries where four of the six Sufosec organisations are active simultaneously: Fastenaktion, SWISSAID, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse (VSF-Suisse), and Vivamos, each in collaboration with local partner organisations that contribute local agroecological expertise. At the same time, it is the only country where all five dimensions of the agroecological assessment framework are visible in the field: biodiversity, soil health, reduced use of agricultural inputs, livestock, and the social dimension.

The initiative spans from Turkana and Baringo in the arid north, through Makueni, Kajiado, and Isiolo in the semi-arid central region, to Bungoma, Kakamega, and Nairobi. Approximately 30,000 people participate directly in the project activities, including about 20,000 women.

A land of contrasts. Kenya has one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the world: in the 2025 Global Hunger Index, the country ranked 103rd out of 123. The nearly annual droughts in the north contribute to this. The realities of life in the pastoral dry zone and in the metropolis of Nairobi are worlds apart, compounded by social inequalities in access to land, water, and income, as well as gender-based inequalities. The most vulnerable are women, widows, and pastoralist communities, whose livelihoods are directly threatened by drought, price fluctuations, and insecure land rights.

What can be voiced within the group

In Mumias, Kakamega County, Vivamos is collaborating with the local organisation CJPD. The project focuses on the particularly precarious situation of widows, women who lose their land after their husbands' deaths, in one of Kenya's most densely populated regions. "From widow to widow" is the guiding principle: trained women facilitators pass on agroecological knowledge, group by group. What circulates at first are seeds, compost, and a handful of chickens. Then something else: within the group, women speak out loud for the first time about their right to their deceased husbands' land. In the group setting, it becomes possible to voice what an individual widow might not dare to say.



Through the project in Mumias, widows not only acquire agroecological knowledge, they also strengthen one another.

What is happening here goes beyond seeds and land. The goal is to highlight women's fundamental rights and raise awareness among local decision-makers. It is a gradual change that not only empowers individual women but also challenges rigid gender roles.

Who does what in Kenya

Fastenaktion works with partner organisations in Kajiado, Laikipia, Kakamega, Bungoma, and Makueni. These organisations promote the establishment of solidarity groups, agroecology, and school gardens; across the programme, local peace committees have mediated a total of approximately 700 conflicts over land and water. Through the international consortium RAISE, the land and seed rights of farming communities are incorporated into national policy.

SWISSAID is active in Baringo, Turkana, and six other counties through the Seed Savers Network Kenya (SSN-K). The network has over 101,000 members, 70% of whom are women, and operates 51 community seed banks for local varieties.

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse is strengthening the livelihoods of pastoralist communities in northern and western Kenya. Through the Anolei Women Camel Milk Cooperative, VSF-Suisse promotes the professional collection and marketing of camel milk. Mobile One Health stations improve the health of people, animals, and the environment in remote pastoral areas. In addition, VSF-Suisse creates jobs and income for young people and women through sustainable poultry farming and improved market access. This secures incomes, strengthens food security, and sustainably improves resilience to droughts.

Vivamos supports widows' groups and smallholder farming families in Kakamega and Bungoma through agroecology, nutrition education, the protection of natural water sources, as well as forest protection and reforestation. In Nairobi, the organisation supports youth affected by poverty by providing vocational training in urban gardening and food processing.





Agnes Esinyen in the Kalemnyang seed bank: the seeds are stored in recycled bottles, each labelled with its owner's name.

Borrowed ten, returned twelve

On the wall of the Kalemnyang seed bank is a sentence in English and Ng'aturkana, the language of the Turkana: "My seed, my food, my future." Agnes Esinyen, the chairwoman, translates it herself from Ng'aturkana. She explains why native varieties are essential by citing nutrition: those who grow native seeds and eat native vegetables live healthier lives. Inside, it is cool and dark. Hundreds of small vials of seeds line the shelves.

Turkana, the arid northwest of Kenya: 77,000 square kilometres, with an average of 200 millimetres of rainfall per year. Droughts that used to occur every five years now happen almost every year. SWISSAID supports the Seed Savers Network Kenya here. The Kalemnyang seed bank opened in July 2024; 35 members store seeds there, and 300 women and men farmers have already received seeds. Anyone who borrows ten units returns twelve after the harvest, allowing the stock to grow without any external financial contributions. Agnes tests each batch with a germination test. "We count out ten seeds, place them on compost, and add water," she explains. "If more than eight germinate, we recommend the seeds for planting. If fewer do, they're no good." For sorghum, this becomes apparent after three days; for maize, after four to five.

