

Bimonthly Updates

Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium Bimonthly Newsletter

Empowering Women, Inspiring Youth, Growing With Agroecology

Contents

1. **Editorial Message**
2. **Article Feature:** Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs): A Growing Challenge for Africa's Food Systems.
3. **Event Recap:** African Union (AU) Event Highlights
4. **Campaign Feature:** AFSA Youth Working Group Updates.
5. **Best Practice Highlight:** Kenya Seed Law Reform and Its Implications for Farmers.
6. **Training Update:** Forum for Social Studies (FSS) Training on Gender, Climate, and Nutrition.
7. **Food Culture:** A feature on traditional food from Southeast Africa.
8. **Upcoming Events**



**Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems
and Agroecology Consortium
(ESFSAC)**

Editorial Message

Welcome to the June 2026 edition newsletter of the **Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium (ESFSAC)**.

In this issue, we share some of the important moments and lessons from our recent work and more.

We are proud to announce the launch of the **Youth in Agroecology Startup Competition 2026**. For the second time, ESFSAC is creating a platform for passionate young innovators to showcase their agroecology driven agribusinesses while getting valuable mentorship and guidance to improve their startup.

We also highlight AFSA's impactful campaign that has been making an impact in youth empowerment, particularly through youth-led agroecology, entrepreneurship, and sustainable food systems working groups.

You will find an article feature about the health concerns of UPFS, update on the 52nd AU Ordinary Session and a traditional food feature from Southeast Africa.

As ESFSAC, we remain committed to working together with our partners, communities, and stakeholders. We believe that by sharing knowledge and supporting local best practices, we can build better food systems for everyone.

Warm regards,

ESFSAC Team

Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs): A Growing Challenge for Africa's Food Systems

Africa's food systems are undergoing profound transformation. Rapid urbanization, changing lifestyles, expanding supermarket chains, and the aggressive marketing of packaged food products have significantly altered dietary patterns across the continent. These changes accelerated the consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs), raising concerns about nutrition, public health, and the sustainability of Africa's food systems. As African countries face the challenges of undernutrition alongside rising rates of overweight, obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs), addressing the growing influence of ultra-processed foods has become an increasingly important policy priority.

Historically, African diets were largely based on diverse fresh, locally produced foods such as cereals, roots and tubers, pulses, vegetables, fruits, and traditional fermented foods and drinks. However, this dietary landscape is changing rapidly. This nutrition transition reflects a shift away from diverse traditional diets toward a few more energy-dense, highly processed food products.

Without effective policy interventions, current trends suggest that the consumption of ultra-processed foods will continue to increase as food markets become increasingly globalized. The negative health implications of rising UPF consumption are well documented. Numerous studies have associated high consumption of ultra-processed foods with increased risks of obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers, and premature mortality.

For Africa, the challenge is particularly complex because many countries continue to face triple burden of malnutrition. Children are especially vulnerable. Diets high in ultra-processed foods often replace nutrient-rich traditional foods needed for healthy growth and development. Excessive intake of sugary drinks and energy-dense snacks contributes to childhood overweight while failing to provide adequate vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber.

Reversing current trends requires coordinated action across governments, civil society, academia, communities, and the private sector. A comprehensive approach should include policies that make healthy foods more accessible while discouraging excessive consumption of ultra-processed products. Africa stands at an important crossroads in the evolution of its food systems.

While economic development and modernization present opportunities to improve food access, they also risk accelerating dietary shifts that undermine long-term health and nutrition.



“ The Core Challenges

- **Public Health Risks:** The consumption of cheap, highly accessible UPFs is directly linked to an alarming rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and hypertension.
- **Weakening of Local Economies:** Food and beverage corporations are rapidly capturing market share, undermining smallholder farmers, local food processors, and the informal markets that have traditionally supplied fresh, healthy food to urban and rural poor populations.
- **Loss of Biodiversity & Climate Impact:** The large-scale manufacturing of UPFs relies heavily on a narrow range of commodity crops, which diminishes agrobiodiversity, contributes to intensive pesticide use, and increases carbon footprints.

