



**AFRICAN CENTRE
FOR BIODIVERSITY**

Strengthening Agro-biodiversity in Southern Africa

External Review of the project

Final Report

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Abbreviation

ACB	African Centre for Biodiversity
AFA	Advocating for Agrobiodiversity
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Agreement
AFSA	Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa
AGN	African Group of Negotiator
AGRA	Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa
AHTEG	Ad Hoc Technical Experts Group Advocating for Agrobiodiversity
ARIPO	African Regional Intellectual Property Organisation
AU	African Union
BIBA	Biodiversity and Biosafety Association of Kenya
CAADP	Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme
CBD	Convention on Biodiversity
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
COPAGEN	Coalition pour le Protection du Patrimoine Génétique Africain
CRISPR	Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAC	East African Community
ESAFF	East and Southern Africa Farmers Association
FISPs	Farm Inputs Subsidy Programs
FMSS	Farmers-managed Seed Systems
FR	Farmers' Rights
FSS	Food System Section
GMO	Genetically Modified Organism
HHPs	Highly Hazardous Pesticides
HLPE	High Level Panel of Experts
ITPGRFA	International Treaty de Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
MAGNET	Malawi AgroBiodiversity Network
MVIWATA	Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (National Network of Farmers' Groups in Tanzania)
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBR	Plant Breeder's Rights
PBRA	Plant Breeder's Rights Act
PELUM	Participatory Ecological Land Use Management
PFAG	Peasant Farmers' Association of Ghana
PIA	Plant Improvement Act
PSS	Peasant Seed System
PVP	Plant Variety Protection
RWA	Rural Women Assembly
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SASA	Strengthening Agrobiodiversity in Southern Africa
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

SPGRC	SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre
ToRs	Terms of Reference
TWN	Third World Network
UNDROP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas
UNFSS	United Nations Food Systems Summit
UPOV	International Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties
WEMA	Water Efficient Maize for Africa
ZAAB	Zambian Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity
ZSSP	Zimbabwe Seed Sovereignty Programme

1. Introduction

This report presents the results of the external review of the “Strengthening Agro-biodiversity in Southern Africa – SASA” (hereinafter the SASA project) implemented by the African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) and funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).¹ This project started in 2013 as “Advocating for Agrobiodiversity – AFA” and was renamed SASA in 2016 for two additional phases (2016-2019 and 2019-2023), including an extension to June 2024. This review focuses on the outputs and outcomes of the project, and was conducted through a capitalisation approach, assessing the achievements, the challenges, and the lessons that can be drawn from these interventions.

Established in 2003, and registered in 2004, as the African Centre for Biosafety with an exclusive focus on genetically modified organisms (GMO) and biosafety, the work of ACB (now African Centre for Biodiversity) expanded to interconnected issues affecting food sovereignty and biodiversity in Africa, including seed laws, farmer seed systems, agricultural biodiversity, agroecology, and corporate expansion in agriculture. Its geographical focus is mostly on Southern, West, and East Africa, with extensive continental and global networks.

Together with other African NGOs and farmers’ organisations, and with support and collaboration from international ones, ACB works towards building an alternative food system in Africa, guided by food sovereignty and agroecology, in contrast with the industrial food system promoted by African policymakers through different institutions, policies, and laws at both country and regional levels. Central to this endeavour is the promotion of farmer-managed seed systems (FMSS), also referred to as peasant seed systems (PSS). Through their research, advocacy, and capacity building, including through different networks, ACB contributed to popularising FMSS and promoting the recognition, protection, and support of these systems on the continent.

ACB also pioneered work on the harmonisation of seed laws and mounted continent-wide opposition to such initiatives. In South Africa, it contributed substantially to obtaining exemptions in commercial seed laws for smaller producers after wide mobilisation, while still seeking a policy to recognise and support FMSS. It supported farmer experts who participated in the Ad Hoc Technical Experts Group (AHTEG) on the implementation of farmers’ rights (FR) under the aegis of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), where considerable progress has been made.

The work of ACB and the results thereof, as summarised above, are examined and assessed in the present review based on the terms of references and research questions presented below.

2. Purpose of the review

The SASA project aims at building momentum, especially amongst civil society organisations in Southern Africa to respond effectively and at scale to the issues associated with the three key areas of interventions, i.e., genetic modification, seed sovereignty and corporate expansion in agriculture. Its objectives include strengthening and supporting a network of active CSOs

¹ The ACB receives funds from Bread for the World, Germany, Swedbio, Thousand Currents, Porticus and the 11th Hour.

including farmer associations in SADC, at the national and regional levels to advocate towards seed sovereignty, with a wider development goal of establishing agricultural policies in Southern Africa that recognise farmers' rights, diversified farmer-managed seed systems, and contribute to sustainable maintenance and use of agricultural biodiversity. This work also entailed a focus on commercial seed laws and policies, farmer-managed seed systems, and agroecology.

The assessment focused on the work of ACB in responding to the aim of the project as stated above, examining the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned throughout all the phases of the project's implementation, from 2013 to 2023. The main purpose, as stated in the ToRs, was to interrogate and examine **the extent to which the ACB has achieved the objectives of the SASA project in terms of both outputs and outcomes**. To do this, the evaluators evaluated the following specific aspects:

- a. The extent to which ACB has influenced the discourse and policy spaces nationally, regionally, and internationally about issues relating to farmer's rights, farmer-managed seed systems, commercial seed laws, and seed sovereignty;
- b. The extent to which the ACB and its work have galvanised civil society and influenced advocacy nationally and regionally regarding commercial seed laws, the 1991 Act of the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV 1991), farmers' rights, and farmer-managed seed systems;
- c. The extent to which the ACB as a learning organisation has ensured that its work both reflected and responded to the challenges posed by the deepening food, climate, biodiversity, and social crises in Africa.

The evaluator was also expected to do the following:

- d. Conduct an objective and critical analysis to guide the ACB regarding its future work, both in terms of outputs and outcomes, taking into account the catalytic and weaving role that the ACB plays in Southern Africa and the wider continent toward civil society and government action;
- e. Recommend future opportunities for ACB and donors, such as SDC, to work in the seed policy spaces in Southern Africa with connections with the rest of the continent, in the context of interlinked issues including, agricultural biodiversity, food systems, climate change, agroecology, farmers' rights, and sustainable farmer-managed seed systems.

Based on the ToRs as summarised above, the reviewers identified four focus areas in conducting the assessment: (i) the achievements and impacts of the project; (ii) the key challenges and unexpected circumstances confronted during project implementation; (iii) the key lessons to draw from the project to guide the future work of ACB, and (iv) the prospective analysis of opportunities for continuous presence in the seed policy space in southern Africa for both SDC (and other donors) and ACB. The review was conducted in using the DAC evaluation criteria² in combination with other relevant tools and approaches for data collection and analysis as described in the methodology section.

² <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

3. Methodology

The evaluation was conducted in three steps: (i) scoping; (ii) data collection and analysis, and (iii) reporting.

3.1. Scoping of the review

This phase aimed at the clarification of the different aspects of the review. It entailed the analysis of the ToRs, the preparation of an inception report, and its discussion with ACB and SDC. This allowed the evaluators to share their understanding of the review process, the methodology, and its expected results. The interactions with ACB and SDC around the inception report allowed them to provide feedback to the evaluator on the following:

- (i) whether they had a good understanding of what was expected;
- (ii) whether the methodology was fit for the review process;
- (iii) how relevant the interview questions were, and
- (iv) who were the persons to interview.

The inception report was presented and discussed with ACB and SDC staff during an online meeting on 13 February 2024. It was revised in the light of the received feedback and sent to ACB on 20 February.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from two different sources, i.e., desk review and interviews. A third data source was the strategic workshop held after the preliminary analysis from desk review and interviews. For the desk review, the reviewers examined the following documents: the project documents, project reports, research results relevant publications, and previous end-of-phase reviews/evaluations. The reports and other documents produced during the implementation phase were reviewed to identify the actual results and to inquire how the project adapted to challenges in the course of implementation, including how this influenced its course and results. The review also examined current trends in seed laws, seed sovereignty, and related topics for guidance and positioning purposes for both ACB and its donors.

Interviews availed practical information from different actors, i.e., ACB staff, SDC, partners, and other target groups, including CSOs, farmers' organisations, government counterparts, and selected organisations working on food/seed sovereignty and seed laws. The interviews were conducted with the view to assess how ACB work is bringing change on the ground to compare it with reported results in different reports. They also allowed the evaluators to verify the impacts and effects of ACB's interventions through the project, and to assess how actors viewed ACB's work, how they engaged with it, and how relevant it has been for their work, including the policy and legal changes it succeeded to bring.

A questionnaire was prepared for the interview. Questions and the analytical framework were guided by the five OECD/DAC evaluation criteria (assessing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the project). The interviews were done online. Twenty

(26) six persons were identified with ACB's support, including twelve partners in the SASA focus countries (Malawi, SA, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), four at the regional level, four ACB staff members, two from SDC and four informants from West Africa to have the views of remote partners that indirectly benefit from ACB's work.

As a capitalisation activity, the review also entailed a dialogue with ACB and SDC, with the participation of some partners, for a common understanding of the review, a collective analysis of its preliminary results, and a reflection on the way forward. To accommodate such a participatory approach, the methodology of the review included a two-day workshop, held on 21-22 May 2024 in Johannesburg, where the preliminary results were presented and discussed with ACB, SDC, and some key partners.³

After the workshop, the full report was drafted and submitted to SDC and ACB for feedback. This was turned into a final report in the light of their comments.

4. Results

The key aspects of the project are analysed in connection with the key focus areas of the review as described in section 2 (purpose of the review), and the key questions identified using the five OECD/DAC evaluation criteria to assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the project.

4.1 Relevance of the SASA project

The relevance of the SASA project is linked to that of ACB as an organisation. Indeed, the project overlaps with the core areas of ACB's work. Since 2006, ACB has been vocal and critical of the Green Revolution, including an early critique of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). From 2009, it expanded its scope of work to include seed systems, with a focus on mounting opposition to laws on commercial seed systems, the push for African countries to join the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants, specifically the 1991 version of its convention (UPOV-1991), private intellectual property ownership on seeds, as well as continued resistance to corporate expansion in African agriculture.⁴

As part of its contribution towards building alternatives to dominating corporate agriculture and supporting smallholder production systems, ACB has done pioneering work in the elaboration of the discourse on farmers-managed seed systems (FMSS) in the context of agroecology.⁵ During this period, it contributed to popularising FMSS and promoting the recognition, protection, and support for these systems on the continent. It also pioneered work on the harmonisation of seed laws and raised continent-wide opposition to these initiatives. At the beginning of this intervention, the issues of Farmers' Rights and biodiversity were very weak in public debates, and in the policy actions of civil society and farmers' organisations. Also, seed policies and laws were, and continue to be, completely biased towards corporate agricultural regimes, with strong negligence and

³ The workshop was designed and facilitated by Davine Thaw who also provided some analytical support to the reviewer.

⁴ ACB Strategic Plan 2023-26

⁵ Ibid.

marginalisation of agro-ecological farming practices of small farmers, their rights and their seed varieties. The severity of some laws went up to the criminalisation of some seed activities conducted by farmers.⁶ It is reported that ACB is probably the first organisation to use the term “farmer-managed seed systems” to capture what was referred to as ‘informal seed systems’ and to advocate for their recognition and their promotion.⁷ A lexical innovation that contributed to changing the discourse and the views on farmers seed practices.

The SASA project emerged in this context as an opportunity to both ACB and its donor. While ACB was looking for more sources of funding to sustain its work on these issues, SDC had invested in formal seed systems, in partnership with national governments, in order to enhance the availability of maize seed varieties in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, and was looking for alternative approaches to ensure wider access to diverse seed crops for smallholder farmers beyond what can be provided by the commercial seed system.⁸ This ‘coincidence of interests’⁹ led to the ten-year intervention (2013-2023), allowing ACB to respond to an important demand for evidence-based advocacy for biosafety in Africa, securing agricultural biodiversity in Southern and East Africa and contesting corporate expansion while changing the narrative towards the redirection of public funds towards agroecology.

The integration of the SASA project into ACB’s theory of change also supports its relevance for alternative building to the promotion of industrial agrifood systems in Southern Africa. The ToC rests on long-term quality research and political analysis of issues relevant to African small-scale farmers, including analysis of current smallholder systems and related policies, and the impact of agribusiness on the food system. This research is shared with the general public, CSOs, networks, and movements, to collectively develop and amplify demands and solutions that will influence media, ‘thought leaders’, the private sector, and decision-makers, with the expectation that the resultant changes in government and corporate policies, laws, and programmes would lead to direct improvements in the lives of farming communities and the general population, and the food and farming systems.¹⁰

This approach of ACB, building on the strong support it received from SDC, aligns with the ecological food systems transition approach. This refers to one of the three key approaches to agro-food system transformation used as a framework of analysis in a previous evaluation of the SASA project. These approaches are (i) Agribusiness (a business-as-usual approach), the Green Revolution approach (also termed sustainable intensification when combined with some sustainable practices), and the ecological food systems transition described as transformative approaches based on environmental health, economic profitability, and social equity.¹¹ Rooted in food sovereignty, these approaches could continue to provide resilient bio-diverse and localised food systems for the majority of people in most countries in the region, the more so when the

⁶ See GRAIN, Seed [laws that criminalise farmers: resistance and fightback](#)

⁷ Mulvany et al., End of Phase report of the SASA project, 2019.

⁸ SASA Project Fact sheet.