What the women farmers safeguard has been embedded in local varieties over generations. Yet for decades, they obtained seeds from externally funded programmes. In the process, their knowledge of local varieties was lost, and with it, the generational wisdom of how to achieve good yields despite this harsh climate. External structural pressures lead to dependencies and food insecurity: where commercial

and externally funded seed systems expand, informal networks come under strain, and with them, their traditional knowledge. Kalemnyang is no exception; it is one of 51 community seed banks through which the Seed Savers Network Kenya is reversing this trend.

What happens daily in Kalemnyang was long a legal risk in Kenya: the Seeds and Plant Varieties Act criminalised the sale of unregistered varieties. In November 2025, the High Court in Machakos ruled that key provisions of the law were unconstitutional, stating that farmer-managed seed is protected by fundamental rights. The lawsuit was filed by 15 women and men smallholder farmers, supported by the Seed Savers Network, which deliberately chose not to be listed as a plaintiff so that the case would remain the farmers' own. "I'm proud to be a petitioner because I'm a woman farmer and I know how to grow native seeds," says Beatrice Wangui, one of them. "I want our seeds to be free." The government has filed an appeal; the ruling remains in effect until further notice.



Quality control: new seed is tested with a germination test before storage.

Turning milk cans into a business

In Isiolo, in the semi-arid centre of Kenya, the story begins in 1997 with five Somali women selling camel milk from cans. Milk destined for Nairobi is loaded onto the roofs of buses, travels six hours, and often arrives spoiled. To get a handle on these losses, the women join forces and pool their milk supplies, transportation, and sales. In 2010, they give this alliance a permanent form: the Anolei Women Camel Milk Cooperative.

Camels are particularly well-suited for this enterprise. They are part of a long tradition of pastoralism in the north and withstand water shortages far better than cattle: when pastures dry up and cattle have long since stopped producing milk, camels continue to provide milk. Thus, camel milk serves as a dual safety net, a climate-resilient food source, and a reliable source of cash income all at once. During drought periods, it covers up to half of the nutritional needs of pastoral communities in northern Kenya; in Isiolo, according to surveys by VSF-Suisse, camel milk accounts for about 41% of household income during the rainy season and still about 36% during the dry season.

What started as five women with milk cans has grown into a business. Together with VSF-Suisse and the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), the cooperative in Isiolo established its own collection and processing facility: refrigeration, hygiene training, and product development. Milk that is reliably cooled and processed arrives fresh in the city, and the volume of deliveries is growing accordingly: from 300 litres daily in 2010 to up to 7,000 litres today during the rainy season, bound for Eastleigh in Nairobi. Thanks to the cooperative, household incomes and food security have also increased, primarily due to camel milk during dry and drought periods.



Delivery at the Anolei cooperative in Isiolo, where the camel milk is filtered and cooled.

Strongest together

The work of the four Sufosec organisations in Kenya is guided by a common goal: to make women-centred agroecology more robust. Credit instead of debt, ongoing group-based training, a seed bank for seeds that belong to the women anyway, and a first space where legal issues are discussed. The Sufosec household survey measured these elements together for the first time in 2025: diversity in the field and community within the group have the greatest impact where the two come together.

Rebecca Kyalo, Agnes Nzesya, the widows of Mumias, Agnes Esinyen, and the founders of Anolei are not the beneficiaries of a project. They make decisions about their children's health, speak out about their land for the first time, preserve the seed knowledge accumulated over a hundred dry seasons, and have built a business that supplies Nairobi daily. And they work as a group. This is empowerment through agroecology, which provides their families with a more diverse and secure diet: an active contribution to overcoming hunger.

In the darkness of the Kalemnyang seed bank, each vial bears the name of its owner.

"AGROECOLOGY CHANGES LIVES"



Stellamaris Mulaah picking a ripe papaya in her food forest.

AGROECOLOGY EXPERT STELLAMARIS MULAEH

Stellamaris Mulaeh heads the Kenyan organisation Act for Change and lives in Nairobi. She grew up in the southeast of the country in a large family with grandmothers who sorted seeds and passed on farming knowledge. In two decades of development cooperation she has watched kitchen gardens and diversified farming disappear, and has seen agroecology bring both back. In the International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026, she spoke with Christian Heuss about solidarity groups, food forests, and the cultural limits that even years of community work barely shift.