Therefore, revitalizing traditional diets can serve multiple objectives: improving nutrition, strengthening local economies, preserving biodiversity, and reinforcing cultural identity. Protecting and promoting traditional African diets is not simply a matter of preserving culture - it **is a strategic investment in public health**, food security, environmental sustainability, and economic resilience. The choices made today will shape the health, productivity, and well-being of Africa's populations for decades to come.

The 52nd Ordinary Session of Permanent Representatives' Committee (PRC) of the African Union (AU)

The **52nd Ordinary Session of the African Union's Permanent Representatives' Committee (PRC)** took place from 3 - 26 June 2026 at the AU Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In his opening address, H.E. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Chairperson of the AU Commission, delivered a candid assessment of the multifaceted challenges threatening the continent's stability and progress. He highlighted a confluence of crises: geopolitical tensions disrupting global supply chains, macroeconomic instability, delays in fertilizer imports impacting food security, ongoing conflicts, and health emergencies including the recent Ebola outbreak.

H.E. Ambassador Willy Nyamitwe, Chairperson of the PRC and Ambassador of Burundi, delivered a compelling address that framed unity not merely as a virtue but as essential to Africa's survival and prosperity. He cautioned against national positions that might inadvertently undermine continental solidarity, urging ambassadors to ensure their decisions tangibly improve the lives of ordinary Africans.

The session also addressed pressing peace and security concerns. In the combat against health emergencies the summit successfully mobilized political support and resources for the continental response, demonstrating the AU's capacity for coordinated action. Despite acknowledging the complex and evolving security challenges facing the continent, the Chairperson expressed confidence in the AU's collective capacity to address them, citing sustained Member State commitment to African-led solutions.

At its core, the 52nd PRC session represents a critical inflection point for Agenda 2063 **"The Africa We Want"**. The discussions reflect growing recognition that the continent's transformation cannot be donor-driven. Achieving Agenda 2063's ambitious objectives requires predictable, African-led financing and strengthened institutional capacity. The PRC's deliberations will shape the recommendations presented to the Executive Council, with the Committee's report and draft decisions set to inform the 49th Executive Council Session in El Alamein.



Key outcomes & decisions

- **Austerity Budget Adoption:** The AU Commission announced that the 2027 budget will be an austerity budget.
- **Urgent Resource Mobilization:** Member States were called upon to enhance solidarity and material support to bridge the widening gap between continental ambitions and operational capacity.
- **Strengthened Continental Unity:** The summit urged Member States to prioritize collective interests over national positions and ensure decisions translate into tangible improvements for ordinary Africans.
- **Coordinated Health Emergency Response:** The summit successfully mobilized political support and resources for coordinated action in addressing health crises through African-led solutions.
- **Agenda 2063 Financing Commitment:** The discussions reaffirmed that achieving Agenda 2063 requires predictable, sustainable African-led financing and that it can not be donor-driven.

As the 52nd Ordinary Session concludes, the African Union stands at a defining crossroads. The combination of fiscal constraints, geopolitical pressures, and internal challenges demands a new level of commitment from Member States and AU institutions alike. The messages from this session are clear: unity is indispensable, fiscal discipline is non-negotiable, and Africa's future depends on its ability to mobilize its own resources and speak with one voice on the global stage. The decisions made in the coming weeks will determine whether the AU moves from aspiration to acceleration in implementing Agenda 2063.



Dignitaries at the 52nd Ordinary Session of the Permanent Representatives' Committee of AU

AFSA's working groups are spaces for collaboration, learning and action across Africa's agroecology movement. They bring together farmers, Indigenous peoples, civil society, researchers and advocates to address shared challenges and advance food sovereignty from the ground up.

As Africa combats with climate change, biodiversity loss, evolving markets, and a rapidly growing population, one resource continues to offer the greatest promise for lasting transformation, its youth. Recognizing this immense potential, AFSA has established the **Youth Working Group** as a dynamic platform dedicated to nurturing young leaders who will shape the future of agroecology and food sovereignty across the continent.

It creates opportunities for young farmers, entrepreneurs, researchers, innovators, and advocates to acquire the knowledge, confidence, and networks needed to become influential changemakers within their communities and beyond. The group's vision reflects AFSA's broader commitment to ensuring that those who will inherit tomorrow's food systems are actively involved in designing them today.

