



From Drought to Abundance

How Conservation Agriculture Transforms Lives in Kwando.

By Vongai Makamure
(With contributions from Sunnypo Imawa)
Images by Sunnypo Imalwa

Phedinant Mate's homestead is a shining example of showcasing how agroecological farming techniques can transform the harshest conditions into abundant, life-sustaining gardens. From the moment one steps into his yard and walks around his garden, one is met by dark, rich-looking, well-fed soil that is a result from effective use of compost, mulching, biochar and a general focus on good soil management.

The 42-year-old father of six, living in the Kwando Conservancy within the Zambezi Region of Namibia, has been practising Conservation Agriculture and Agroecology for the past three years under the KAZA Arise project, which aims to promote agroecology practices and habitat protection. The lush but water-stressed region, bordered by the Zambezi and Kwando Rivers, faced seasonal water shortages due to a massive drought that hit the country in 2024.



Phedinant Mate, 42 years old.

Agroecology is a set of sustainable farming techniques designed to improve soil health, conserve water, reduce the environmental impact of agriculture and enhance agro-biodiversity. It emphasises minimal soil disturbance, permanent soil cover and crop rotation amongst others, to increase productivity and resilience, particularly in areas prone to climate change impact, like droughts.

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From the moment you step into Mate's yard, it is evident that these principles are working. The lushness is a testament to his dedication to soil management. Despite the challenges of limited water availability, a terrible drought that hit the country and changing climate, Mate has created an oasis of fruit trees and crops that sustain his family and, where possible, the community.

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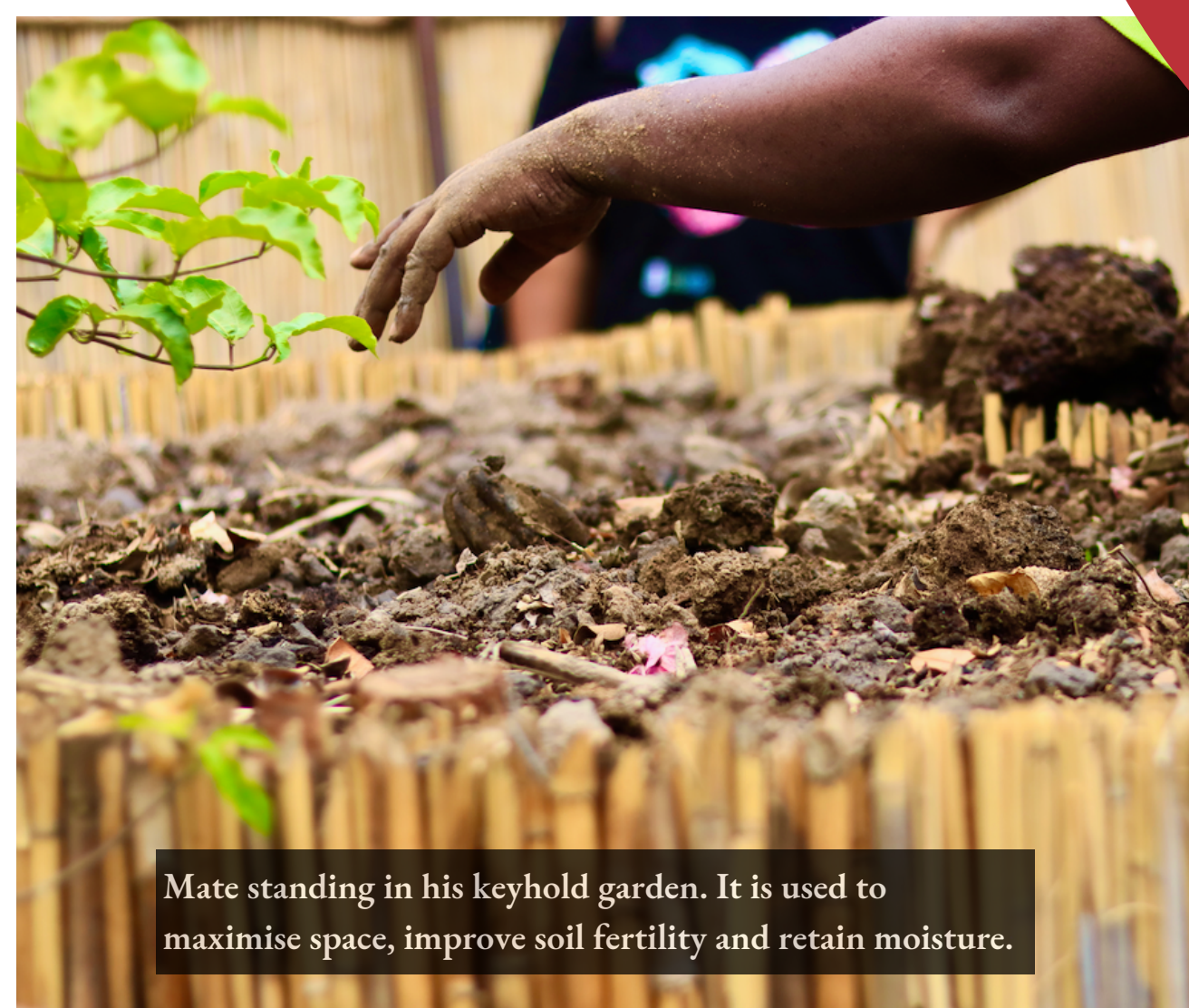
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Mate standing in his keyhole garden. It is used to maximise space, improve soil fertility and retain moisture.