Stellamaris Mulaeh, you grew up in a farming family in southeastern Kenya. What shaped your relationship with agriculture?

My father was a high school teacher, and he wrote the first agricultural book for secondary schools in Kenya. I grew up among my great-grandmothers and grandmothers, all of them farmers, who taught me how to sort seeds, which herbs are used when someone in the community falls ill, and how we kept putting back into the soil what we got from the livestock. We practised a lot of mixed farming, very diverse. Seasons came, and we knew what was going to come: the fruits, the root crops. For us, agriculture was not just an income. It was the life, the culture, the diets, and really also a place to gather together. It is so ingrained in me that even when I am busy, I do farming. Yesterday I was on the farm. I ran away. I needed to take a break.

What brought you into agroecology?

It was the stories of the women in the communities where I worked. I would sit down and listen to women telling me how they were not able to feed themselves and their families every day. One of the first things that made me sad was a visit to a project in Tana River. The biggest Kenyan river flows through those fields, and yet people told me they had eaten spaghetti the previous evening, with a dollop of cooking oil, nothing else. So I started looking: where are the kitchen gardens we grew up with? When Fastenaktion began to think about a new country strategy, I was very clear:



Stellamaris Mulaeh as keynote speaker at the third national agroecology symposium in Kenya, July 2026.

we have to look at the agriculture people here are actually doing. If from one season to the next they depend on buying everything from the market, something is fundamentally wrong.

How do you explain agroecology, and how do you work with it?

There are thirteen principles, set out by the UN Committee on World Food Security. To explain agroecology in a village, I use the four dimensions proposed by CIDSE, the international network of Catholic development organisations (53). They group the principles into themes that can be explained locally. We start with the social dimension, the people, because agriculture is about people: how are they organised? What governs them? What does food mean to the women and men in this community? That is the foundation, and many organisations miss it because they skip straight to the environmental dimension and the practices. The economic dimension asks: how do we become attractive to markets, how do we build safety nets, how do we actually make a living from agroeco-

logy? Because farms are not run on water, they have to be run on money. And then agroecology has to be about politics: seed rights, access to land, market prices, who determines what. In Switzerland people often ask me whether organic farming is agroecology. No. Organic farming focuses on the practice. Agroecology is a science, a movement and a practice.

How do you begin with a new village community?

You invite the community through the local administration. They sit under the tree and discuss what is working and what is not working in their food supply. Those who are keen to get involved form groups and register with the local project team. From there we start with the social dimension: the group defines its journey, agrees on leadership and on its own rules, and only then do we recall the indigenous values and traditional knowledge about working together, the Ubuntu philosophy embedded in our communities, before they even start looking at soil. We rebuild community trust, which in many places was lost. The groups gather every week, rotating from home to home, all from the same locality, not more than a three-kilometre radius, so they know each other. Then we begin the kitchen garden, which brings quick and visible results. Within six weeks, people are not buying vegetables. And the others, who did not believe it, are amazed: these guys have vegetables without chemicals!

Why do women play a special role in agroecology?

They are the custodians of love, life, seed and land. They work the land and adjust it to the seasons. They keep the seed from one season to the next. They know which medicine or herbs the community needs. And they are the ones hardest hit by climate change. But women are not a homogeneous group. When you become a widow in some communities in Kenya, you lose your right to land and your right to speak up in the community. You are demonised for being a widow. A pastoralist woman does not own the livestock, but she has access to its products, which is a very different story from women who have grown up in crop farming. I am one of the few women privileged to own land in my own name, because I negotiated that.

What changes in a household when a woman joins a solidarity group?

In the first six months there is already a change in how much money the woman contributes to the household income through the kitchen garden. Pre-

viously she had to ask her husband: please give me money to buy vegetables, or to pay for pencils for the child. Now she is able to. Importantly, it is also the labour, because they work together, and this lessens the burden on each woman and frees up time for other things. The group is also a cushion: even if she is farming a section and the man wants to move her, the other women will come and back her up. And when a woman contributes to the budget, household decision-making becomes participatory rather than the preserve of men.

Where does cultural change reach its limits?