Through mentorship programmes, learning journeys, innovation challenges, and digital learning tools, participants are exposed to real-world agroecological practices while developing skills in advocacy, entrepreneurship, policy engagement, and community organizing. This emphasis on experiential learning helps transform passionate youth into confident professionals capable of influencing food systems at multilevel.

The **Youth Working Group** operates within AFSA's wider ecosystem of thematic working groups, collaborating alongside initiatives focused on climate action, land rights, seed sovereignty, and citizen engagement. This integrated approach allows young leaders to understand the interconnected nature of Africa's food systems while contributing fresh ideas and innovative solutions across multiple areas of work.

Young people bring technological fluency, creativity, and fresh perspectives that strengthen AFSA's continent-wide movement. Importantly AFSA's longstanding vision places youth at the center of agroecology, food sovereignty and sustainable development.

The **Youth Working Group** also celebrates youth-led enterprises that demonstrate the economic viability of agroecology. By showcasing successful businesses and innovative farming models, AFSA helps challenge the misconception that sustainable agriculture cannot generate profitable and resilient livelihoods. These success stories inspire other young Africans to view agroecology not only as an environmental responsibility but also as a pathway to economically viable entrepreneurship, employment, and community development.

Africa is home to the largest economically active youngest population in the world, making youth not just desirable but essential for sustainable development. The working group ensures active participation of youth in the present while equipping them with the tools and disciplines they need to drive Africa's future.

Youth are the Future of Agroecology and Food Sovereignty

As the continent moves toward agroecology, secure food systems and sustainable development; the youth remain the greatest assets in the chamber. This working group moves beyond empowering, it enables the youth to utilize every resource that is available to build a stronger, inclusive and sustainable solutions to rising problems we face in areas like: malnutrition, natural resource management, climate change and agriculture.

Through the AFSA's **Youth Working Group**, potential is being transformed into action - building a new generation of leaders equipped to cultivate not only healthier landscapes, but also a more resilient and sustainable future for the continent.

Kenya Seed Law Reform and Its Implications for Farmers

In the rural heartlands of Kenya, a quiet revolution has been unfolding with handfuls of multicoloured seeds. For generations, farmers have carefully preserved indigenous seeds, passing them from parent to child as a living inheritance. These seeds are drought-resistant, climate-adapted, and deeply woven into their cultural identity. Seeds represent far more than agricultural inputs, they are the very fabric of food sovereignty. Yet for over a decade, this sacred practice existed in the shadows, burdened by the weight of a law that treated traditional knowledge as contraband.

Kenya's Seed and Plant Varieties Act (Cap. 326), first enacted in 1972 and significantly amended in 2012 and 2016, imposed severe penalties on farmers who saved, shared, or sold uncertified indigenous seeds. Offenders faced fines of up to KSh 1 million (approximately \$7,700) and imprisonment of up to two years. The Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) was empowered to raid community seed banks, seize heirloom varieties, and inspect farmers' stores without warrant. The Act's architects argued it was necessary to guarantee seed quality, prevent counterfeit products and maximise yields. Yet for smallholder farmers who produce over 80 per cent of Kenya's food say that the law felt less like regulation and more like criminalisation of their existence.

The 2012 amendments aligned Kenya's seed laws with the 1991 Act of the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV 1991). Critics argue that this framework prioritises commercial breeders intellectual property rights over farmers customary practices. Under UPOV 1991, farmers rights to save and exchange seeds become optional exceptions at best; even where permitted, royalties may be owed to corporations.

The implications extended far beyond economics. Indigenous seed systems, which supply 80 to 95 per cent of planting material for smallholder farmers across Sub-Saharan Africa, were systematically marginalised. The law ignored the reality that these farmer-managed seed systems are the backbone of food security. It represents generations of agroecological knowledge, preserve biodiversity, and ensure resilience against climate change.

On November 27th, 2025, a High Court in Kenya ruled in favor of smallholder farmers that resonated across the whole continent. The court declared unconstitutional key sections of the Seed and Plant Varieties Act, including provisions that criminalised seed sharing and granted inspectors sweeping search and seizure powers. The court found that the law violated constitutional protections for culture, the right to food, and the right to non-discrimination.

Crucially, the court ruled that the legislation created an uneven playing field, granting extensive proprietary rights to plant breeders with no corresponding right given to farmers, favoring corporate interests over the rights of smallholders.