⁹ Interview ACB (1)

¹⁰ ACB Strategic plan 2023-26

¹¹ Mulvany et al.; supra note 6. See also: [‘Food Security, Poverty Reduction, Climate Change: Placing Trócaire’s Livelihoods Work in Context’](#)

power of the other approaches, the most favoured in current policies, are challenged and held in check.¹²

The above paragraphs show that the objectives and outcomes of the SASA project are relevant to the needs and priorities of small-scale farmers who are the main victims of the marginalization of their seed rights and FMSS in agricultural policies, corporate control over food systems and the rapid spread of GMOs in countries. It's also relevant to policy-makers, providing them with information and policy content on farmers' seed practices and customs that are generally neglected despite their place in seed production and seed access in African countries (around 80%).¹³ Moreover, the project aligns with the vision and actions of CSOs that support farmers, who recognize and commend the leading role of ACB in this area, as evidenced during the interviews. They find ACB's interventions (research/publications, capacity building, joint activities, technical support and advocacy) unique and indispensable for the improvement of their knowledge, the strengthening of their understanding of the real implications of seed-, Agriculture- and food-related legal and policy frameworks in force or under development, and the technical support that strengthens their positions and arguments in their advocacy both at country and regional levels.

The interviews conducted in the course of this review support the above findings. Indeed, many CSOs and farmers' organisations confirmed their high appreciation of ACB's support and its relevance in their activities. They specifically value the collaborative, supportive, and capacity development approach of ACB through which they remain in the driver's seat and do the work on the ground with ACB providing the technical support. Examples of this approach are presented below.

In Tanzania, ACB jointly conducted a study on the seed system with their local partner MVIWATA. The report of the study *"was used to organise seminar, trainings to raise awareness of famers and different actors, and our current activities are based on that study."*¹⁴ According to ACB's partner, they also benefited from its support in their campaign against GMOs, and that support was instrumental in getting a governmental ban on these organisms.¹⁵ Another important milestone stressed by the Tanzanian partner is their work in Zanzibar where they had a joint activity with the government, with ACB's support, to discuss the essence of the seed law. Now, the government of Zanzibar *"is calling upon MVIWATA to assist them in developing a seed policy and we are going to do it in collaboration with ACB."*¹⁶ This shows already the sustainability of what was built with a strong contribution of the SASA project and confirms the need for the continuous presence of ACB in seed and seed-related policymaking.

Actors also confirmed their reliance on ACB's policy scanning. They consider that ACB is the organisation to do the groundwork on analysing policies about seed and biotechnology in support of civil society organisations in their activities. In South Africa, ACB is reported to have played a convening role in CSOs policy participation. An informant highly appreciated this role as follows:

¹² Mulvany et al.; supra note 7.

¹³ Mohamed Coulibaly and Karine Peschard, [Towards Legal Recognition of Peasant Seed Systems in Africa: The Experience of Mali and Uganda](#). Misereor, 2023.

¹⁴ Interview MVIWATA, Tanzania.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

*“when there are policies coming up, [ACB would] gather people together, help us look at the law together, come up with positions and be stronger in going out in our provinces or engaging on our own.”*¹⁷ Other respondents acknowledge the unique role of ACB in the region, and even on the continent, in their very sound, quality research, and their partnerships with other national organizations working on similar issues. They find particularly relevant their policy and legal perspectives, but also their fine knowledge of the intrinsic value of FMSS, and their flexibility in linking the global, the continental, the regional, and the national.¹⁸

ACB’s role is also well recognised by regional policy-makers like the SADC. The Plant Genetic Resources Centre (SPGRC), which oversees SADC’s seed regulations, considers ACB *“as a check on policymakers, whether the policymakers are not forgetting the interests of other constituencies in whatever business they are doing in the area of promoting seed systems in our region.”* The SPGRC finds ACB very relevant and believes that its presence in this policy area *“helps us very much, because they always point out where the policy-makers tend to forget, and the interests of the vulnerable, especially the smallholder farmers.”*¹⁹ Finally, it is noteworthy that the relevance of the SASA project, and ACB’s work in general, are well appreciated beyond the SADC and the East African regions. Informants from West Africa also recognize its relevance and appreciate the ability of ACB in policy and legal analysis.²⁰ According to the coordinator of the Coalition for the Protection of African Genetic Heritage (COPAGEN), *“ACB is very proactive and has a good ability to analyse and produce useful documentation; they work on quite unique themes like gene drive.”*²¹ He then praised their efforts to reach francophone countries and expressed their satisfaction to be part of the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) alongside ACB.

The above findings reveal that the SASA project was highly relevant at different levels across various stakeholders, notably farmers’ organisations, CSOs, and governments. Actors still demand multi-dimensional and unique support, especially in policy analysis as an instrument of advocacy, the role that ACB has played very well.

4.2 Key achievements and impacts of the SASA project

This section examines two aspects of the project: whether it has been effective and achieved its objectives; and whether it contributed to the attainment of the overall policy goal.

The different evaluations of the SASA project found it to be effective in achieving significant outcomes. For the period 2011-2015, which included the first phase of SASA, the evaluators concluded that ACB contributed to strengthening social movements at the national and regional level to build civil society voices to keep the spread of GMOs and related pesticides at bay and consolidate FMSS, and that it made progress in shifting policy and corporate practice in the face of strong national and global opponents. They then added that ACB is *“extremely highly regarded by its peers locally, regionally and internationally, something enhanced [...] by the quality of its*

¹⁷ Interview Biowatch, South Africa

¹⁸ Interview Zambia 1 and some participants at the assessment workshop in Johannesburg (22-23 May 2024).

¹⁹ Interview SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre (SPGRC)

²⁰ Interview COPAGEN/West Africa

²¹ Ibid.

*evidence and analysis, and [...] its collaborative ways of working and clarity about its niche issues and role.”*²²

The end of phase evaluation (phase 2, 2016-2019) arrived at a similar conclusion.²³ It found that ACB gave a bold lead in opening up policy spaces for seed diversity and agroecology, especially through its work on FMSS and Farm inputs subsidies Programme (FISP); that its support to different networks across the SADC region constrained corporate control of policy levers and contributed to build capacity, awareness and confidence that the agroecological alternative is viable.²⁴ The evaluators acknowledged, however, that public investment in support of FMSS is negligible,²⁵ meaning, otherwise, the push should continue on this aspect in the future.

The Mid-Term Review of the last phase acknowledges that ACB has generated literature that can be used as a resource by interested organizations to inform their work as well as future actions. It also found that the project approach was effective in creating multiple alliances that can influence farmer seed systems and agroecology to improve the wellbeing and livelihoods of farmers, agrobiodiversity, and food sovereignty.²⁶ It acknowledged ACB’s expertise in seed laws and advocacy that facilitates positive change and its impacts through strategic alliances across the region as evidenced by local CSOs increased knowledge, understanding, and resistance to UPOV-1991 and industrial agriculture systems that need to be replaced with more farmer based agroecological systems.²⁷ The review also noted the ability of ACB to progress work on the legislation of farmer varieties including issues of quality of seeds to respond to the current challenges.²⁸

The most recent evaluation of ACB’s work, though not focusing on the SASA project, confirmed the trends identified in the previous evaluations.²⁹ Indeed, this report found that ACB has been able to focus on unique, relevant, demand-driven services in its work with national, regional, and global networks, stakeholders, and donors, and it managed to address relevant issues and capacity gaps affecting smallholder farmers using the most appropriate pathways and tools.³⁰ The report also stressed the forward-thinking orientation of ACB and its research-based information and advisory support to local and regional partners that kept the networks refreshed and updated on new technologies, new GMO threats, and appropriate measures for countering and resisting corporate capture of agri-food systems on the African continent.³¹

Interviews with key partners and other actors support the findings of the different evaluations undergone by ACB and the SASA project. While ACB’s partners and other informants attest to its

²² Dr. Barbara Klugman and Paul Currie, External Review of The African Centre for Biodiversity: 2011-2015. March 2016.

²³ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Centre for Community Development Solutions, Mid-Term Review of Strengthening Agrobiodiversity in Southern Africa (SASA) and the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI), 16 March 2022.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Masendeke et al., Project Evaluation on Resisting Expansion of Corporate-Industrial agriculture and genetic modification technologies in African agri-food systems, July 2023.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

effective interventions and to the relevance of its strategy to their work, many believed the goal of “*establishing agricultural policies that meet Farmers Rights, diversified Farmers-managed Seeds Systems, and contribute to sustainable maintenance and use of agricultural biodiversity*” was too ambitious. They argue that policy reforms do not depend on one actor or a category of actors, and do not happen in the short term but rather require sustained pressure and momentum.³² For some others, the goal is generally seen as the ultimate result to which a project is expected to contribute to. It is different from the objective. In that sense, “*we cannot say the goal was ambitious;*”³³ it was rightly identified, but the implementation of SASA and its results and outcomes are great contributions to the end goal as recalled above. Actors believe, indeed, that ACB has done a lot, and that this is likely to yield huge impacts at the policy level in the longer term as its work and results have been taken up by other actors. Some of these impacts are already emerging at country and regional levels, but also at the international level. Examples from the field include the following:

In South Africa, ACB participated in the multi-stakeholder consultation workshop (October 2023) on the Plant Breeders' Rights Act (PBRA) and Draft Regulations of the Plant Improvement Act (PIA).³⁴ It made substantial inputs for exceptions to be granted so that these laws do not criminalise farmers’ practices of saving, exchanging, and reusing farm-saved seeds and do not require certification. There is a strong likelihood that these propositions could be accepted, but the final draft is yet to be published.³⁵ ACB also contributed significantly to strengthening networks in collaboration with Biowatch on agroecology in South Africa. Notable achievements include the feasibility study of an agroecology centre for food and agriculture in collaboration with the Government. Considered together with facilitation for farmer seeds and agroecology network in Limpopo and Eastern Cape, these initiatives laid a solid ground for civil society-government dialogue on agroecology in South Africa and led to several partnerships with CSOs for ACB’s work.³⁶

In 2019, ACB provided technical and advocacy support to the Malawi AgroBiodiversity Network (MAGNET), specifically on the development of the Malawi Seed Bill as well as the draft Seed Policy.³⁷ This includes the preparation of a draft monitoring policy on farmer-managed seed systems in the country. In Zimbabwe, it alerted local CSOs on the Plant Breeders Rights Bill based on UPOV-91 and mobilized their local partners, PELUM Zimbabwe and the Seed Sovereignty Programme (ZSSP) to develop an advocacy action plan, to raise concerns on the Bill and take corrective action with the relevant authorities. The Bill is not adopted, as of 30th July 2024, and the advocacy continues.

In Zambia, ACB has worked very closely with the Zambian Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB) which is involved in the mobilisation of civil society on farmers’ rights and agroecological practices. The seed law of Zambia is currently being amended and ZAAB has called

³² Interviews with ACB, seconded by some partners in different words, confirmed that ACB and its partners play “*against a huge system that is entrenched and cannot bring about structural changes in the short term on [their] own; it’s all interlinked with a whole range of other things.*”

³³ A participant to the review workshop in Johannesburg.

³⁴ <https://acbio.org.za/seed-sovereignty/draft-plant-breeders-rights-and-plant-improvement-act-regulations/>

³⁵ Interview with ACB (2)

³⁶ Mid-Term Review of the SASA and SKI projects, supra note 26.

³⁷ Ibid.

on ACB to support them in their engagement with the government; they also reported having benefited a lot from ACB to influence the reform on their own, but they find it always useful to collaborate with ACB when it's possible.³⁸ ACB has also provided capacity building to several civil society organizations in the SADC region including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on seed laws and how to engage and influence reform. In the case of the DRC, a flexible mechanism and rapid response fund were used to fund the initiatives.³⁹

At the regional level, ACB has engaged with the national Governments of the SADC region on the SADC Plant Genetic Resources Centre (SPGRC). ACB has facilitated the participation of representatives from Zimbabwe and South Africa into SADC meetings on the harmonization of seed legislations to raise and defend the case farmer varieties. SADC policymakers agreed to work on guidelines for the registration of farmer varieties and will work closely with ACB on them. According to the SPGRC, "*The drafting process will start soon.*"⁴⁰ ACB also participated in the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) and highlighted the implications of food security and nutrition as well as seed sovereignty and farmers' rights on the continent. As a result of the ACB's extensive groundwork on the AU guidelines, the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA)'s numerous network partners have picked up this work, and a series of regional webinars/dialogues have been initiated to interrogate these guidelines building on the work of the ACB.⁴¹ This was qualified as a core element of ACB's influencing advocacy work at the continental level using its knowledge of African agriculture.

ACB's work also reached the international level. The present review seconds the finding of the Mid-Term Review of the SASA project on the extensiveness of ACB work on seed systems, PVP laws, farmer's rights, and agro biodiversity. In addition to its technical and thematic scope, the work went beyond African borders with linkages to the UN Declaration on Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), the CBD Convention, and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) also known as the Seed Treaty. ACB reinforced the consensus position of African civil society on farmer seed systems and the importance of agriculture biodiversity under the CBD. It was involved in the work of the Ad hoc technical expert group which was tasked to come up with options for implementation of farmer's rights.⁴² This provided leverage for ACB to influence debate and dialogue on farmers' rights' and enabled its participation in the Treaty process. It gained more leverage from FMSS and biodiversity through participation in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework for the CBD as well as the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) which resulted in increased knowledge on the role of agriculture biodiversity post-2020.⁴³

Lastly, ACB has provided a critical voice in the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) through the multi-shocks works aimed at highlighting the shocks with a potential impact on food and nutrition security in the region such as the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and the African Green Recovery Plan. This critical thinking provides ACB with the capacity to challenge conventional

³⁸ Interview with ZAAB.

³⁹ Mid-Term Review of the SASA and SKI projects, supra note 26.

⁴⁰ Interview with SADC/SPGRC.

⁴¹ ACB, SASA Project's Operational Report for the Period: 1st March 2023 to 29th Feb 2024.

⁴² Details on the group to be found here: <https://www.fao.org/plant-treaty/areas-of-work/farmers-rights/expert-group/en/>

⁴³ SASA MTR report, supra note 24.

thinking that may impact negatively on food sovereignty, and food and nutrition security in Africa. The work is also linked to several civil society organizations and the Government and requires ACB to network on multiple fronts to achieve its objectives and legitimise its arguments.