What the solidarity groups have achieved so far is at least 85% access to productive assets, and that means land: that women can access land to practise their agroecology. But women becoming owners of the land is governed by patriarchy, and that is a no-go zone for many of the solidarity groups. Tree rights are another example: in some communities culture dictates that women are not allowed to plant certain trees. That is why we engage men, individually or together with their wives. We call them agroecology male champions or agroecology couple champions. Once men are convinced, tree rights are respected and the food forest can be extended. And what convinces men is the economic benefit, then they quickly agree this can work. When a woman is given unproductive land and works on it, in most cases you will find that the men make more land available, because they have seen it.

Kenya adopted a national agroecology strategy in 2024. What has that changed?

It had a ripple effect at county level. In three of the counties where we work there are now county agroecology policies: Vihiga and Makueni have them, and in Bungoma the policy is about to be approved. That gives the groups a platform, because they were already implementing agroecology before there was any policy framework. When it comes to the county budgeting process, they can now say: as agroecology farmers of this region, we need this in the budget for the year. In Vihiga, together with Caritas Kakamega, we helped shape the extension service system for the whole county. And we provided exposure: we got the directors of agriculture, of education and of water to come onto the farms and have the conversation there. Once they have seen agroecology in practice, they talk about it differently.



Freshly harvested cabbage from her own farm makes Stellamaris Mulaeh happy; behind her, bananas and papayas grow in her food forest.

What would you say to the Swiss Parliament, which decides on Sufosec funding?

The money given to the Sufosec Alliance is working. It is changing people's lives, it is changing ecosystems, and it is building a better food system. Especially this year, the International Year of the Woman Farmer, we can see that agroecological transitions are having an impact: in households, on the land, in the negotiations farmers hold over fair prices. If more money is put in, we reach more communities. It means that Switzerland makes a huge contribution to a better and fairer food system.

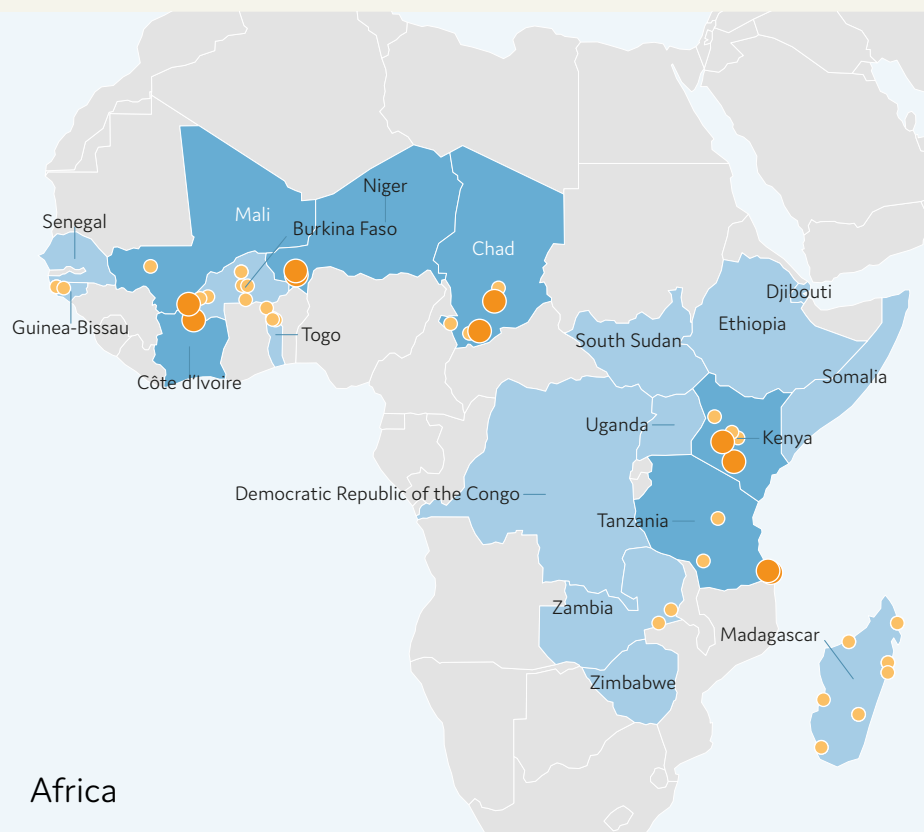
What would be a measurable success of this International Year of the Woman Farmer?