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Mate reflects on the impact of the KAZA Arise project, in which he has been selected to become a lead farmer. "The project has provided us with a lot of farming knowledge and advice," he shares. "With climate change and insufficient rain, this knowledge has helped me learn more about water retention."

He says the resilience, even during this drought, has allowed him to feed his family, support some community members, and sell excess produce to get a good income to pay school fees for his children.

Mate's garden boasts several fruit trees such as pawpaws, guavas and mangoes which provide nutritious fruits for his family and the community. He also grows seedlings which he sells for N\$30 per plant. He not only sells what he produces to the community but also imparts his knowledge for others to improve their livelihoods. "I want to make sure we put food on the table by making our soil rich. So, I share knowledge on how to make compost, production of biochar and many other techniques."

There has been a lot of information sharing in the community with farmer's frequently exchanging knowledge, fostering a community of learning and mutual support. They all however, share a similar challenge – limited access to water.

Although there is a community borehole close by, dispute sometimes arises on quantities usable for each household. Recognising the issue, the KAZA Arise project plans to support Mate with water infrastructure by early 2025.

Despite challenges, Mate remains optimistic. He continues to work as a lead farmer within his community, demonstrating how Agroecology can improve lives even in water-scarce regions.

About KAZA Arise Project

The KAZA Arise project is an initiative launched in March 2022, aiming to enhance food security and protect habitats within the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA). This conservation area is the world's largest land-based transboundary conservation region, spanning parts of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The project enhances food security and ecosystem resilience by supporting at least 625 smallholder households with capacity-building in agroecological practices, improving habitat connectivity and implementing community initiatives such as borehole drilling for water access, benefiting both people and wildlife.

To find out more information about the KAZA Arise project and how it supports climate resilient farming, please contact:

1. Mareike Aufderheide-Voigt (Programme Lead: Sustainable Agriculture, KAZA Arise Project) mvoigts@nnf.org.na
2. Sunnypo Imalwa (Assistant Communications Officer – Namibia Nature Foundation). sunnypo@nnf.org.na
3. Vongai Makamure (Communications Specialist – World Wildlife Fund Zambia) vmakamure@wwf.org.zw



Mate holding one of the seedlings which he sells for N\$30



 [Namibia Nature Foundation](https://www.namibiannaturefoundation.org.na)



 [World Wildlife Fund Zambia](https://www.worldwildlife.org/programs/zambia)



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