These concrete examples indicate the relevance, value, and impact of the work of ACB in various regions of the African continent, at the continental level, and at the international level. Partners also believe ACB's footprint reaches a level where it will continue to produce more impacts in the future. This is particularly due to the capacity and knowledge that ACB brought in more than ten years of engagement, collaboration with, and support to, different actors and the body of literature generated on key issues and the information produced out of it, in an easily accessible language. These materials and capacity-building activities allowed many actors to take up and build on ACB's work and continue the struggle, as confirmed by the following interview excerpts:

“This was an African narrative in the making, and African movements came up with their own work. So, this is very important [...] At the beginning, farmer seed systems were discussed only as informal seed systems. The whole discourse changed, but not only that, today you find many hundreds of groups working on seed laws and policies.”⁴⁴

“This is not the initial days, for example, as [a partner] would see something and quickly send to [ACB] and ask for help. I think most of the organisations, be it PELUM Eswatini, PELUM in Zimbabwe, BIBA Kenya, TABIO in Tanzania, etc., are fully fledged and have people, staff and the issues understood that they can continue.”⁴⁵

“The posters on seed that [ACB] produced many years ago, we translated it into local language and we're still using those posters to this day.”⁴⁶

Some successes of ACB work

ACB has been highly successful in its work as confirmed through the different evaluations. Partners attribute ACB's success to its multi-dimensional strategy originally revolving around four key elements: (i) research and analysis, including participatory research (ii) technical support and capacity building, (iii) advocacy, including with partners, and (iv) effective communications through different means, including social media. In its continuous improvement, the four-pronged strategy of ACB has been refined to five functional areas as follows: Horizon scanning and prioritisation; research and analysis; movement building; advocacy; communications/sharing and learning.⁴⁷ Actors believe that ACB still has a role to play and that it should continue to play it and inform them on new issues and how to deal with those issues.

For ACB, the success is also due to the nature of the issues that the organisation works on. Indeed, the seed and farmers' rights work had been a success at all levels because people owned it as the issues were appealing to them. Anything that ACB does *“has to have this popular appeal*

⁴⁴ Interview ACB (1)

⁴⁵ Interview BIBA Kenya.

⁴⁶ Interview ZAAB, Zambia.

⁴⁷ ACB Strategy 2023-26.

nature.⁴⁸ This will be a line to follow in future work too; even with technical issues like artificial intelligence (AI), digitalisation, etc., ACB will have to find a way to connect them with other issues and unpack them to find a place for people to feel comfortable with it. They can therefore engage on it. An example of this is the new work on ultra-processed food (UPF).⁴⁹ ACB is engaging on this to alert on the impact of the corporate-controlled globalised food system on people's health, thereby attacking the issue of nutrition which necessarily will be part of the integrated work it now turned to in its new strategic plan (2023-2026).

Through the focus areas of the SASA projects, the following successes can be highlighted.

– *Biosafety, GM and new technology*⁵⁰

The original focus of ACB has been on biosafety. Its biosafety work is anchored in more than two decades of research, analysis, workshops, capacity-building, policy engagement, strategic planning, skilful staff, and stakeholder and partner relationship-building. Strengthened through the SASA project, this work resulted in widespread capacity on the part of network partners, culminating in legal challenges regarding GM crop approvals, challenging the lifting of bans and restrictions on GM imports, and campaigns in favour of agroecology. ACB and its partners succeeded in halting or slowing down the testing, release, and commercialisation of GM crops in the context of the Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) project in Southern and East Africa. The litigation initiated in South Africa, spanning longer than eight years, has precluded Monsanto from commercially selling MON 87460 GM maize seeds as a climate change solution to commercial farmers in SA and the rest of the Eastern, Western, and Southern African region as it had intended.⁵¹

In Tanzania, the GM campaigns resulted in ministerial decrees stopping field trials for the WEMA project and hence the commercialisation of those GM maize varieties. The action against WEMA variety trials was in reaction to a well-funded, but illegal and biased, use of trial data in the biotech industry's campaign to promote GM crops. ACB, which has always been closely following the activities of the pro-biotech lobby, was praised by activists in many countries for exposing this fraudulent promotion of GM crops in the name of averting hunger.⁵²

ACB has also been at the forefront of African CSOs in alerting organisations about the global push for developing, testing, and releasing new genetically modified organisms using new technologies like synthetic biology, genome editing, gene drives, and CRISPR (referred to as GM 2.0). It called on governments to apply a strict precautionary approach and to question the public benefit of such technologies and the products thereof. Along with other international organisations that focus on these issues, notably ETC Group and TWN, ACB led the CSO lobby in the CBD to advocate for moratoria on field trials and release of organisms developed

⁴⁸ ACB staff at the Assessment workshop in Johannesburg (22-23 May 2024).

⁴⁹ <https://acb.org.za/corporate-expansion/ultra-processed-food-in-africa/>

⁵⁰ ACB's work on biosafety and new genetic engineering technologies is not funded by SDC at all but by Bread for the World, Thousand Currents, and the 11th Hour.

⁵¹ ACB, SASA Project's Operational Report 2023-2024, *supra* note 41.

⁵² *Ibid*.

using these new biotechnologies, against a heavily financed lobby in favour of the industry.⁵³ At the national level, ACB and South African CSOs succeeded in submitting these new technologies to the GM regulation through a decision by the Minister of Agriculture, in August 2023, that overruled a decision of an appeal board, after rejecting a challenge from a powerful consortium of agricultural industry actors in November 2021.⁵⁴

– *Seed Sovereignty*

ACB has strongly worked toward the development of progressive seed laws and policies in SASA countries and at the regional level, and has effectively brought FMSS into the mainstream discourse. One of the successes already mentioned in this report is the strong knowledge and understanding it brought to local CSOs on the corporate-driven UPOV-91 and industrial agriculture systems and the deep engagement of those CSOs to resist such systems and advocate for more farmer-based agroecological alternatives. The main ‘hooks’ to give concrete content and ground for this work were the negotiation of the ARIPO PVP Agreement and the seed harmonization process of SADC/COMESA/EAC. ACB collaborated with many regional CSOs and farmer networks, including PELUM and AFSA, the Eastern and Southern African Farmers’ Forum (ESAFF) as well as with national CSO and farmer networks in Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia, just to name the SASA countries, to contest the exclusion of farmers’ voices in these processes.

These coordinated actions of engagement, information and knowledge sharing and direct training of partners at national and regional levels had great impacts on the processes. The role of ACB as catalyst, facilitator and technical expert has been recognised by actors and confirmed by concrete actions in different countries. In Zambia, with detailed information provided by ACB’s technical support, ZAAB was able to stall the ratification of the ARIPO PVP protocol.⁵⁵ In the Malawi Seed Policy revision process, ACB remotely analysed drafts which informed CSOs interventions, improving their organisation strategy and the content of their positions, causing an important number of proposals to be accepted by the government.⁵⁶ In Tanzania, ACB helped alert and bring together CSOs and farmers’ organisations, including from the neighbouring East African countries of Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, to create a lobby of the sectoral council of ministers of the EAC that adopted the EAC Seed Bill in December 2018. As a result, one of the CSOs from Uganda participated on their government’s committee that drafted the PBR law implementation regulations.⁵⁷

In Mozambique, the Department of Seed Services acknowledged the government has benefitted from the dialogue initiated by ACB’s partners under the seed laws review process. A particular focus of the dialogue was the consideration of farmers’ rights and interests in the

⁵³Including funding a delegation of some 32 African scientists, organised under the pro-biotech lobby platform, the Public Research Regulation Initiative (PRRI), at the CBD/COP14 in 2018 at which ACB was present, to represent governments in the decision-making processes in order to ensure that the CBD did not enforce Biosafety Protocol regulations on these technologies. See Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

⁵⁴ ACB, SASA Project’s Operational Report 2023-2024, supra note 41.

⁵⁵ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

⁵⁶ According to the Mulvany et al. (2019), “one enthusiastic respondent that [conveyed] that 90% of the proposals for changes made by ACB were accepted in revisions to Malawi’s Seed Policy.”

⁵⁷ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

review, and most recently (October 2023), ACB analysed Mozambique Draft Seed Policy and Seed Law, and found that it “does not recognise the role played by the three million small-scale farmers who provide 95% of the food consumed, completely ignoring their priorities, needs, and rights, following the model of typical commercial seed legislation by proposing stringent rules and standards for the regulation of the formal/commercial seed sector.”⁵⁸ It then suggested to its local partners to demand “a transparent, inclusive, and democratic process in the development of the policy, and those public seed institutions; and that local seed companies are supported and strengthened, to address challenges in the seed sector, rather than prioritising the private sector, which is bound to entrench corporate control by multinational seed companies.”⁵⁹

In South Africa, after demonstrating, through public hearings on the seed bills, how the democratic space on seed laws can be opened up and made more transparent and effective,⁶⁰ ACB and its partners achieved relatively good draft exceptions in commercial seed laws to avoid criminalisation of farmers’ practices of saving, exchanging, and reusing farm-saved seeds, and certification of such seeds (2023). These shifts were possible due to ACB’s engagement in the issues within a well-supported and coordinated civil society network that readily took guidance from it for around eight years.⁶¹

As confirmed by informants from Tanzania, ACB’s involvement in the Seed law review in Zanzibar is very likely to turn the 2022 seed law into an FMSS-friendly one. At a meeting organized with MVIWATA in May 2023, the report of research conducted by ACB on the draft Zanzibar seed law was discussed. It was followed by an online bilateral meeting between the two partners to strategise and analyse their involvement and input, including technical expertise, in assisting the Zanzibar Ministry of Agriculture in developing its Seed Act. The ministry has requested technical and financial expertise to support them in developing and finalising the Act and this process is ongoing with special interest being on the development of legislation that also protects FMSS and implements FR.⁶²

As already mentioned in this report, ACB’s work on the AU seed harmonisation guidelines led to a series of regional webinars/dialogues initiated to discuss the guidelines and raise farmers’ concerns about them. Such activities happened in Southern Africa, as organised by Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM), and ACB was also invited to speak at a webinar organised by the East and Southern African Farmers’ Forum (ESAFF) – headquartered in Tanzania – in the context of the East African Community (EAC), with recommendations to East African policymakers.⁶³

– *Corporate expansion in Agrifood systems*

⁵⁸ ACB, SASA operational report 2023-2024, supra note 41.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

⁶¹ ACB, SASA operational report 2023-2024, supra note 41.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

ACB has been at the forefront in opposing corporate capture of African agrifood systems and in building a strong foundation for alternatives based on agroecology and food sovereignty to protect agrobiodiversity and promote farmers' rights.⁶⁴ An important aspect of this component has been the work on researching, documenting, and widely disseminating findings on FIPs,⁶⁵ which are heavily donor-funded governmental programmes to promote the use of Green Revolution inputs (hybrid seed, synthetic fertilizer and agro-chemicals) produced by multinational corporations. The research and analyses of ACB revealed that these programmes are destructive to small farmers and suppress their options to access agroecology-friendly inputs. ACB and its partners did a strong critique of the FIPs through studies/analyses and workshops to engage farmers and CSO networks as part of awareness creation and advocacy. A key example of such activities is the organisation, in August 2018, of a joint regional workshop with the Rural Women Assembly (RWA) to develop concrete proposals, focusing on diversification and reallocation of resources to agroecology and the promotion and support to defined agroecological practices, including seed, soil health, water, pest management, integrated production and agroforestry, local markets, integrating social and economic dimensions. Taking advantage of the SADC people summit, ACB and RWA gathered around 140 smallholder farmers and CSOs from countries⁶⁶ to discuss FIPs and public sector support for agroecology.⁶⁷

The event enabled ACB to build a regional network of organisations actively involved in activities and discussions on FIPs and agroecology alternatives for public sector agriculture support and to expand the network of interested organisations from multiple countries which took up the issue, including Groundswell, Peasant Farmers' Association of Ghana (PFA), RWA, and ZAAB. The number of CSOs engaging on FIPs in the region was estimated to be 16 organisations directly engaged with ACB in FISP research and advocacy.⁶⁸ The FISP was found to be timely, with widespread questioning of the benefits to farmers and their communities of Green Revolution input subsidies. Key messages arising from the process are the need for diversification and greater choice for farmers, more inclusion of women and resource-poor farmers, and public sector support for diverse agroecological practices and techniques. ACB further catalysed national CSO and farmer networks driving these key messages, as well as national and regional advocacy. These advocacy messages are being heard but have not yet demonstrably influenced FISP implementation, which is highly embedded in its current 'Green Revolution' form in the political economy of the region.⁶⁹ But the work continues under the current assessment of the Green Revolution approaches and industrial agriculture on the food system in some African countries. The first briefing investigating the question of whether Zambia's food system is collapsing, and stressing the indispensability of transitioning to agroecology, was published on 18th July, 2024.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Masendeke et al., supra note 29.

⁶⁵ Different FIPs resources can be found here: <https://acbio.org.za/corporate-expansion/farm-input-subsidy-programme>

⁶⁶ South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, Swaziland, Lesotho, Mauritius, Tanzania, Burkina Faso and Ghana.

⁶⁷ Details of the event available here: <https://acbio.org.za/corporate-expansion/report-sadc-regional-farmer-speak-farm-input-subsidy/>

⁶⁸ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Available here <https://acbio.org.za/corporate-expansion/is-zambias-food-system-collapsing/>

The work on cooperate expansion in agrifood systems has evolved over the years to cover more aspects beyond the FISPs. Throughout the three phases, the work under this component has been extremely rich, diverse, and innovative, embodying a strong emphasis on building alternatives to the corporate food regime, focusing on South Africa. In this regard, Important work was recently catalysed in this country, with the ACB spearheading the formation of a more coherent network of CSOS working in the agroecology space and producing an in-depth study of 22 agriculture policies that already supports agroecology when compared to the High-Level Panel of Experts on food security and nutrition (HLPE) principles. The report concludes with a call for using an agroecological framing to integrate the fragmented policy landscape across sectors; development of multi-actor, place-based initiatives for implementation; and a review of existing commercial policies and laws to remove obstacles for the development of agroecology in SA. The report was also published in French, as requested by Francophone peasants to guide them regarding their own research and advocacy work in that region.⁷¹ This work will still be part of ACB's work in the future.