Recognition alone is not enough. It is really about whether the woman farmer in Bungoma, somewhere in Senegal, somewhere in India, can actually claim her

rights, is recognised in her own right for her contribution to the food system, and is able to access services she has long been barred from: markets, finance and credit. And whether it is accepted that a woman is entitled to self-care, that the care economy recognises and gives a value to what she contributes to the food system.

The conversation between Stellamaris Mulaeh and Christian Heuss took place on 27 May 2026 by video call.

ALLIANCE SUFOSEC



- Country with repeated measurements
- Additional survey country
- Project site: household survey with repeated measurements
- Project site: household survey

91,000 households practise agroecological farming

Counted in the projects of the six organisations, 2025 survey. The households comprise approximately 455,000 people.

54% of the partner organisations have a say in the decision-making process

The partner organisations assess annually how much say they have (2025 survey).

Who we are

In 2020, six Swiss development organisations with different areas of expertise, countries of operation, and development policy profiles joined forces to form the Alliance Sufosec: Fastenaktion, SWISSAID, Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse, Vivamos, Aqua Alimentata, and the Skat Foundation. They are all united by one conviction: women and men smallholder farmers who practise agriculture based on agroecological principles improve their nutrition and become more independent.

The work is carried out by approximately 300 local partner organisations in 28 countries of the Global South. Since 2022, the Alliance has published the Global Food Report every two years (47, 48). It is based on the annual household survey, which measures food security, dietary diversity, and agroecological practices among smallholder households in selected project regions.



1.2 million people directly reached

In 2025, the six organisations reach 1.2 million disadvantaged people through their projects, 821,000 of whom belong to particularly disadvantaged groups, 59% of whom are women.

Alliance Sufosec: what the six achieve together

The Alliance focuses on four interconnected areas of action: sustainable food systems, resilience in ecosystems, a strong civil society, and equitable partnerships. The six organisations are working towards the same goal: to sustainably improve food security for women and men smallholder farmers. Each contributes a different area of expertise, ranging from small-scale irrigation to animal health and farmer-managed seed, to vocational training and community empowerment.

These efforts are brought together in a joint programme supported by the SDC through a programme grant.

On the ground, around 300 partner organisations provide technical advice, facilitate knowledge sharing, and foster networking, with the aim of reducing external dependencies and strengthening communities.

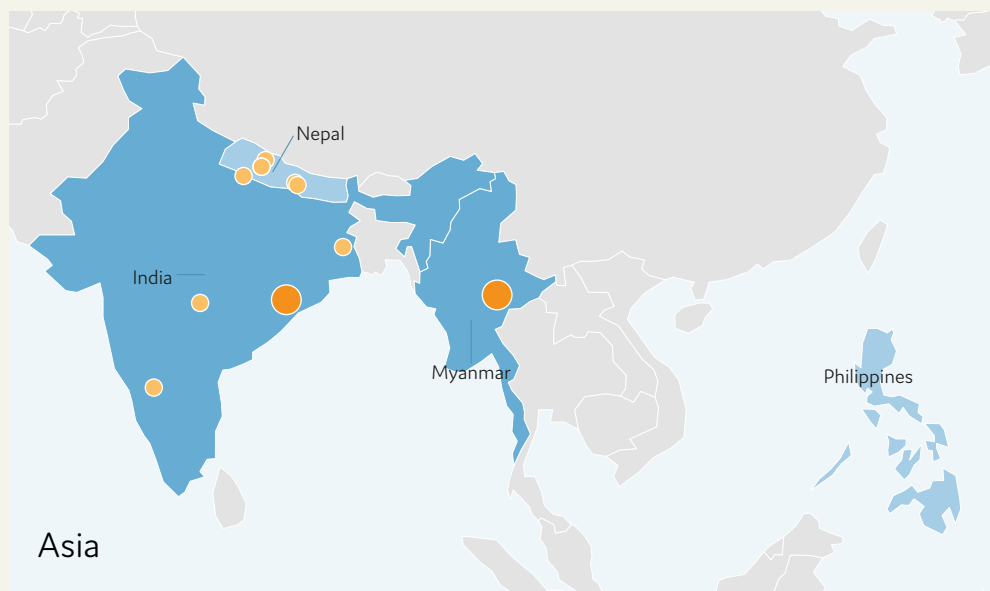
The six organisations regularly assess the impact of their work. Since 2021, they have been using the same tools to track changes in household nutrition in the project regions. To date, over 56,000 households have been surveyed, and the data have been scientifi-

One public franc becomes 3.6 francs

The SDC, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, contributed CHF 12.8 million in 2025. With donations, foundation grants, and the six organisations' own funds, the programme totals CHF 45.5 million.