The mandatory merchant fees were deemed indirectly discriminatory, and inspectors' powers were found to violate rights to privacy and fair administrative action.

The ruling has sent shockwaves far beyond its borders, **it is a significant affirmation that human rights should prevail over restricting intellectual property and bounding cultural inheritance.** Across Africa, similar battles are unfolding.

In Zimbabwe, the government faces pressure to align domestic seed laws with UPOV 1991 a move that peasant movements warn would criminalise traditional seed exchange and undermine the legacy of land reform. Meanwhile, the East African Community is considering a regional Seed and Plant Varieties Bill that critics say would replicate the restrictive provisions struck down in Kenya. Civil society organisations and farmer networks are pushing for amendments to protect farmers' rights and ensure the final law supports resilient seed systems. The ruling freed farmers tethered to their indigenous roots from fear and laws that threatened their livelihood and existence.

Despite this incredible win for indigenous knowledge and sustainable agriculture, the struggle is far from over. Now, the seeds in the palm of farmers are no longer potential evidence in a criminal case, they are once again simply seeds that sustain life - an invaluable natural resource to be passed down to future generations along with their cultural significance.

The Kenyan judgement represents more than a legal victory it is a testament that food sovereignty begins with a seed. it showed what can be achieved when society works towards a common goal, for a sustainable future. It is a powerful affirmation that the future of African food sovereignty is in the hands of the people.

Congratulations to Kenyan farmers and who supported their voices heard! your boldness and endurance is inspirational.

Training update: Training on Gender, Climate, and Nutrition

From 21 – 23 April 2026, Forum for Social Studies (FSS), through the Gender, Climate Change, and Nutrition Integration Initiative (GCAN) project, in partnership with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and WE-Action, hosted a three-days capacity-strengthening training in Addis Ababa. The program brought together participants representing government ministries, regional Bureaus of Agriculture, civil society organizations, academia, research institutions, and young climate advocates. The diverse composition of participants created a dynamic learning environment where different perspectives converged around a common goal: advancing integrated solutions that promote gender equality, climate resilience, and improved nutrition outcomes.

The program opened with welcoming remarks from the GCAN Ethiopia Project Lead, setting the stage for three days of collaborative learning. Participants highlighted the importance of sustaining collaboration beyond the training itself. Ground rules were jointly established to encourage active participation, respectful dialogue, and knowledge sharing.

The training progressed through a carefully structured learning journey that moved participants from foundational concepts to practical application. The training established the core principles of the Gender, Climate Change, and Nutrition (GCAN) nexus through presentations, facilitated discussions, interactive exercises, and scenario-based group work. Participants explored gender analysis, climate vulnerability and adaptation, and nutrition security, examining how unequal access to resources, decision-making, and climate-related shocks influence development outcomes.

These sessions emphasized evidence-informed planning, cross-sector collaboration, and the integration of gender, climate, and nutrition considerations into policy and program design. The training centered on transforming knowledge into action by strengthening participants' capacity to implement and sustain integrated programming. Through policy analysis, theory-of-change development, and scenario-based exercises, participants explored leadership, coordination, communication, and practical implementation strategies for advancing the GCAN agenda within their respective institutions. A post-training assessment highlighted significant improvements in participants' understanding of the GCAN framework and their ability to apply integrated analytical tools to evidence-informed policy development and program implementation.

The Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium was represented by its Executive Director, Dr. Bayush Tsegaye. She shared the consortium's ongoing commitment to advancing sustainable food systems, empowering women and youth, and promoting the conservation of natural resources through collaborative, evidence-based initiatives that integrate indigenous knowledge with modern methodologies.

The training concluded with a certificate award ceremony. It marked not only the successful completion of the training but also the beginning of a growing community of practitioners equipped to advance integrated solutions that contribute to Ethiopia's sustainable development agenda.



Participants of the training on Gender, Climate, and Nutrition

Food Culture : Traditional Dish From Mozambique

Cultural Significance and Preparation of Matapa

Matapa is more than a dish to the Mozambican community, it is a representation of identity, culture and ingenuity. This is a rich, earthy stew made of young cassava leaves cooked with crushed peanuts, garlic, and creamy coconut milk. One of the main ingredient of matapa is cassava leaves which contain naturally occurring cyanogenic glucosides (toxins) and are incredibly bitter. Through a meticulous process of heavy pounding and hours of slow simmering, home cooks learned to eliminate the toxins entirely, turning a potentially dangerous, discarded plant part into a velvety, iron-rich delicacy.