Other relevant and current work under the corporate expansion component includes the convening of a national dialogue for a just transition in food systems in South Africa which allowed the different actors, including labour movement, smallholder farmers, farm workers, labour tenants, informal traders, waste reclaimers, food, and land justice organisations, civil society, and policymakers to come together and discuss building a coordinated understanding and policy approach to a just transition in the food system across sectors; the participation in a regional workshop on the development of national agroecology strategies in East and Southern Africa led by the Biovision Foundation, and the publication of papers and opinions on agroecology as the only alternative to the industrial food system in the face of climate change and its consequences. It also includes a considerable amount of work on pesticides in the light of the global campaigns to phase out highly hazardous pesticides (HHPs), involving a People's Tribunal on AgroToxins in SA, a voluntary collaboration of organisations exposing the human and environmental rights violations related to agricultural chemicals; new work on digital agriculture, dematerialisation and financialisation of African agriculture, and a large body of work linked to the Global Biodiversity Framework, with an emphasis on agricultural biodiversity, and its links to climate change, broader biodiversity, FMSS, and FR.

ACB also commenced a reflection on ultra-processed food (UPF) through the production of a series on UPF in Africa, to describe and define UPF, how it differs from other foods, and outline the major concerns with it. The increase in the presence of UPF in the African diet is closely correlated with the obesity pandemic taking hold in the region, linked to type 2 diabetes including in children, hypertension, strokes, premature deaths, and cancers. This work is likely to be more prominent in the future given the lack of knowledge on the nature, the extent of the uptake, and the political and economic implications of the expansion of UPF-based diets on the continent, including and especially, its impacts on the cultivation, manufacture, retail, and consumption of fresh and minimally processed foods that comprise traditional African foods, cuisines, and diets.⁷²

⁷¹<https://acbio.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Evaluation-agroecologie-dans-le-paysage-politique-sudafricain.pdf>

⁷² ACB, SASA operational report 2023-2024, supra note 41.

Finally, it's important to recall ACB's work on challenging the consolidation of corporate power in the seed sector, through mergers and acquisitions. This consolidation further limits the choice of providers of industrial seeds and increases the pressure on countries to accept the corporations' proprietary, often genetically modified, varieties that are designed for use with chemical packages sold by the same corporations.⁷³

4.3 Efficiency and sustainability of the SASA project

The deployed resources (financial and human) to the achieved results and effects of the SASA project were found to be adequate in previous reviews and evaluations. According to the 2019 end-of-phase evaluation, the budget reallocation request submitted by ACB during the first year (phase 2) indicated that project resources were being used efficiently and in line with human resources. This reallocation was based on a foreseen underspend on the budget of the seed sovereignty programme area. ACB, therefore, requested for 10% to be reassigned to programme area 3 (resistance to corporate expansion in seed and agrifood systems) to support relevant work as it arises on FISPs and corporate power in seed and related agricultural inputs. The report also stated that ACB reported to SDC on its total budget and the proportion of that which is SDC expenditure with all variances clearly explained in the Annual Narrative reports. The financial management was described as rigorous, with negligible difference between actual aggregate expenditure and aggregate budget, i.e., 65.8% versus 66.6% at the end of the year.⁷⁴ The last operational report submitted by ACB informs that as of the end of February 2024, while 93% of the SASA project period was completed, the expenditure of SDC funds stood at 82% of total funds received.

The lean organisational structure and the availability of qualified staff have also contributed to the good performance and efficient management of ACB's programmes. Such an operational approach tends to be flexible and effective in achieving set goals and objectives, and in responding to new opportunities and challenges promptly. Indeed, the lean structures usually provide high-quality, and cost-effective outputs as witnessed by all ACB partners.⁷⁵ ACB is organised along programme goals, enabling it to develop functional structures for the effective implementation of its programmes. Its reliance on a small but united, specialised, and results-oriented team, including resident staff members like in Tanzania, and collaboration with national partners and food sovereignty coalitions with support from the headquarters, has lower overhead costs than in a large organisation.⁷⁶

The present review confirms the finding of the 2019 end-of-phase report that "the overall efficiency of conversion of inputs into outputs [is] good as ACB has produced significant outcomes and outputs and continues to operate efficiently, continuing to realise more outputs than contractually required throughout the programme."⁷⁷ According to ACB's staff "*the SASA project had many innovative components [...] it allowed us to navigate national spaces, regional spaces, international spaces and do what we would never have been able to do[...] I think we did much*

⁷³ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. See also the interviews' excerpts presented in the above sections of the present report.

⁷⁶ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

*more than we planned to do.*⁷⁸ The different annual reports show the continuity of the work and the evolutive nature of what has been built through the SASA and other projects, the legacy of which serves as great foundation for future work.

This also speaks to the sustainability of the project. ACB and its partners are confident that the work will continue even at the end of the SASA project. They believe that the level of understanding and capacity has reached a threshold that allows autonomous reproduction. According to ACB's research and advocacy officer, seconded by all informants, *"people will still continue the same work, because I think it's a project that has been owned by [them]; and partners in different countries have taken up this work. [...] they're pushing in their own way, they have projects on the ground, some have even gone further in terms of doing their own advocacy and lobbying. I think it's been so embedded in the movement that whatever happens, people will always continue."*⁷⁹ This echoes past evaluations that found the collaborative engagement of partners and networks based on shared aspirations, values, and objectives to be motivating diverse networks to achieve more with less resource.⁸⁰ Also, ABC's approach of building skills across civil society and farmer networks was found to have the potential to "ensure the sustainability of the movement at the local level."⁸¹

The SASA project contributed to the development of usable and durable information and research products that reach and inform wide audiences. Partners recognise that the essential part of the seed work in Africa is grounded in ACB's work. According to an informant, *"all the relationships that we have with AFSA around the seed group, all of that is built on ACB's work, foundation of that, the people who are all trained, the voices, all rest on ACB's work. The critique of AGRA, the corporate capture, the African Union stuff, it's all still relevant."*⁸² The same partner reported they still have the relevant information obtained from and through collaboration with ACB. Partners *"now tweak [it] a little bit, change and repackage to use [it] for the updated context."*⁸³ Partners also value the opportunity to be involved in regional and international networks as a result of their collaboration with ACB: *"now we have international relationships ourselves [through our work with ACB]; before ZAAB was not connected regionally at all, now we are a well-known national network."*⁸⁴

Despite the great potential for sustainable project outputs and outcomes, the presence of ACB is still relevant to keep up the momentum of the work that was started by the project, sustain the outcomes, and build on them for new work in the ever-changing context. Some partners believe that even though the work may continue without ACB, it will be different. Indeed, despite the strong capacity gained by partners and the networks built, the research capacity and specific legal and policy expertise, rooted in an approach of mutual respect, the understanding of the rural context from the point of view of peasants and their movements, the non-extractive and non-dominating way of working, that distinguish ACB from other CSOs will be missing, thereby creating a big gap in the work. It is therefore important that ACB continues its work even beyond

⁷⁸ Interview ACB (1)

⁷⁹ Interview ACB (3)

⁸⁰ Masendeke et al., supra note 29.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Interview ZAAB.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

the SASA project.⁸⁵ The 2019 end-of-phase evaluation described that as a dependence on ACB support because “national networks have not reached sustainability in terms of technical/legal capacity to handle their research, document preparation, and technical/legal policy influencing.”⁸⁶ The evaluators then concluded that “ACB outreach would be in some danger of being weakened without SDC funding as other funders would not immediately fill the gap.”⁸⁷ ACB has recognised the decisive nature of SDC funding but seems to have integrated the imminent end of the SASA project since then. Indeed, the new strategic plan (2023-2026) was developed with this in mind and will support the diversification of sources of funding through the holistic and integrated approach ACB took for its future work. This builds on the legacy of the SASA project and announces the continued presence of ACB in the food sovereignty and agroecology work as wished by its partners. However this requires ACB and its partners to strengthen their donor diversification strategy and think about innovative ways of co-financing joint initiatives in the face of shrinking funding space.⁸⁸

4.4 Key challenges of the SASA Project and ACB’s work

Key challenges in ACB’s work and affecting the SASA project are as follows:

The main challenge for the SASA project and all the food sovereignty and agroecology movement is the so-called ‘enabling environment’ that African governments have put, or are putting, in place. Indeed, the policies, strategies, programmes, and action plans for Agricultural development, and food systems improvement, are, in general, grounded in the vision that agribusiness and corporate-led food systems should be the model for the ‘modernization’ of agriculture and rural development in African countries. This vision is highly supported by bilateral and multilateral donors and reflected in African food and Agriculture development strategies like the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), with a clear orientation towards free trade with the emergence of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA). In the face of this vision from policy-makers, ACB works against FISPs, UPOV, and all green revolution and agribusiness approaches would be perceived as against the government programmes. The other challenges that are linked, in one way or another, to the main one, are as follows:

- a. Lack of transparency and weak democratic processes in many countries: this was identified as an important challenge facing ACB and all those seeking to participate in policy and legal processes around seeds, farmers’ rights, and the agro-food system in general. Many actors feel that it is very difficult to have a voice in those processes, that the agenda is already set at the international level and through public-private partnerships and funding, and that governments are captured from the onset. This makes it difficult to achieve important results and delays progress in policy change. But the level of awareness on the issues of farmers’ rights, farmers’ seed systems, and the conservation of agrobiodiversity is now very high and the resistance to corporate-friendly policies and the promotion of agroecological alternatives will continue. Also, the fact that ACB’s work stimulates activist academic researchers to take issues and leads to the recognition by mainstream

⁸⁵ Interview ZAAB.

⁸⁶ Mulvany and al., supra note 7.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Masendeke et al., supra note 29.

development organisations that green revolution approaches are not helpful in the long term for the needs of farmers, there's a strong expectation that things will change in a near future, especially when we now see a growing awareness that biodiverse agroecological alternatives are needed, and should be promoted by donor governments, in the face of challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss.

- b. Resistance of Governments and lack of political will to take on FMSS and Farmers' Rights: This challenge echoed the one on untransparent processes described above, the latter being a consequence of the lack of political will to adopt policies in favor of biodiversity and agroecology, due to governments' proximity with the industry and the corporate-capture of regional institutions. This was stated by some of the informants in this review, as summarised in this answer: "*most of our departments and the political environment that we work in are still very much pro-industry. We have really seen a lot of opposition.*"⁸⁹ The 2019 end-of-phase evaluation reported significant interest from some government officials to work more on FMSS, especially if international donor funding were available to support, but found that connecting FMSS strengthening and the critique of restrictive and contaminating seed laws, industrial practices and policies may not be on the government's agenda.⁹⁰ Strong coordinated and evidence-based advocacy is needed to reverse this trend.
- c. Contradictions between international instruments and dominance of corporate-friendly policies. The contradictions between biodiversity instruments and those related to intellectual property like UPOV-91 reduce regulatory options for countries. While instruments like the seed treaty and the biodiversity convention are favourable to farmers' rights and their agroecological practices, UPOV-91 impedes FMSS through the prohibition of some of those practices, i.e., sharing, exchanging, and selling their farm-saved seeds. This makes it difficult for African countries who joined or are in the process of joining, UPOV-91 to adopt policies and laws that support FMSS. Some countries, like Malaysia and the Philippines, received, in the past, recommendations from UPOV to remove FMSS-friendly provisions from their seed laws because of their incompatibility with UPOV-1991.⁹¹ As we conduct the present review, there are ongoing undertakings by governments of Zambia and Zimbabwe to adopt PVP laws modelled after UPOV-1991. UPOV already found the draft law of Zimbabwe to conform with its Act of 1991, but CSOs and farmers keep campaigning against the law. In Zambia, the revision of the PVP law is underway and CSOs received the last version to provide comments. In both cases, ACB provided technical support. The main challenge is the governments showing preference for UPOV over biodiversity and farmers' rights instruments, including the UNDROP.⁹²
- d. Lack of sustainable funding for continuous support to FMSS and agroecologically sustainable food systems: actors are unanimous that the work performed by ACB is always important and unique in its nature: research, analysis, advisory services, technical support

⁸⁹ Interview ACB (3)

⁹⁰ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

⁹¹S. Shashikant; *International Contradictions on Farmers Rights*. Nov. 2016. https://www.upov.int/edocs/mdocs/upov/en/upov_itpgrfa_sym_ge_16/upov_itpgrfa_sym_ge_16_ppt_6.pdf

⁹² The reviewer participated in CSOs' information and knowledge sharing workshops in both Zambia (28 June 2024) and Zimbabwe (26 June 2024) and had the chance to witness the support provided by ACB, specifically in the Zambian context.

advocacy, networking for broad-based movements, etc. They would like to see ACB receiving more funding to continue to provide evidence-based knowledge and information to back partners' work and ensure that "*their arguments [are not] easily dismissed,*" as put by a participant at the assessment workshop in Johannesburg (23-24 May 2024). The funding from SDC is highly valued by ACB staff, including the flexibility in it, as it allows them to do tremendous work and achieve important results.⁹³ The end of this funding will have a great impact on ACB's work and the dynamic contribution it makes to the broader agroecological sustainable food system approach in Africa. However, ACB can build on the achievements of the SASA project and integrate new thinking and new issues as important as the classic ones it has been working on for a year. This ability for horizon scanning and anticipation of new issues are important characteristics of a sustainable organisation.