20-percentage-point drop in food insecurity

In the 16 projects with repeated measurements, the proportion of households experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity fell by an average of 20.5 percentage points. The comparison is made between the 2025 survey and the first measurement, which took place between 2021 and 2024, depending on the project.



cally analysed. The data allow for comparisons across countries and organisations and highlight which approaches improve food security and where improvements are needed.

In this way, the Alliance contributes to the goals Switzerland has set for itself in international cooperation: combating hunger, managing resources sustainably, and reducing poverty.

Localisation: global partnerships on an equal footing

For the Alliance, localisation means not only that funds flow to the Global South, but also that local stakeholders have a say in how those funds are used. The partner organisations are familiar with the local soils, markets, and social structures, and they are increasingly demanding forms of collaboration that give them greater decision-making power.

In 2024, the six member organisations committed to four points: more flexible funding for partner organisations, greater say in setting the agenda, better access to additional funders, and more funding for networking and exchange among countries in the Global South (10). Once a year, partner organisations can use a questionnaire to assess the extent to which they feel they have a say in their collaboration with the Alliance organisations.

Scientific support

The Alliance reviews its work in its annual household survey, collaborating with academic institutions: the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies (IZFG) at the University of Bern, as well as NADEL, ETH Zurich's centre of competence for development and cooperation. In addition, there is the ETH spin-off Restor, which makes environmental data visible via a geodata platform. For the Sufosec Impact Study, which will be published in 2027, country teams are active in six countries. Many of these teams collaborate with local research institutions.

Outlook

The Alliance continues to work on resilient, locally driven food systems in the Global South. Data from the past five years show what matters most: where agroecology has been implemented over several years, hunger is on the decline. Programmes designed to bring about change require time, funding that extends beyond a single year, reliable partnerships on an equal footing, and a policy environment that promotes sustainable agriculture.

ORGANISATIONS

Fastenaktion

Ending hunger together

Fastenaktion is a Swiss organisation dedicated to international cooperation. It is politically independent and communicates on an equal footing, transparently, in a gender-equitable and culturally sensitive manner. Its vision is a just world without hunger. A world in which the right to food is realised, a life of dignity is ensured for all people, and creation is preserved in all its diversity, today and for future generations. At the heart of everything it does are people in their dignity, with their rights, abilities, and needs.

Active in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, it works together with local partner organisations to achieve lasting improvements in the living conditions of disadvantaged people. It values long-term partnerships and alliances. In doing so, it draws on local expertise and structures and, in dialogue with its partner organisations, develops effective approaches such as agroecology, which strengthen local food systems. It supports communities as they organise themselves and assert their fundamental rights, in the spirit of helping people help themselves.

Right to food

Both in Switzerland and internationally, it identifies the causes of poverty and environmental degradation and advocates for binding regulations to protect people and the environment. Its goal is to create a political framework that guarantees the right to food and access to secure livelihoods for all. It highlights solutions and alternatives that enable fair and sustainable production and consumption.

It encourages people in Switzerland to help shape a socio-ecological transition. To this end, it relies on dedicated networks and ecumenical cooperation. Especially during Lent, it brings its concerns to the attention of the Church and the public and encourages a sustainable lifestyle. Fastenaktion was founded in 1961 on the initiative of the Catholic youth movement. It is guided by Christian social ethics, human rights, and science.



Josephine Akacho, a smallholder farmer in Kenya, watering her field.

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Fastenaktion
Action de Carême
Azione Quaresimale

SWISSAID

On the ground. Fighting hunger.

As a foundation independent of any religious denomination or political party, SWISSAID creates sustainable and equitable solutions to the global food crisis. Its vision is a world in which even people living in extreme poverty can lead healthy, dignified, and self-determined lives. To this end, SWISSAID advocates for an agroecological transition in agriculture. The foundation supports people in the Global South in using diverse and adaptable seeds, conserving the soil, and marketing their food independently and profitably. In doing so, SWISSAID simultaneously strengthens seed diversity and combats climate change.