Traditionally, making *Matapa* is an intensive, labor-of-love community affair accompanied by singing, storytelling, and catching up on community news, turning the meal preparation into a bonding moment for all who are involved. It is served at weddings, holidays, and high-profile state banquets.

Ingredients

- **Greens:** 500g of cassava leaves (if unavailable, use Tuscan kale, collard greens, or spinach)
- **Peanuts:** 1 cup of raw, unsalted peanuts (or natural peanut butter)
- **Coconut Milk:** 1 to 2 cans (about 400ml - 800ml)
- **Seafood:** 500g of fresh and peeled shrimp or cooked crab meat
- **Aromatics:** 1 medium onion (chopped), 3-4 cloves garlic (minced)
- **Seasoning:** 1 tsp salt, and optional fresh chili (to taste)



Instructions

1. **Prepare the Greens:** Wash the leaves and remove any tough stems. Chop them finely and pulse them in a food processor or blender with a splash of water until they form a coarse paste.
2. **Make the Peanut Paste:** Blend the raw peanuts until they become a fine powder. Mix the peanut powder with a cup of warm water or some of the coconut milk until smooth.
3. **Sauté the Aromatics:** Heat a splash of oil in a large pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the chopped onion and minced garlic, sautéing until translucent.
4. **Combine and Simmer:** Add the green paste, the peanut mixture, and the coconut milk to the pot. Bring to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and let it simmer for about 30 to 40 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking.
5. **Add the Seafood:** Add the peeled shrimp (or crab meat) to the stew. Cook for an additional 10-15 minutes until the shrimp are pink and fully cooked through. Taste and adjust salt or chili if needed.
6. **Serve:** Serve hot over a bed of fluffy white rice or *Xima* (A thick, stiff porridge made from maize flour).



UPCOMING EVENT

Get ready for a series of exciting upcoming events that will bring together experts, policy makers, and stakeholders to advance sustainable food systems.

- **Event Title:** AgroFood East Africa Ethiopia.
Date & Place of Event: 14 - 26 August 2026, Addis International Convention Center (AICC). Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- **Event Title:** Africa Food Systems (AFS) Forum 2026.
Date & Place of Event: August 31 to September 4, 2026 at the Kigali Convention Center. Kigali, Rwanda.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

■ Launch of the Youth in Agroecology Startup Competition 2026.

The competition is calling on passionate young innovators from Addis Ababa and Sheger City who are helping transform Ethiopia's food systems through creativity, entrepreneurship, and sustainable solutions. Whether they are advancing agroecological farming, promoting healthy indigenous foods, or building climate-resilient enterprises, this competition offers an opportunity to gain recognition, mentorship, networking opportunities, and cash prizes.

Applications open on 20 July and close on 31 July 2026. You can find the registration page through ESFSAC's official channels. Stay alert!

We are excited to invite you to be featured in our upcoming August edition of ESFSAC's newsletter. If you have any projects, achievements or announcements you'd like to share, please send us your content by mid-August. This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase your work. For submissions or inquiries, feel free to contact us or email your content to: contact.esfsac@gmail.com / newsletter@esfsac-ethiopia.org. We look forward to featuring your highlights.



Ethiopian Sustainable Food Systems and Agroecology Consortium (ESFSAC)

Consortium Members

- MELCA Ethiopia
- Land for Life Ethiopia
- PELUM Ethiopia
- Enhanced Rural Self-Help Association
- Pesticide Action Nexus Ethiopia
- Agri Service Ethiopia
- CST Ethiopia
- Home Grown vision
- PHE Ethiopia
- Ethio-Organic Seed Action
- Action Aid Ethiopia
- SNV Ethiopia
- Ethio Africa Youth & Green Legacy Charitable Organization
- ORDA Ethiopia

Our Address

Email: info@esfsac-ethiopia.org

Phone: 251-98-6194293

Our Office: Grace City Mall 8th floor, Yeka Sub-city near Megenagna, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Follow Us on

[LinkedIn](#)
[Twitter X](#)