- e. Differences of CSOs' approaches are likely to reduce collaboration and joint initiatives. ACB is often seen as radical and confrontational in its approach by some CSOs that are supposed to be their partners, and with whom they share information and can have joint strategy. This leads sometimes to misunderstanding on the strategy to take in advocacy, and negatively impacts the results in policy influence where the desired outcome may not be achieved.

To the external challenges identified above, the review also reveals two key internal challenges: the lack of a formal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system and the lack of a resource mobilisation strategy. While the M&E aspect is being dealt with, it will be important to have in place a strategy around resource mobilisation to have visibility on how to seek, acquire, use, and report on funding from different sources. Although the existing approach, which the reviewer knows little about, may have proven efficient, with the closure of the SASA project and the evolution of the strategic plan towards more integrated and holistic interventions, the reliance on a clear and predictable strategy for fundraising will be necessary to support future work.

4.5 Lessons Learned

Key lessons from the review process can be summarised as follows:

- a. Research-based interventions backed with expertise in policy analysis and a good understanding of grassroots actors' views and concerns, combined with capacity building, information sharing and awareness raising, alongside advocacy, are highly effective and can enable others to act on their own, thereby guaranteeing continuity in the actions, something that is needed in areas like policy and legal advocacy in the agro-food systems that depend on long-term engagements. Such an approach has been determinant in ACB's achievements and allowed the SASA project to build on the experience and networks that it enhanced and contributed to grow through its different phases.
- b. Collective actions grounded in multidimensional and multi-country strategy are the best approach for alternative food systems grounded in food sovereignty, seed sovereignty, and agroecological practices. ACB's strategy of six integrated functional areas, and its reliance

⁹³ Interview ACB (1).

on partnerships, movement building, and learning exchanges at the national, regional, and global level has proven effective in that respect. The use of regional, national, and grassroots networks as a pathway for awareness creation, sensitizing, capacity development, and advocacy has shown great results and is greatly admired by the partners of ACB.

- c. A holistic and integrated approach to seed sovereignty, FR, and FMSS in the broad context of food sovereignty and democratic food systems is necessary as a new vision to engage on food systems transformation in Africa. This integrates key challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, and public investments in the benefit of smallholder farmers. It speaks to ACB's new strategic plan and is encouraged as a new direction, building on the success of its work, including the SASA project.
- d. It is important to develop an African narrative on different issues based on African realities and context, instead of following international development narratives. The solutions suggested by the development narrative are not adapted and do not serve the interests of African countries. Organisations that understand that and work to build the African narrative, like ACB, should be kept alive and should continue to provide expertise and needed support to farmers' organisations and CSOs supporting them, and advisory services to governments for quality participation in international discussions and informed decision-making at the national level.
- e. Linking the global, regional, and national levels is key to successful interventions for the emergence of a biodiverse, resilient, and just food system in Africa. This speaks also to collaboration, partnerships, movement building, and a holistic approach to amplify the struggle and enhance policy and legal framework in line with the goals and approaches of sustainable and resilient food systems that should be democratically and collectively designed by all stakeholders.

Such lessons should be integrated in ACB's plans and strategies for future work. The following section reflects on issues and opportunities for a continuous presence in food systems governance.

4.6 Emerging issues and opportunities for continuous presence in food systems governance

The end of the SASA project marks the end of an era, the legacy of which constitutes a strong basis for ACB to build new work. There is still important work to do on the core focus areas of the SASA project and new issues are emerging. The present review and the previous ones confirm the relevance of ACB's work and its importance for the future of the African food system. According to ACB's partners, this body of work can stand as institutional memory on issues about food systems transformation in Africa. They also appreciate the way ACB picks up emerging issues and technologies and delves into the technicalities of these, making expertise available, and analysing and digesting with partners, to create new knowledge, discourses, and political positions that are anchored within food sovereignty and agroecology. In this regard, the ACB is flexible in terms of participating directly and indirectly in response to demands for technical support and to build on

its regional experience.⁹⁴ This flexibility should be kept as ACB continues to build on its tremendous experience and achievements.

The new strategic plan of ACB (2023-2026) already shapes the future work of ACB. It was developed based on lessons and experience from previous work, including the SASA project. This new strategy is both an opportunity and an asset for a continuous presence of ACB in food systems governance and related issues in Africa. Different opinions from interviews and the assessment workshop are in line with this view. This also follows the trends and emerging issues in food system governance in Africa, the main aspect being the holistic and integrated approach, combining past focus areas with new issues underlined by a contextualised evidence-based thinking of an African CSO, and localising the interventions in the broader context of food systems transformation. This new direction for ACB's future work is analysed below to assess how relevant it is to strengthen ACB's leading role and its networks and partnerships to influence the food systems transformation agenda in Africa.

– Integrated approach through intersectionality: the new orientation of ACB's work

ACB's vision for 'culturally and biologically diverse, and socially just and democratic food systems in Africa' relies on a holistic and integrated approach. This comes clear in the new strategic plan which vests ACB with the mission to work at "the intersections of biodiversity, climate change, and food systems, to shift power and social changes that advance a just transition in Africa." This led to four key programme areas, including a core area (biodiversity) and three key entry points or implementing areas, i.e.; climate change, food systems and agroecology. The present review finds this new organisation of working areas very relevant in the face of current issues and trends observed in agrifood systems in Africa and globally.

The relevance of the approach first lies in ACB's inherent research and analytical nature. Reading through the different programme areas, the reviewers note a thorough analysis of the key issues in agrifood systems in Africa, key drivers, underlying causes, and proposed solutions. Considering biodiversity as the main source of living for humanity through the provision of food, energy, medicine, ecosystem services, etc., ACB plans to work on key drivers of its loss and alternative solutions to ensure the conservation and sustainable use thereof, focusing on agricultural biodiversity. This has been a cross-cutting theme at the core of ACB's work on seed policies, advocacy, and movement building for the last 10 years. It will continue to be a key component of future work as essential to safeguarding biodiversity to ensure food security and build resilience in the face of an ever-changing climate, and safeguarding the rights and roles of smallholder farmers and their farming practices. The new strategic plan considers the rights of smallholder farmers to seed and the maintenance and development of agricultural biodiversity as the cornerstones of agroecology and a just transition away from carbon-based, corporate-controlled, and extractive industrial agriculture and food systems.

The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity also entails opposing standardisation and homogenisation emanating from industrial-corporate agriculture, which has led to on-farm genetic erosion. This will continue to be an important focus in ACB's work, based on the understanding that "on-farm diversity lies outside of the commercial sector, taking into account that industrial

⁹⁴ ACB strategic plan (2023-2026).

agriculture and the Green Revolution rely only on a few commercial crops and varieties.”⁹⁵ The promotion of on-farm biodiversity includes supporting FMSS, seed banks and networks, in situ conservation, the revival and use of indigenous crops and knowledge, non-food plants for ecosystem services and synergy. The scope of this just transition work also includes on-farm animal and soil biodiversity which is not a focus of ACB’s work. The recognition of this as part of the work offers an opportunity for collaboration with people working on these issues, and also avenue for research on integrated issues.

The key drivers to biodiversity loss and other interconnected issues, including the associated impacts to the agrifood systems are used as entry points to identify the three programme areas for the future work of ACB. The first programme area focuses on climate change and its intersections with food systems and biodiversity and is described as the *climate lens*. The climate lens provides an analysis of the role, and proposed solutions, of the current corporate-controlled food system in climate change, and its social and human rights impacts. The food system is said to be responsible for 21 to 37% of global greenhouse gas emissions per year, and that found to be “a wholly inequitable system in its impacts on farmers, farm workers, and rural communities, in terms of the production component and on consumers, food workers, and the urban and rural poor communities.”⁹⁶ When it comes to solutions, the main focus is on the promotion of climate-smart agriculture (CSA), defined as an agribusiness-led, and development-supported, vision of high-tech, high-surveillance, and data-driven “farmerless farming.”⁹⁷ Given international development and philanthropic agencies do not offer better alternatives, ACB’s approach of resisting corporate take-over of the African Agrofood system and building alternatives to false solutions will still be needed as part of the solutions for a climate-resilient, sustainable, and equitable food systems grounded in diversified seed systems, human rights, and indigenous knowledge systems. The *climate lens* offers a clear orientation on how to develop such alternatives.

Through the *food systems lens*, the second programme area articulates agrofood systems, climate change, and biodiversity. It focuses on the analysis of the African agrifood sector development instruments to assess the trajectory of the transformation of food systems in Africa. The main instruments are the Africa Union (AU)’s Agenda 2063 and its implementing plans, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), and Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods.⁹⁸ ACB strategic plan points to the neoliberal orientation of Agenda 2063 and its potential to be a ground for infrastructure development for a capitalist model of trade, and ultimately the local and international structural powers. ACB believes it is more likely to reinforce the current system, protect the economic interests of the elite, and reinforce the European and agribusiness imperialist agenda. This concern is shared by many African COSs and some interested researchers. The reviewer and GRAIN⁹⁹ conducted a light analysis of the intellectual

⁹⁵ Strategic Plan of ACB (2023-2026).

⁹⁶ Ibid., citing the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on Climate Change and Land (2021).

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ All documents to be found on the AU website here: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>

⁹⁹ The Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) is a small international non-profit organisation that works to support small farmers and social movements in their struggles for community-controlled and biodiversity-based food systems. Information available here: <https://grain.org/en/pages/organisation>

property protocol of the AfCFTA and its potential impacts on seeds and farmers' rights and found that it is more likely to strengthen the privatisation of agricultural biodiversity.¹⁰⁰

It appears clear in ACB's analysis that the orientation of the African food system transformation, as conducted by key institutions and different governments, lies mainly in the push for the adoption of commercial agriculture and upscaling and 'graduating' farmers into the commercial and industrial seed and food systems intertwined with the exercise of power and control by the state over farmers, via farmers' organisations and climate change adaptation strategies.¹⁰¹ This is supported by external actors with funding and policy influence. AFSA recently published a briefing paper that reveals how AGRA "[uses] its outsized power to exert undue influence on local, national, and continental policymaking, [through] strategic financial backing and embedding of consultants in government institutions to entrench industrial models detrimental to farmers."¹⁰² This will need more attention from organisations like ACB. An important aspect of such work will be the assessment of the impacts of the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security (2003), the predecessor of the Malabo Declaration. The Maputo Declaration committed African States to allocate at least 10 percent of national budgetary resources to agriculture and rural development.¹⁰³ It is important to assess how these 10% have been used at the national level, and advocate for more public funds to go to farmers and agroecological practices. This needs to also be monitored properly, including accountability mechanisms, and a link with the post-Malabo process.

ACB's strategic plan stresses the urgent need to question the neoliberal paradigm driving African food systems transformation and global trade policies, and the necessity to assess and restructure trade and investment relationships between Africa and the rest of the world, especially considering the impacts of COVID-19. This will rely on the well-elaborated multidimensional strategy that ACB developed and refined over its twenty-year engagement on issues described above. The interconnectedness of the programme areas adds high value to this strategy and strengthens alternatives building for a paradigm shift in the African food systems' transformation agenda. It is important to recall ACB's core strategies that rely on the following:

- Active resistance to extractivism/capitalist encroachment, critical analysis, and deconstruction of and challenging corporate and false narratives on development and transformation;
- Strengthen and support democratic and progressive spaces, institutions, and policies wherever feasible, taking into account that policies are mostly contradictory, being the result of compromises based on the balance of forces. Hence the ACB supports the realisation of progressive elements within such policies, such as FR in the ITPGRFA but not free corporate access to genetic resources, nor the subordination of FR to the dictates of commercial seed laws and policies.

¹⁰⁰ Mohamed Coulibaly and Grain (2023): [What future for seeds under the African Free Trade Area?](#)

¹⁰¹ Strategic Plan of ACB (2023-2026).

¹⁰² AFSA Press release: AGRA's policy influence exposed. 28 August 2024. <https://afsafrika.org/press-release-agras-policy-influence-exposed/>. Briefing paper available here: <https://afsafrika.org/pulling-back-the-veil-agras-influence-on-africas-agricultural-policies/>

¹⁰³ <https://www.nepad.org/caadp/publication/au-2003-maputo-declaration-agriculture-and-food-security>

- Build alternatives – intellectual and material resources and practice to go beyond capitalism – rooted in mass-based, democratic organisations and networks.

With the combination of these core strategies with the five dynamic and integrated functional areas, i.e., Horizon scanning and prioritization, research and analysis, movement building, advocacy, Communications/sharing and learning, ACB is in a strong position, together with its partners, to yield more results and impacts towards the realisation of its vision, that is establishing “culturally and biologically diverse, and socially just and democratic food systems in Africa” backed with practices and ideological outlooks of popular movements in the detriment of the corporate food regime. This will, however, depend on sustainable and flexible funding and a well-coordinated partnership with key networks at both national and regional levels.

The last programme area focuses on agroecology as an alternative to the industrial food system (*the agroecology lens*). This builds on the existing knowledge systems and agricultural practices on which a farmer-led and people-centered food system is based, including farmers’ associativity processes, self-managed extension work, and popular education pedagogies. These knowledge systems and practices strengthen the social fabric of communities and enhance their adaptive capacities, enabling them to persist in the context of adversity. Agroecology is seen in the new ACB strategy as a powerful climate and biodiversity solution in the hands of frontline farming communities, and grassroots groups, supported by an important body of academics and scientists. It is a practice, science, and movement that uses ecological and social concepts and principles in the design and management of sustainable agricultural ecosystems. ACB considers agroecology as an integrated and appropriate response to the multiple challenges facing smallholder production in the era of climate change, the biodiversity crises, and global disruptions facing the continent. This is an important aspect of its future work for an effective transformation of agriculture and food systems on the continent towards democracy, social justice, redress of past injustices, and an inclusive economy.