Women play a central role in sustainably overcoming hunger. They are responsible for more than three quarters of the world's food supply, yet they are affected by malnutrition and undernutrition far more frequently than men. Breaking down outdated gender roles, strengthening women's rights, especially those of women farmers, and raising awareness among men are key components of SWISSAID's projects.

Local work, global impact

SWISSAID relies on local expertise and sustainable knowledge sharing driven by the Global South. It supports women and men smallholder farmers in finding appropriate solutions, building networks, and, when necessary, making their voices heard at higher levels. International experts are integrated into this knowledge sharing. The coordination offices work closely with local partners to implement projects efficiently. This close collaboration helps ensure that SWISSAID can provide assistance quickly and without red tape in emergency situations.

For a Switzerland based on solidarity

SWISSAID advocates for a cosmopolitan and solidarity-based Switzerland that supports positive change in the Global South. It represents the interests of disadvantaged people and countries at the development policy level. SWISSAID provides information, raises awareness, and advocates for Switzerland to fulfil its social responsibility in legislation, economic and trade policy, and consumer behaviour.



Bibi Jan harvesting millet in southern India. Her commitment to traditional seeds strengthens biodiversity, food sovereignty, and the role of women in agriculture.

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SWISSAID 
ON THE GROUND, AGAINST HUNGER.

Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Suisse

Healthy animals. Healthy people.
Healthy environment.

Animals as the key to food security

For millions of families in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, livestock are far more than just possessions. They provide milk, meat, and income; serve as financial security in times of crisis; and enable children to attend school. Healthy animals are therefore a key prerequisite for food security and resilience in livelihoods.

VSF-Suisse supports vulnerable populations in improving their livelihoods and food security by promoting the health and productivity of animals in a sustainably managed environment. In a total of ten countries in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, it implements approximately 50 projects annually in collaboration with local partner organisations.

Animal health creates opportunities

A central pillar of its work is local animal health specialists, known as Community Animal Health Workers. They provide veterinary services even in remote regions, administer vaccinations, detect diseases early, and advise livestock keepers. They are often the only point of contact for families who do not have access to veterinarians.

VSF-Suisse combines humanitarian aid with long-term development cooperation. In addition to providing animal health services, it promotes the processing and marketing of animal products, strengthens local markets, and creates economic opportunities for women and young people. In this way, it improves food security, income, and resilience all at once.

Locally rooted, internationally connected

Its work follows the One Health approach, which considers the health of humans, animals, and the environment as an integrated whole. It has a lean and decentralised structure, with 150 local staff members in five country offices in Africa and a team of ten staff members at its headquarters in Bern. The country programmes are led by local managers and developed in close collaboration with communities, government agencies, and partner organisations.



Treatment of a flock of sheep by a community animal health worker in Ethiopia.

Since 1988, VSF-Suisse has been working to ensure that people who make their living from livestock farming can take charge of their own future.

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VÉTÉRINAIRES
SANS FRONTIÈRES
SUISSE

Vivamos

For lives with a future

Vivamos strengthens communities in Latin America and East Africa through programmes focused on education, water, and food. The organisation prepares young children for school, guides young adults as they enter the workforce, and supports rural communities in the sustainable management of water, forests, and soil. To this end, Vivamos tailors its work to the local context, adopts an evidence-based approach, and collaborates with competent local partner organisations.

Sustainable forestry, water management and agriculture

Through its “Water and Food” programme, Vivamos supports local authorities and communities in protecting key watersheds and forest reserves to preserve water security and biodiversity. Experienced advisers train smallholder families in agroecological farming practices so they can sustainably increase their production and improve their food security without overexploiting natural resources. This also makes them more resilient to the effects of climate change. In addition, the organisation supports women and men small-scale producers in joining forces, jointly developing market channels, and asserting their rights.

Fair future opportunities for children and young people

Through its early intervention and vocational training programmes for socially disadvantaged children and youth, Vivamos creates equal opportunities for a successful school journey and better income prospects. The organisation places a strong emphasis on the healthy development of young children and the psychosocial empowerment of young adults. To this end, the organisation also involves parents, teaching staff, and healthcare professionals. To combat malnutrition and undernutrition, it improves the availability of nutrient-rich foods and provides families with practical knowledge about balanced, age-appropriate nutrition and household hygiene.



Harvest in the Atitlán Highlands in Guatemala: María Tzaj Chocoy provides her son Hefferson with a balanced diet thanks to cooking workshops and access to nutrient-rich foods.

