

It's time to invest in rain

Tiyeni was recently invited to present at a major investment forum in Botswana which aimed to scale up rainfed agriculture in Africa. The forum brought together development organisations such as Tiyeni with policymakers, investors and financial institutions from across the region.

Never before has the sector been so strongly advocated for. The forum brought together, for the first time, representatives of agriculture, finance and water ministries of the eight member states of ZAMCOM: Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, reflecting their commitment to attract finance to rainfed agriculture.

Isaac Monjo Chavula, Tiyeni's Country Director, attended the Zambezi Rainfed Agriculture Investment Forum and presented on behalf of Tiyeni in a session entitled 'Deep Bed Farming – a Climate-Smart approach: Experiences from Farmers – Insights into Policy and Financial Barriers.'

The session aimed to showcase the Deep Bed Farming system of managing rainwater and soils and demonstrating the benefits, both in terms of crop yield and resilience against climate change impacts, and its contribution towards achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).



The session was extremely well-received with most of the questions in a subsequent Q&A session being directed to Isaac: questions which ranged from the labour demands of the system, through methods of promotion and the rate of adoption to questions on land ownership.

As Isaac said at the forum 'It is not a choice. Africa has few perennial rivers and thus, farmers rely heavily on the rain. There are very few irrigation schemes and access to those is also limited.' Farmers are the front-line managers of water as their actions have a significant impact on the management of water resources by reducing run-off, increasing infiltration into groundwater, and reducing soil erosion and sedimentation. Therefore, it is important to invest to harvest rainwater and allow it to infiltrate into the soil to maximise the benefits; the dangers of rainwater are intensified when it becomes surface run-off, destructive to both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

The Zambezi Rainfed Agriculture Investment Forum was a key moment to exchange knowledge and adapt policies that make investments in rainfed agriculture attractive for the private sector. The forum highlighted that development charities have in effect done the due diligence in the region required for investors to invest in rainfed agriculture: the forum provided evidence of more than 310,000 smallholder farms which are demonstrating impact across Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Zambia. For Tiyeni, the forum gave us a lot of opportunities to forge partnerships with other organisations, government officials and private investors, both within Malawi and in the wider region. During the event, a number of organisations expressed interest in working with us so let's see where that takes us!

Malawi revisited



Tiyeni trustee, Ulele Andrews, was born and raised in Malawi. She now lives in the UK with her family and works for the Civil Service. She recently took time out of her family holiday in Malawi to visit some of the farmers in Mulanje and Emsizini and told us what she found.

I had the privilege to visit Malawi in August. It had been twelve years since my last visit. We normally head straight to the Northern region, but I was keen this time, to visit some of the places my mother had particularly loved, that I'd never seen. We headed down south, to Mulanje.

The first thing that struck me on the journey was the poverty. The children selling roasted birds on sticks by the side of the road, as we drove past. The scenery, however, was spectacular.

I'd arranged to meet early with Tiyeni Field Officers Fabiano and Hazel. It was a grey, drizzly morning and I was thankful for my waterproof. We drove through monocropped manicured tea plantations, and then down a dirt track over some questionable bridges. We went through a small settlement, which was absolutely vibrant with colour and activity – not a raincoat in sight and even shoes in short supply.

But, there was a treat in store for me! Out from what seemed like nowhere a couple of people emerged, and then a handful more. These were members of Tiyeni in the area, come to show off their fields. They explained how they were expanding the Tiyeni elements of their fields, the yield having been so much higher

in those parts of their farms. They also commented on how much more resilient the land was and how comparatively well it had survived the storms. One of the ladies explained how she was so grateful to Tiyeni as she had six children to support and get through school.

I asked whether any of the farmers had any reservations or had spotted anything not working well. The one thing they flagged was the astronomical price of fertilizer. The maize had been harvested, but I was able to see the pidgeon peas in the fields and note the composition of the ridges, complete with mulch and join in wishing them a good next season.



A couple of weeks later, I visited Emsizini in the north with Tim and Love, the Field Officers there. The area generally seemed slightly less desperate, perhaps being closer in to a city, although we still travelled down an extremely riven dirt track for several kilometres (almost impassable by vehicles in the rainy season). Like in Mulanje, I heard how farmers were actively expanding their use of the Tiyeni Deep Bed Farming method.

Typically, the farmers club together on a Thursday and head to one members' farm on a rota basis to break up the hardpan. They do this together as a group for moral support. My children got to take a turn at breaking up the hardpan and it was as physically demanding as it looks.

I was also astounded by how quickly their composting method works in the tropical heat – and this was the cool season! As we were waved off, we were handed a bowl of soya beans as a present: 'they're delicious dry fried like peanuts!' the lady said in Tumbuka, delighted at my slightly rusty use of the language!

I thoroughly enjoyed connecting with the farmers, but above all, left really inspired by the difference Tiyeni is making to real people's lives.

We are looking for a new Social Media Volunteer!

Our brilliant social media volunteer, Alissa Burn, has recently moved to New Zealand. We very much hope that she'll continue to help when she can, but we're on the hunt for someone to take over the reins.

Rather than share a boring job description, we asked Alissa to tell us what the role is really like.

"I started volunteering with Tiyeni two years ago after seeing an advert online. I was looking for a way to use my social media and digital marketing skills in a different way to give back, and do something creative in my spare time.

Tiyeni has absolutely given me that opportunity. There are two key areas that I'm able to help with. The first is making the most of the content that our field teams collect - photos, videos and interviews. There's lots to share on our social media channels, and I help think of ways to edit and share them with our audiences. I've learned a lot about important, sustainable farming methods that are being developed, as I work to explain them in a simple and engaging way.

The other area is supporting with big projects and fundraising campaigns. For example, when one of our team is speaking at an event I might help them put together a slide deck and video. Or if we have a big fundraising campaign, I'll help design a concept and the artwork.

In my volunteering role I've spoken to people from across the UK, Malawi and the USA, we're international! Although I have Malawian family, I don't get the chance to visit very often. I've valued being able to feel connected to the country through Tiyeni, and even learn more about areas I've never been to, from our highly skilled team on the ground. To anyone who'd like to come join as a volunteer, tiyeni tithandizane nchitoyi! (let's help each other with this job)."

If you, or someone you know, might be interested, please get in touch to find out more or to express interest. We look forward to hearing from you!



General updates

Our Development Manager, Becky Kelly, left Tiyeni this month after eight years with our charity. Recruitment is ongoing for a new Fundraising Manager (please spread the word!), and we look forward to introducing them to you soon. If you have any questions about donations or gift aid in the meantime, please email us at info@tiyeni.org. Thanks for your support.