ACB also believes that “Agroecology is a potentially effective response to meeting multiple government objectives, including food and nutrition security, natural resource management, biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, land redistribution, water access and use, localisation, cooperative and small enterprise development, spatial planning, local economic development, women and youth, and participation amongst others.” It is important to ensure that agroecology becomes central to the transition process in different African countries. For this to be a reality, ACB will need to strengthen its collaboration with different CSOs and Farmers’ organisations, and strengthen its evidence-based advocacy. This needs also concrete support to farmers on the ground, beyond policy work. ACB is not a field organisation, but can contribute to this through collaboration with national farmer organisations to strengthen such actions. There will include capacity building and partnership with research institutions on participatory research and experimentation.

With such programme areas building on experience and achievement, ACB still has a lot to bring to support the search for a biodiverse and ecologically sustainable food system, based on the needs, realities, knowledge, and practices of African farmers and other food system actors. The new orientation of ACB’s work allows for the continuation of past activities that still have relevance and value-addition in the context of the integrated approach, such as the issue of FMSS.

– FMSS, an unfinished work

ACB and its partners were able to uncover the FMSS issue and bring it into policy processes, but this is still unfinished work. The 2019 end-of-phase evaluation of the SASA project raised the question of “how these heterogeneous FMSS [can] truly become the core of a production system that enriches agroecology, sustains agricultural biodiversity, and helps realise food sovereignty [...]?”¹⁰⁴ For this to happen, FMSS must be fully recognised in national systems based on alternative legislation and standards that allow farmers to freely continue with their seed activities as part of their agricultural practices, including multiplication and selling of their seeds. The issue of recognition of farmer's seed is still stuck in the registration of farmer's varieties but needs to evolve to alternative standards. This work fits well in the integrated approach described above but needs to be carried on specifically as the continuation of what was already achieved.

The governance and legal/institutional frameworks needed to ensure the sustainability of FMSS should build on international instruments like the Seed treaty and the UNDROP, and borrow from progressive national legislations of countries like Brazil, India, Italy, Ethiopia, etc.¹⁰⁵ The recognition of ‘populations’ in Europe as a legitimate type of seed, especially for use in organic production, may also be an example to look at, as recommended in the cited evaluation report.¹⁰⁶ The main argument behind the needed alternative legal framework is that farmers’ seed systems are not intended to produce uniform crops like the commercial seed system but to embed diversity and heterogeneity within the seeds, and ensure nutritious foods for local food webs. This also integrates the fulfilment of Farmers’ Rights as a Human Right and the protection of their seed and biodiversity from contamination and biopiracy.¹⁰⁷

The expertise and experience of ACB are still strongly needed in this endeavour. It entails strong advocacy and strong cross-continental partnership with either organisations with a continental reach like AFSA, or with regional networks and organisations on a joint coordinated strategy, including on how to raise more funding.

5. Recommendations

Recommendations for ACB

– Develop a clear narrative around agroecology, taking into account both rural and urban issues

The present review revealed a very strong and radical voice of ACB on systemic issues and critiquing power relationships to call out for alternatives, based on the evidence and the work done by partners on the ground. Recently, agroecology emerged as the main alternative for the transition towards resilient and sustainable food systems. ACB will have a strong role to play in articulating what it entails to put agroecology at the centre of diverse, resilient, just, and democratic food systems in the African context. How to break from the standard development paradigm which also

¹⁰⁴ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

¹⁰⁵ See Coulibaly and Peschard, supra note 12.

¹⁰⁶ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

¹⁰⁷ This paragraph attempts to provide some answers to questions raised in the 2019 end of phase evaluation, by Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

use agroecology as a solution should be one of the core elements of such reflection. This needs a clear narrative on agroecology espousing the vision of grassroots actors and the principles of food sovereignty. ACB could lead the development of such a narrative, the key elements of which are already available in different actors' speeches and actions. The main benefit of this narrative-building will be to gather all relevant actors around the same understanding, the same vision, hence the same practices across the continent and beyond. This is important as there is no clear position among ACB and its partners, and agroecology is also used by supporters of industrial agriculture.

While there are “multiple definitions of agroecology [...] as different institutions and countries adopt definitions that reflect their concerns and priorities,” the term has evolved now to include the whole food system.¹⁰⁸ It is “concurrently a science, a set of practices and a social movement and has evolved as a concept over recent decades to expand in scope from a focus on fields and farms to encompass the entirety of agriculture and food systems. It now represents a transdisciplinary field that includes the ecological, socio-cultural, technological, economic, and political dimensions of food systems, from production to consumption.”¹⁰⁹ As such, agroecology is in line with the food systems' approach that includes the relationships between rural and urban areas, which may lead to the development of urban agroecology.¹¹⁰ This contradicts a criticism that agroecology focuses only on food production and excludes the urban dimension of food systems.¹¹¹ It is, therefore, important to build a clear narrative that clarifies all aspects of Agroecology as part of the vision shared by ACB and its partners in their quest for sustainable and resilient food systems.

– Develop a resource mobilisation strategy

With the end of the SASA project that covered an important part of ACB's budget, there is a need for ACB to have in place a strategy for resource mobilisation. This will help it to diversify its funding sources and to ensure stability in its financial situation through a clear, systematic, and predictable approach to the mobilisation, use, and management of financial assistance. This will also include the reporting, monitoring, and evaluation of the funding. It will also strengthen the well-managed and efficient finance and management systems already in place.

During the review, the reviewer attempted to identify elements of such a strategy. The understanding is that the main work of resource mobilization is done by the high management, specifically the executive director through close engagement with potential donors as she travels and participates in international meetings and events, and through collaboration with some strategic partners. In any case, the existing approach seems to have worked so far, but ACB has nothing to lose in developing a clear strategy that may engage other staff in resource mobilisation. The strategic plan is already an important tool to engage with donors, but resource mobilisation will add more value and improve efficiency and effectiveness in ACB's operations. The strategy should be in line with the vision, mission, and goals laid down in the strategic plan, and take into

¹⁰⁸ HLPE. 2019. Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.

¹⁰⁹ FAO. What is Agroecology? <https://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/en/b>

¹¹⁰ HLPE, 2019. Supra note 108.

¹¹¹ Notes from the assessment workshop in Johannesburg (23-24 June 2024).

account joint intervention with different partners. The strategy should insist on the Basket Funding approach and Contribution Agreements. These give more flexibility in activities prioritisation and implementation under and across different programme areas identified in the strategic plan. It should also be supported by a clear monitoring reporting and learning system. That is not systematic at ACB so far.

– Keep targeted and tailored intervention strategies for governmental actors

The policy influence is done through different types of interventions including capacity building for autonomous actions by partners. Interventions targeting governmental actors are mostly ad hoc and linked to the development or revision of specific policies or laws. For more impacts and change in mindset, there is a need for constant targeted actions on governmental actors, the actual policy-makers in a dominated policy-making system that exists in most African countries. Such interventions should be based on a permanent dialogue with state actors, including through regular meetings, conferences, webinars, trainings, etc., and can be coordinated with partners in different countries.

– Strengthen the collaboration with popular movements and like-minded networks

The vision of ACB and like-minded organisations is set and actions towards it were, so far, conducted through collective interventions and multi-level strategy. With the new direction based on a holistic and integrated approach to food systems transformation in Africa, the partnerships should be strengthened for the continuous success of the work and structural changes to food systems. Big networks such as AFSA are gaining more and more prominence at the continental level. ACB needs to be more involved to partake in setting the priorities, harmonising the approaches, and reorienting the goal where necessary.

Strengthening the collaboration with different networks also entails reinforcing the translation of ACB's research products and communication in other languages like French and, to some extent Spanish and Portuguese. Some efforts are already noticed in that direction and well appreciated by actors in francophone Africa, all members of the West African biosafety and biodiversity network, COPAGEN.

All these recommendations need more funding to be effectively implemented. The main issue for the future of ACB's work remains the sustainability of funding. SDC could still do something about that.

Recommendations for SDC

ACB and its partners recognised the relevance of SDC funding and commended SDC for supporting such important work over such a long period. The end of the funding will impact the continuation of the work as foreseen in the present report. SDC must remain in contact with ACB to support its transition to unfolding its new strategic plan and tackling new issues. The strategy of SDC's food system section (FSS) is under the integrated approach that orients ACB's work now and could be an avenue to explore for future support. This section is described as "a thematic unit supporting the transformation towards sustainable, resilient, inclusive and efficient food systems, in line with agroecological principles to achieve food security and nutrition, realising the right to

adequate food for all, in particular for women and young smallholder farmers and disadvantaged urban consumers in low- and middle-income countries.”¹¹²

The FSS has three thematic entry points or components: (i) agroecology, (ii) inclusive agricultural and food market systems, and (iii) healthy diets for improved nutrition. An over-arching component of global governance encompasses the three themes.¹¹³ It represents the relevant channel for SDC to partner with ACB on “innovative projects and programmes in line with agroecological principles to achieve food security and healthy, safe and diversified diets, realising the right to food [in Africa].”¹¹⁴

6. Conclusion

After examining the key achievements, challenges, and lessons learned throughout the three phases of the SASA project (from 2013 to 2023), we can say that ACB’s work is highly needed and appreciated by actors, and has generated important outputs and outcomes towards the project’s goal. Despite the slow changes at the policy level, important results have been achieved and some changes are visible at other levels. The first is the change in discourses and policy spaces at national, regional, and international levels about issues relating to biosafety, farmer’s rights, farmer-managed seed systems, commercial seed laws, UPOV 1991, and the resistance to corporate expansion in the African agrofood system. Through its proven strategy involving horizon scanning, innovative research, catalytic support to partners and networks through technical and advisory services, ACB succeeded in galvanising civil society and in influencing advocacy regarding the same issues. The lean organisational structure and flexible operational approach of ACB created multiple pathways to the project outcomes and enabled the emergence of strong networks, including the voice of small-scale farmers and other vulnerable groups. Other ACB projects contributed to the same goal.¹¹⁵

Based on self-sustaining movements that ACB contributed to building, the second level of change is the dissemination of agroecological alternatives and “[the frustration of negative changes to] agricultural policies and practices that would lead to full-scale industrialisation of African agriculture, unfettered use of biotechnologies and irreversible damage to agricultural biodiversity.”¹¹⁶ While evidence for alternative proposals in favour of farmers’ rights and sustainable food systems exists in different countries, with some encouraging outcomes as described in this report, there is also a clear indication that “ACB’s radical and outspoken critiques” that galvanised the networks helped avoid ‘closed door’ “policy revisions which would have left civil society with a much-diminished terrain of action for promoting agricultural biodiversity.”¹¹⁷

The SASA project also contributed to the transformation of ACB’s thinking and the refinement of its strategy. This has to do with the learning approach in the implementation of the project through

¹¹² <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/sdc/organisation/abteilungen/thematische-zusammenarbeit/global-programme-food-security.html>

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ See Masendeke et al., supra note 29.

¹¹⁶ Mulvany et al., supra note 7.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

the consistent assessment of its different phases and collective reflections with partners to draw lessons and learn from the successes and challenges of the project. The new strategic plan is the outcome of such a learning process along the implementation of different projects, SASA being the main one over the last ten years. This allowed ACB to ensure that its work reflected the challenges posed by the deepening food, climate, biodiversity, and social crises in Africa. The future work of ACB will be directed at those challenges. Given their heavy burden on African agro-food systems, the inadequacy of conventional measures adopted by African countries under the intensification of corporate control and Green Revolution approach in the food system, the agroecological alternatives proposed by ACB, its partners, and the growing 'ecological food systems transition coalition' have a lot of chance to get more attention, hence more supports. This confirms the need for such actors to remain involved in food system governance and the just transition debate.

The reviewers noted the awareness of ACB about this situation and the fact there will be more demands from partners in future. There's a need for more capacity building to address more complex needs on laws and policies. This should be done through the leveraging of legal expertise at the national level, wherein national CSOs will lead the critiques of official documents of their governments and propose alternative contents in line with the goals and objectives of the ecological food system coalition, and ACB will continue to provide the needed support, including reviewing documents and "maintaining its role as the point of referral for advice at the regional level."¹¹⁸ "This will require ACB to develop a clear institutional development strategy to address mutually agreed gaps in a timely and monitorable process of change,"¹¹⁹ as recommended in past evaluation reports. It also requires sustainable and flexible funding, and while ACB should be developing a clear strategy to diversify its sources of funding, SDC could still provide some support through its food system section which supports projects and programmes like those of ACB.

Annexes

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

1. Background information and context of the evaluation

ACB's vision is culturally and biologically diverse landscapes, territories, and food systems in Africa that are socially just and democratic, based on the interconnectedness and harmonious co-existence and co-creation between people and nature. ACB's mission is to carve transformative pathways through co-generating and diffusing new discourses and catalysing action, at the intersections of biodiversity, climate change, and food systems, to shift power and social changes that advance a just transition in Africa. Our work is anchored in a value system of reciprocal, horizontal, and interconnected relationships between people and nature.

The ACB has been at the forefront of the political and policy processes at regional and national levels to promote Farmer Seed Systems (FSS), farmers' rights (FRs), and agricultural biodiversity. We have done pioneering work bringing global attention to and challenging the harmonisation of

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

seed and intellectual property rights laws at Southern and East African regional and continental levels as well as having spearheaded a formidable challenge to the harmonisation of Intellectual Property (IP) laws based on UPOV 1991, under the auspices of the African Regional Intellectual Property Organisation (ARIPO). ACB was able to contribute to avoiding draconian rural surveillance systems being put in place in ARIPO countries, considerably slowed down the accessions by African parties to the ARIPO Protocol on the protection of new plant varieties, and catalysed the mobilisation of African civil society organisations (CSOs) in supporting democratic seed laws and fighting against over the commercialisation of seeds by aggressive multinational companies.

ACB has created working relationships on agroecology, seed systems, and farmers' rights in the region through collaborative work. This has provided platforms for joint planning and reflection for better coordination with governments and other stakeholders at the national level while creating a collective voice at the regional level on these issues. This strengthens movement building, which is a key objective of the ACB.