Agile and impact-oriented

Vivamos operates with an agile approach and, as a learning organisation, regularly has the impact of its work scientifically evaluated. For this, Vivamos has already been honoured twice with the Impact Award from SDC/NADEL.

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Aqua Alimenta

Make it flow, let it grow

Since 1998, Aqua Alimenta, a Swiss non-profit association, has been focusing on the women and men farmers who produce a significant portion of the world's food on small plots of land. Through agroecology and small-scale irrigation, it is committed to ensuring that smallholder farming families can secure their livelihoods year-round, maintain a balanced diet, and lead self-determined lives.

The food supply and income of farming families depend directly on their natural resources. The commitment to sustainable food systems is therefore inextricably linked to the protection and responsible use of water, soil, and biodiversity. In this way, it helps ensure that soils remain fertile and water resources are preserved, that diverse and productive small-scale farming can thrive, and that women and men farmers become more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Aqua Alimenta works in partnership with locally rooted organisations in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, and India, based on shared goals. The organisation places great importance on strengthening its partners in their commitment, their capabilities, and their autonomy. Interactions with them are guided by respect and appreciation. It recognises the diversity of cultures and people and supports them regardless of their political and religious views or their ethnic background.

The partner organisations work together with women and men farmers and other relevant stakeholders to develop projects tailored to local conditions. Responsibility lies with the people and communities themselves: they improve their living conditions through their own efforts. The organisation supports them and mobilises the necessary resources.

Aqua Alimenta ensures the careful use of the funds entrusted to it and systematically reviews the results and impacts of its projects. The organisation reports transparently on its activities, highlighting not only its successes but also the challenges and inevitable setbacks it faces. Not only at the international level but also in Switzerland, it welcomes cooperation with like-minded partners so that together they can make a greater impact.



An employee of Ecovillage Madagascar talking with a smallholder farmer in the Vakinankaratra region of Madagascar.

Water that flows. Plants that grow. People who harvest enough and live self-determined lives. That's what Aqua Alimenta stands for: Make it flow, let it grow.

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Skat Foundation

Water, food security, and local resilience

The Skat Foundation is an independent Swiss non-profit organisation based in St. Gallen. For over 20 years, the Skat Foundation has been working on four continents to promote sustainable development cooperation with a focus on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Its vision is a world in which local actors can independently and sustainably ensure access to basic services.

The work focuses on strong local partnerships, global knowledge sharing and promoting ownership. Rather than providing services directly, the Skat Foundation supports and connects local organisations, specialists, businesses, and government agencies to help them develop and implement long-term, sustainable solutions for their communities.

The thematic focus is on water. The organisation takes an integrated approach that considers the interconnections between water, food security, health, climate resilience, and economic development. Within the Alliance Sufosec, the Skat Foundation is particularly active at the intersection of water, agriculture, and food. Improved access to water, productive water use, and agroecological approaches strengthen the livelihoods of women and men farmers and increase their resilience to the impacts of climate change.

In addition to its project work, Skat Foundation acts as a global knowledge hub, supports the learning processes, and serves as a strategic partner to local actors. In doing so, the organisation relies on the self-supply principle: technologies that can be produced and maintained locally, as well as locally trained specialists. The organisation promotes knowledge transfer between partner organisations, supports the dissemination of proven approaches, and strengthens local specialists through training and continuing education. As the host of the secretariat of the Rural Water Supply Network (RWSN), it also connects research, knowledge and practice in rural water supply worldwide and puts knowledge to work. In this way, the Skat Foundation contributes to resilient communities, sustainable development, and long-term, locally rooted solutions.



Tinashe Size with freshly harvested vegetables in the garden of the Mwenje Healthy Harvest project in the Nyamukamani region of Zimbabwe.

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Bern, September 2026



"Thanks to agroecological farming methods, I harvest more and a greater variety of food. In the past, the high costs of fertiliser and pesticides ate into my profits. For me, farming means independence, and agroecology means responsibility: we must protect and nourish the soil."

Mani Munda, smallholder farmer, India

"In addition to rice, maize, and cassava, we now also grow vegetables and fruits. Since we stopped using chemicals, our costs have gone down and the soil is more fertile again. That gives me greater peace of mind, especially since my family is now debt-free."

Lydia Harintsoa, smallholder farmer, Madagascar



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