Through the ACB's work on FSS and FR, via multiple alliances with national CSOs and stakeholders toward the development of progressive seed laws and policies, local CSOs now have knowledge and understanding of, and resistance towards UPOV 1991 and industrial agriculture systems that need to be replaced with more farmer-based agroecological systems. In addition, the ACB has been able to advance work on the legislation of farmer varieties, including issues of quality of seed, to respond to the current challenges. In SA, relatively good exceptions have been achieved in commercial seed laws so that these do not criminalise farmers' practices of saving, exchanging, and reusing farm seed and do not require certification. These shifts would arguably not have come about had the ACB not been heavily engaged in the issues, within a well-supported and coordinated civil society network, which readily took guidance from the ACB over around eight years.

ACB has supported farmer experts participating in the Ad Hoc Technical Experts Group (AHTEG) on the implementation of FR under the aegis of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA) and pushback against the co-option of FRs by the seed industry in the AHTEG as well as at Governing Body meetings of the Treaty. The ACB has engaged with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), specifically the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB) since its inception. These engagements include following the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI), the negotiations on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), and Digital Sequence Information (DSI) under the Open-ended Working Groups (OEWG). Indeed, a significant area of growth has been our work under the CBD, in particular the multilateral negotiations to craft a new GBF, and in this regard, the ACB contributed substantially to national, regional, and international discourses on issues situated within the convergence in the African context between climate change, agriculture, biodiversity, biotechnology, and food systems.

Overall, we have learned that networking is a critical component of influencing change and knowledge creation for local partners and stakeholders. As a result of networking, the ACB's sphere of influence has expanded regionally and continentally throughout Africa.

There is widespread global consensus that the global food system is the primary driver of biodiversity loss and unless we tackle our food systems, biodiversity loss will accelerate, as will the destruction of ecosystems and habitats, threatening our ability to sustain human populations. In the past 50 years alone, vertebrate wildlife populations have shrunk by almost 70% and around one million species are threatened with extinction. Agriculture alone uses 80% of the world's extracted freshwater, and 80% of global farmland is used to raise animals, with farmed poultry representing 70% of all bird species, and wild birds making up only 30%. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species lists agriculture as the main threat to 24,000 of the 28,000 species it has assessed so far, and overfishing is the largest driver of biodiversity loss in ocean ecosystems.

Typical development interventions from bilateral and multilateral agencies as well as philanthropic interventions are nested in inequitable power relationships and contestations, especially over access to, and tenurial rights over, natural resources. These rarely address the underlying causes for vulnerabilities let alone question why marginalised groups bear disproportionate burdens for both climate change mitigation and adaptation. Rather the literature points to these tending to increase vulnerabilities and redistribute existing inequalities, reinforce vulnerabilities, and create new sources of vulnerabilities. In this regard, the literature talks about adaptation strategies being nested in typical development interventions that are inherently anti-transformation.

The AU's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, aspires to build a "prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development", and ensure that Africa becomes a "strong, united, resilient, and influential global player and partner. In its implementation plan (2014-2023), Agenda 2063 seeks to ensure the free movement of goods, services, and capital and to increase the volume of intra-African trade threefold – especially in agricultural value-added products – by 2023 (AUC, 2015). This will be done through the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA). Agenda 2063 identifies industrialisation and manufacturing as one of the seven core priority areas for its implementation, with the impetus to promote industrialisation through the AfCFTA, which came into force in May 2019. Agenda 2063 aspires to ensure that "Africa's agriculture will be modern and productive, using science, technology, innovation, and indigenous knowledge". The transformation of Africa's agriculture is anchored in the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). The Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods, adopted during the 23rd Ordinary Session of the AU's Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 2014, provides further impetus to the CAADP process and gives the direction for agriculture on the continent for the next decade.

There is a clear commitment by the AU to industrialise Africa, seen as the only way to develop and sell the hindrances to wealth accumulation on the continent. This is visible in the Lagos Plan of Action (1980-2000), the Abuja Treaty (1991), the Africa Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Accelerated Industrial Development for Africa, the Africa Mining Vision, the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa, the AfCFTA, the Framework for Boosting Intra-African Trade in Agricultural Commodities and Services (2021), the Continental Agribusiness Strategy (2012), and impending Africa Industrial Revolution Strategy. At the heart of this is developing the continent's domestic productive capabilities to spur structural transformation.

ACB is led by Ms. Mariam Mayet, with a team of research and advocacy officers based in South Africa and Tanzania, with a strong group of part-time/contracted researchers and facilitators supplementing the core team. ACB also has dedicated communications, monitoring and evaluation, administration, and finance staff to provide support to the operations team. ACB currently consists of seven full-time staff and two part-time staff.

2. PREVIOUS EXTERNAL EVALUATIONS

The ACB has been subject to several external reviews in the recent past including those conducted during the support by the SDC of the ACB. These will be made available to the reviewers.

3. Objective, scope, and focus of the evaluation

The evaluation will assess the work of the ACB in responding to the aim of the project which is to build momentum, especially amongst civil society organisations in Southern Africa to respond effectively and at scale to the issues identified in the project applications. The objectives include strengthening and supporting a network of active CSOs including farmer associations in SADC at the national and regional levels to advocate towards seed sovereignty, a wider development goal of establishing agricultural policies in Southern Africa that recognise farmers' rights, diversified farmer-managed seed systems, and contribute to sustainable maintenance and use of agricultural biodiversity. This work also entailed a focus on commercial seed laws and policies, farmer-managed seed systems, and agroecology. The aim of the evaluation is one of capitalisation with a focus on achievements, challenges, and lessons learned.

4. Purpose and objectives

The main purpose of the evaluation is to interrogate and examine the extent to which the ACB has achieved its objectives in terms of both outputs and outcomes considering the guiding questions below.

The evaluators are required to evaluate the extent to which the ACB utilised strategic interventions, the mechanisms used to galvanise support, its strategy about the expenditure of the rapid response fund, and generally, the extent to which it has influenced the discourse and policy spaces nationally, regionally, and internationally about issues relating to farmer's rights, farmer-managed seed systems, commercial seed laws, and seed sovereignty.

The evaluators must evaluate the extent to which the ACB and its work have galvanised civil society and influenced advocacy nationally and regionally regarding commercial seed laws, UPOV 1991, farmers' rights, and farmer-managed seed systems.

Such an evaluation is meant also to provide an objective and critical analysis to guide the ACB regarding its future work, both in terms of outputs and outcomes. The evaluation must also take into account especially, the catalytic and weaving role that the ACB plays in Southern Africa and the wider continent toward civil society and government action. Further to this, it must assess the extent to which the ACB as a learning organisation has ensured that its work both reflected and

responded to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the deepening food, climate, biodiversity, and social crises in Africa. In this regard, the evaluator must take into account the ACB's evolving strategic plan for 2023-2026.

The evaluators are required to recommend future opportunities for ACB and donors such as SDC to work in the seed policy spaces in Southern Africa with connections with the rest of the continent, in the context of interlinked issues including, agricultural biodiversity, food systems, climate change, agroecology, farmers' rights, and sustainable farmer-managed seed systems.

The focus of such evaluation will entail discreet interviews with partners and stakeholders and by way of capitulation and lessons learned to be conducted internally with the ACB team over a two-day in-person facilitated workshop, on dates to be agreed upon with the ACB. Where relevant, considering the nature of this evaluation, which differs from a conventional evaluation, the OECD/DAC¹²⁰ criteria will be used as a guide regarding relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

5. Scope

Geographic coverage

The target groups are smallholder farmers, including women and youth, activists, and CSOs including farmer and consumer associations, social movements, and NGOs, in Southern Africa.

Other stakeholders

Other stakeholders may include international NGOs working in the field of seed sovereignty and agroecology, government decision-makers, journalists, donors, and key activists working on intersecting issues.

See the questions below that may assist the evaluator in responding to 5 broad areas of focus.

This is one of the key quality criteria for the evaluation.

Gender or other cross-cutting issues such as environmental impact and inclusion of people with a disability should be taken into account in the evaluation questions.

The final report must answer the questions set out here.

⇒ Relevance

Are we doing the right thing? This criterion measures the extent to which the objectives of a project/programme align with the needs of the beneficiaries and strategies (policies) of partners and donors.

⇒ Effectiveness

Are the objectives of the project/programme being achieved? This criterion measures the extent to which the objectives of a project/programme will (foreseeably) be achieved.

⇒ Efficiency

Will the objectives be achieved in an economically viable manner? This criterion measures the adequacy of the deployed resources to the achieved results and effects.

¹²⁰ OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation: [Better Criteria for Better Evaluation. Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use](#) (2019).

⇒ Impact

Will the project/programme contribute to the attainment of overall development goals? This criterion assesses whether and to what extent the project/programme will contribute towards the attainment of the intended primary and secondary long-term objectives under development policy. Additionally, whether and, if so, which other positive and negative changes have occurred will be investigated.

⇒ Sustainability

Will the intended positive changes (foreseeably) have a lasting effect? This criterion assesses the extent to which the positive effects of the development intervention will continue beyond the end of the project period.

Additionally, an organisation's or programme's processes, procedures, and standards or M&E system may be assessed during an evaluation.

Annex 2: Evaluation Programme

Steps	Tasks	Expected results	Date/Period
1. Inception report	Consultant to submit and present an inception report describing his understand of the review and presenting the methodology he will use to carry it. Receive feedback from SDC and ACB and submit a revised version of the inception report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Inception report presented before SDC and ACB – revised inception report 	5 Jan – 20 Feb. 2024
2. Desk Review	Collect relevant documents from ACB. Review and analyse the collected documents. Prepare a preliminary report to be completed with data from interviews.	An (internal) initial report to be turned into interim report, after conducting the interviews.	26 Feb. – 28 March 2024
3. Interviews	Finalise the interview guide based on feedback on the inception report, and on the initial report. Identify key informants with the ACB. Conduct interviews and produce a synthesis note to be merged with the initial report to produce an interim report.	A synthesis note fitting into the initial report as additional information. An interim report of the review.	1-30 April 2024 Will try to combine these two steps as the review evolves.
4. Workshop Preparation	Develop a PPT on the results of the review including the recommendations. Finalize the methodology on the process	PowerPoint Presentation on the preliminary findings Short description of the methodology on how the workshop will be conducted	1-10 May 2024 The interim report will be shared at that time.
5. Workshop	Travel to SA. Present the findings of the review during the workshop and lead the discussion with participants. Collect information from the workshop for the improvement and completion of the report. Travel back to Mali	A note on workshop outcome, including a synthesis of key points of discussions to be used to finalise the review report.	21-24 May
6. Reporting	Analyse workshop results and merge them with interim report to produce the final report.	final report of the review	15 June*

*The report was finally submitted end of August due to unexpected delay in the process.

Annex 4: Evolution of the SASA Project throughout its different phases (discussed at the review workshop in Johannesburg, on 22-23 May 2024).

Aspects of the analysis	Different periods/phases reviewed		
	2011-2015	2016-2019	2019-2023
Focus Areas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seed sovereignty– seed law, intellectual property, biopiracy and farmers’ rights 2. GMOs– biosafety and pesticide 3. Green revolution – corporate control, agribusiness and synthetic fertiliser 4. Food Sovereignty – agroecology and soil fertility 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biosafety, GM and new technologies 2. Seed Sovereignty 3. Opposing corporate expansion in African agriculture 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Biosafety, GM and new technologies 2. Seed Sovereignty 3. Opposing corporate expansion in African agriculture
Goal of SASA project	Increased food sovereignty and food security in Southern and East Africa through seed diversity and agroecological practices		Established agricultural policies in Southern Africa that meet FR, diversify FMSS, and contribute to sustainable maintenance and use of agricultural biodiversity.
Strategy (see ToC)	(i) research and analysis, including participatory research (ii) technical support and capacity building, (iii) advocacy, including with partners, and (iv) effective communications through different means, including social media.		(i) Horizon scanning and prioritisation; (ii) research and analysis; (iii) movement building; (iv) advocacy; (v) communications sharing, and (vi) learning.
Findings/conclusion of past evaluations	ACB contributed to strengthening social movements at national and regional level to build civil society voices to keep the spread of GMOs and related pesticides at bay, and consolidate FMSS, and that it made progress in shifting policy and corporate practice in the face of strong national and global opponents.	ACB gave a bold lead in opening up policy spaces for seed diversity and agroecology, especially through its work on FMSS and Farm inputs subsidies Program (FISP); that its support to different networks across the SADC region constrained corporate control of policy levers and contributed to build capacity, awareness and confidence that the agroecological alternative is viable however, that public investment in support of FMSS is negligible.	The project approach was effective in creating multiple alliances that can influence farmer seed systems and agroecology to improve wellbeing and livelihoods of farmers, agrobiodiversity and food sovereignty ACB’s expertise in seed laws and advocacy facilitates positive change and its impacts through strategic alliances across the region, something it illustrated by local CSOs gaining knowledge, understanding and resisting to UPOV-1991 and industrial agriculture systems that need to be replaced with more farmer based agroecological systems. ACB has the ability to progress work on the legislation of farmer varieties including issues of quality of seeds to respond to the current challenges

Annex 5: List of documents

- ACB Briefing: Is Zambia’s food system collapsing? 18 July 2024. Available at: <https://acb.org.za/corporate-expansion/is-zambias-food-system-collapsing/>
- ACB Strategic Plan 2023-26
- ACB, SASA Project’s Operational Report for the Period: 1st March 2023 to 29th Feb 2024.
- African Center for Biodiversity, Une évaluation du soutien à l’agroécologie dans le paysage politique sud-africain. Document de Référence. Juin 2023. Available at: <https://acb.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Evaluation-agroecologie-dans-le-paysage-politique-sudafricain.pdf>
- African Union 2003 Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security. Available at:
- AFSA Press release: AGRA’s policy influence exposed. 28 August 2024. <https://afsafrica.org/press-release-agras-policy-influence-exposed/>. Briefing paper available here: <https://afsafrica.org/pulling-back-the-veil-agras-influence-on-africas-agricultural-policies/>
- Centre for Community Development Solutions, Mid-Term Review of Strengthening Agrobiodiversity in Southern Africa (SASA) and the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI), 16 March 2022. Hereafter SASA MTR report.
- Dr. Barbara Klugman and Paul Currie, External Review of The African Centre for Biodiversity: 2011-2015. March 2016.
- FAO. What is Agroecology? <https://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/en/b>
- HLPE. 2019. Agroecological and other innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and food systems that enhance food security and nutrition. A report by the High-Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition of the Committee on World Food Security, Rome.
- <https://acb.org.za/corporate-expansion/ultra-processed-food-in-africa/>
- <https://www.nepad.org/caadp/publication/au-2003-maputo-declaration-agriculture-and-food-security>
- La Via Campesina and GRAIN, Seed laws that criminalise farmers: resistance and fightback; April 2015. Available here: <https://grain.org/fr/article/5142-seed-laws-that-criminalise-farmers-resistance-and-fightback>
- Masendeke et al., Project Evaluation on Resisting Expansion of Corporate-Industrial agriculture and genetic modification technologies in African agri-food systems, July 2023.
- Mohamed Coulibaly and Grain (2023): [What future for seeds under the African Free Trade Area?](#)
- Mohamed Coulibaly and Karine Peschard, [Towards Legal Recognition of Peasant Seed Systems in Africa: The Experience of Mali and Uganda](#). Misereor, 2023.
- OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria; available here: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>
- Patrick Mulvany et al., End of Phase report of the SASA project, 2019.
- Sangeeta Shashikant; International Contradictions on Farmers Rights. Nov. 2016. Available at: https://www.upov.int/edocs/mdocs/upov/en/upov_itpgrfa_sym_ge_16/upov_itpgrfa_sym_ge_16_ppt_6.pdf
- SASA Project Fact sheet.

- SDC Food Systems Section:
<https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/sdc/organisation/abteilungen/thematische-zusammenarbeit/global-programme-food-security.html>
- Trocaire; Food Security, Poverty Reduction, Climate Change: Placing Trócaire's Livelihoods Work in Context. Discussion Paper June 2012. Available at:
<https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/food-security-poverty-reduction.pdf>



Management Response to the End of Project Review for the Strengthening Agro-Biodiversity in Southern Africa (SASA) Project

Introduction

The Strengthening Agro-biodiversity in Southern Africa (SASA) project, supported by SDC from 2011-2024, contributed to 'supporting the participation of farmers and farmers' organisations in policy formulation' and 'development of national and regional norms, policies and political processes conducive to farmer-led seed systems. The work on farmers' seed systems is now part of national and regional policy agendas. Civil society and farmers' organizations in Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, and South Africa have been empowered to engage governments on inclusive seed laws. These groups influenced exceptions in the SADC Plant Breeders' Rights to allow farmers to reuse farm-saved seeds and shaped seed laws to support smallholder farmers. Alternatives are being developed to diversified crop and organic fertilizer options. A rapid response fund enabled 250+ CSOs to participate in decision-making on seed laws and policies at national, regional and global levels. A key lesson is that empowered national partners can drive advocacy, leading to policy shifts benefiting smallholder farmers.

Established in 2003 as the African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), the organisation was implementing the SASA project over a period of 12 years. Initially with an exclusive focus on genetically modified organisms and biosafety, the work of ACB expanded to interconnected issues affecting food sovereignty and biodiversity in Africa, including seed laws, farmer seed systems, agricultural biodiversity, agroecology, and corporate expansion in agriculture. Its geographical focus is mostly on Southern, West, and East Africa, with extensive continental and global networks.

Purpose of the review

External consultants were recruited to conduct an end of project evaluation/capitalisation of SASA. The key objectives of the review were to assess: (i) the achievements and impacts of the project; (ii) the ACB's ability to adapt to emerging challenges and unexpected circumstances, while pursuing the goals of the project; (iii) the key lessons to draw from the project to guide the future work of ACB, and (iv) the prospective analysis of opportunities for continuous presence in the seed policy space in southern Africa for both SDC (and other donors) and ACB.

Assessment of the evaluation

The evaluation was conducted by Mohamed Coulibaly, independent consultant, in accordance with international standards, notably the OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria. The evaluation process was well managed and included close involvement of the SDC's reference group comprising Bulisani Ncube, Programme Officer, and Tobias Sommer, Head of Domain.

The main objectives have been met by the evaluators. The report's analysis and resulting recommendations are considered to be useful for strengthening the strategic orientation of ACB and the future of the Strengthening Agro-Biodiversity in Southern Africa project.

Main findings

The SASA project and SDC's formal contract with ACB have been concluded, but agroecology remains central to Switzerland's cooperation efforts. In 2025, SDC will launch an urban

resilience project addressing agroecology in urban areas, while existing projects like SKI and MASAP apply agroecology in rural areas. SDC's support for ACB has been significant, and despite reduced funding, other donors like Bread for the World plan to continue their support. ACB's strength lies in research, legal advice, and capacitating CSOs, who engage governments. SDC remains committed to connecting ACB's work with global initiatives, focusing on seed systems and agroecology in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The evaluation was conducted to our satisfaction focusing on project achievements and recommendations for ACB as a research and advocacy organisation, and to SDC given the important on-going focus of issues of agroecology and farmers rights. ACB will use the findings in planning their transition as an organisation.

1. Recommendation 1: Develop a clear narrative around agroecology, taking into account both rural and urban issues.	
2. Recommendation 2: Develop a resource mobilisation strategy.	
3. Recommendation 3: Keep targeted and tailored intervention strategies for governmental actors.	
4. Recommendation 4: Strengthen the collaboration with popular movements and like-minded networks.	
5. Recommendation 5: SDC must remain in contact with ACB to support its transition to unfolding its new strategic plan and tackling new issues	
Fully agree	Partially agree Disagree

The following are management responses to the end of project review.

Recommendation 1: for ACB		
Develop a clear narrative around agroecology, taking into account both rural and urban issues. It is important to build a clear narrative that clarifies all aspects of Agroecology as part of the vision shared by ACB and its partners in their quest for sustainable and resilient food systems. Agroecology is in line with the food systems' approach that includes the relationships between rural and urban areas, which may lead to the development of urban agroecology. This contradicts a criticism that agroecology focuses only on food production and excludes the urban dimension of food systems. It is, therefore, important to build a clear narrative that clarifies all aspects of Agroecology as part of the vision shared by ACB and its partners in their quest for sustainable and resilient food systems.		
Management Response		
Fully Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
ACB Response: The ACB has commenced work that links urban and rural food systems through the work on ultra-processed food which has a very strong link to multiple issues including agroecology, farmer managed seed systems, agricultural biodiversity, and nutrition. They have earmarked initial work in three African cities, namely JHB, Lusaka and Dar Es Salaam and in this regard, have commenced a literature review of work done already in	Sabrina, Mariam, Stephen and Rutendo	September 2024 - December 2026

<p>cities in Africa to provide a basis for identifying interventions to make meaningful contributions, including but not limited to field work and case studies. To kick start this work more concretely, ACB is aiming to host a seminar in late January 2025, in Cape Town with experts, researchers and community farmers to discuss the issues in depth to assist the thinking and terms of reference for further targeted work. This is also mindful of the work underway by the HLPE of the CFS to develop agroecology principles for urban areas.</p>		
<p>SDC Response: Although this marks the end of the SASA project and SDC's formal contract with ACB, issues of agroecology in both rural and urban areas are important to Switzerland's cooperation programme. In 2025, SDC is developing an urban resilience project that will address issues of agroecology in urban areas (amongst other issues), while existing projects such as SKI and MASAP are applying agroecology in rural areas wholly and partially, respectively.</p>	<p>SKI and MASAP partners</p>	<p>On-going</p>

<p>Recommendation 2: for ACB</p>		
<p>Develop a resource mobilisation strategy. With the end of the SASA project that covered an important part of ACB's budget, there is a need for ACB to have in place a strategy for resource mobilisation. This will help it to diversify its funding sources and to ensure stability in its financial situation through a clear, systematic, and predictable approach to the mobilisation, use, and management of financial assistance. This will also include the reporting, monitoring, and evaluation of the funding. It will also strengthen the well-managed and efficient finance and management systems already in place.</p>		
<p>Management Response</p>		
<p>Fully Agree</p>	<p>Partially Agree</p>	<p>Disagree</p>
<p>Measures</p>	<p>Responsibility</p>	<p>Timing</p>
<p>ACB Response: It is the view of the ACB that we must deepen our work and thinking into interlinked / interconnected new areas of work to keep abreast with developments, government policies, opportunities, and challenges. This will enable the ACB to make new connections including with new partners and donors. The new strategy of the ACB (2023-2026) has already assisted us in shifting and deepening our work. We are particularly excited about the work in the cities which represent a greater chance of success for agroecology to take root.</p>	<p>Mariam</p>	<p>On-going</p>
<p>SDC Response: The significant role that SDC funding played in supporting ACB over the years and the gap that remains is noted. SDC will continue to engage with ACB through its network to pursue opportunities of funding whenever relevant. Our discussion with other donors such as Bread for the World, revealed that these donors have</p>	<p>SCO Harare</p>	<p>On-going</p>

plans to continue supporting ACB post-SDC support although the overall financing envelope will be reduced.		
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Recommendation 3: for ACB

Keep targeted and tailored intervention strategies for governmental actors. The policy influence is done through different types of interventions including capacity building for autonomous actions by partners. Interventions targeting governmental actors are mostly ad-hoc and linked to the development or revision of specific policies or laws. For more impacts and change in mindset, there is a need for constant targeted actions on governmental actors, the actual policy-makers in a dominated policy-making system that exists in most African countries. Such interventions should be based on a permanent dialogue with state actors, including through regular meetings, conferences, webinars, trainings, etc., and can be coordinated with partners in different countries.

Management Response

Fully Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
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Partially Agree

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
<p>ACB response: We do believe that we need to deepen our own advocacy and agency with governments and other actors. However, permanent dialogues can be very detrimental in that it can scupper the unique role that ACB plays in thought leadership, catalysing action, and advocacy as we may run the risk of becoming institutionalised NGOs. There are many NGOs on the continent already doing this sort of work. We would rather look for strategic opportunities for impactful dialogues, conversations and exchanges with government, and other actors who have influence over policy and implementation. The role we play vis-à-vis partners can be trimmed down also to more strategic work and this also depends on the availability of funding and partners' ability to provide co-funding.</p>	All program staff	2025 onwards.
<p>SDC Response: We have discussed this recommendation with ACB in the past as we have felt that many opportunities have been missed by not engaging more directly with government interlocutors in the longer term. Based on their response above and their feedback in the past, direct engagement with government policy makers at national levels may not be the strength or added value of the ACB, but the work of their partners (CSOs and farmers' organisations) anchored in the respective countries. ACB work has been focused on conducting rigorous research, offering legal advice and capacitation of CSOs who then engage their respective governments on related policy and legal issues.</p>		

Recommendation 4: for ACB

Strengthen the collaboration with popular movements and like-minded networks. The vision of ACB and like-minded organisations is set and actions towards it were, so far, conducted through collective interventions and multi-level strategy. With the new direction based on a holistic and integrated approach to food systems transformation in Africa, the partnerships should be strengthened for the continuous success of the work and structural changes to food systems. Big networks such as AFSA are gaining more and more prominence at the continental level. ACB needs to be more involved to partake in setting the priorities, harmonising the approaches, and reorienting the goal where necessary.

Management Response

Fully Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
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Measures	Responsibility	Timing
<p>ACB Response: The ACB is of the view that it needs to ensure the longevity of its legacy, its own agency and identity. The ACB runs the risk not only of losing its identity and becoming obsolete by amalgamating its work, vision, political space, thinking with large networks but also its funding as has already occurred. Having said this, the ACB has and continues to work with many partners across the continent and across the world and does not believe that it is the job of the ACB to harmonise the work but rather to ensure diversity of thinking, interventions, research, and advocacy. The ACB will continue to traverse a diversity of terrains.</p>		
<p>SDC Response: The response from ACB is noted. It is important for them to choose their battles and lines of work while being open to opportunities that would advance their vision. This includes continued engagement and being networked with like-minded organisations and bodies in the region and globally.</p>		

Recommendation 5: for SDC

SDC must remain in contact with ACB to support its transition to unfolding its new strategic plan and tackling new issues. The strategy of SDC’s global Food Systems Section (FSS) aligns well with the integrated approach that orients ACB’s work now and could be an avenue to explore for future support. The FSS has three thematic entry points or components: (i) agroecology, (ii) inclusive agricultural and food market systems, and (iii) healthy diets for improved nutrition. An overarching component of global governance encompasses the three themes. It represents a relevant potential channel for SDC to engage with ACB on “innovative projects and programmes in line with agroecological principles to achieve food security and healthy, safe and diversified diets, realising the right to food [in Africa].” As SDC’s FSS will be transitioning into a new Food and Health section, the alignment will need to be further explored once strategic frameworks of the new section are set.

Management Response

Fully Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
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Fully Agree

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
<u>ACB Response:</u> The ACB will warmly welcome an opportunity if this is possible, to continue its extremely fruitful collaboration with the SDC as we do see many areas of coherence and congruence with SDC's FSS.	ACB	2025 onwards
<u>SDC Response:</u> SDC will continue to explore potential opportunities of linking the work of ACB to global initiatives such as the work of the new Food and Health section. In the southern Africa region, we will be open to collaboration in research and policy work on farmer led seed systems, seed laws and agroecology as much as these can be applied to our focus countries, Zambia and Zimbabwe.	SCO Harare	On-going