

Project Summary

ABN supports Africans in voicing their views on issues such as food and seed sovereignty, genetic engineering, agrofuels, biodiversity protection, extractive industries and the rights of small-holder farmers. ABN's focus is on indigenous knowledge, ecological agriculture and biodiversity related rights, policy and legislation. ABN pioneers culturally-centred approaches to social and ecological problems in Africa through sharing experiences, co-developing methodologies and creating a united African voice on these issues.

Key Project Information (at 2018):

Organisation name: African Biodiversity Network.

Location: Africa - particularly East, West and Southern.

Climate: all African climates.

Key words: indigenous knowledge; sacred sites & territories; small farmers; youth; agro-ecology methods; biodiversity.

Primary Beneficiaries: indigenous peoples and communities; small farmers; youth; women.

Core education activity: indigenous knowledge; youth; agroecology methods.

Project reach: across Benin, Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, through 36 partners.

High Level Outputs & Outcomes:

- The [Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa](#) (AFSA) was Conceived in 2008 and launched in 2011, as a broad alliance of different civil society actors that are part of the struggle for food sovereignty and agroecology in Africa.
- Legislation known as '**Resolution 372**' was passed in May 2017 by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) to safeguard the continent's sacred natural sites and territories - the ABN was a key force in petitioning for this law.
- *"It is a unique resolution and the first of its kind in Africa. Getting [Resolution 372] passed was one thing; making it a reality on the ground with communities to benefit is another."* Simon Ndonco Mitambo, ABN's Regional Programmes Coordinator.

ABN's Education & Network Lessons

ABN's education lessons include the importance of combining practical training on agroecology and youth engagement with high level work to protect and value indigenous peoples' rights to sacred sites and territories through UN international and national human rights systems and legal structures.



Members drawn from the Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties participate in an eco-cultural mapping exercise.

ABN has learnt many lessons about being a pioneering 'Network' of civil society organisations spread across many countries. Here is a summary of some of those lessons:

- Focus strongly on developing the deep roots of allegiance within each Partner - become more of a Coalition than a Network, where fundraising should be for joint activities.
- Focus on the whole Partner organisation, while building capacity in the approach and methodologies of the network.
- Place the emphasis on processes that generate change over time, not distinct activities.
- ABN brings a dimension to 'development work' that is largely missing from most agencies' work, creating a greater chance for this work to be sustainable.
- Innovation and creativity are the keys to ABN's ongoing development.
- to be effective ABN depends completely on communication and flow of information, which needs ongoing attention and creativity.
- A tight-knit pioneering Network/Coalition needs to be made up of strong and active Partners who fulfil the criteria for partnership. Inactive Partners create dead weight and hold the overall partnership back.
- The primary focus of the Network Secretariat is to facilitate networking - this includes continually making sure Partner organisations understand what it means to be an active network partner.
- ABN has been very strategic in its lead role to establish AFSA - it can now feed into a continent-wide Network of Networks - a lesson of the power of strategic collaboration.
- Participation in carefully-selected international events, can increase the network's profile significantly.
- For long-term strength, focus on establishing country nodes in the network.
- Strong involvement of Partners in the governance of any Network/Coalition is crucial to the sense of ownership that is the foundation of any such joint endeavour.



Peter Kamanda, MEAP contact farmer



Eunice Wangari, an innovative agroecological farmer in Giteru.

Peter Kamanda: a Beneficiary Story

Peter Kamanda is an outgoing farmer with hands-on skills in farming practices, who has benefitted from agro-ecology training by MEAP, an ABN partner in Kenya, and now practises agro-ecological methods on his farm.

After the training, Peter started combining conventional crops such as sweet potatoes, pumpkins, cassava, and sorghum, with indigenous vegetables such as pig weed, black night shade, kale and nderema (Africa spinach) – a system that is serving him well. He also practises agro-forestry to incorporate tree and crop growing, and to benefit from the synergies between trees and crops like pest control, nutrient cycling, soil fertility management, moisture management and wind control among others, as well as incorporating crops that are less common locally like coffee, pineapples and fruits that give him high yields.

These practices enhance productivity on Peter’s farm even during dry spells, when the farm is green and continues to produce. Other farmers learn from his innovation. With his outgoing character and innovation, MEAP identified him as a contact farmer, so that MEAP training is held on his farm for farmers to get hands-on experience of his methods.

ABN’s story:

Established in 1996 by policy influencers from the African Group, one of five Regional Groups of the UN, ABN’s status was formalised in 2002. ABN focuses on Indigenous knowledge, ecological agriculture and biodiversity related rights, policy and legislation, and has been responsible for numerous regional initiatives, including helping to launch of the [Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa \(AFSA\)](#) in 2011, which it played a key role in conceiving and developing. In 2010 ABN became a Trust, and today supports 36 partners in 12 African countries.

ABN’s Mission, Vision and Values

ABN’s Mission is to ignite and nurture a growing African network of individuals and organisations working passionately from global to local level, with capacity to resist harmful developments and to influence and implement policies and practices that promote recognition and respect for people and nature.

ABN Vision: We envisage vibrant and resilient African communities rooted in their own biological, cultural and spiritual diversity, governing their own lives and livelihoods, in harmony with healthy ecosystems.

ABN Core Values:

1. Diversity and mutual respect for ethnic, cultural, spiritual and biological well-being for present and future generations.
2. Transparency and accountability as underlying principles of how we work so as to enable equal, inclusive and full participation.
3. Solidarity with those working for justice for people and nature.
4. Commitment, courage and tenacity to promote ABN core values and to defend and implement its principles.
5. Transformation of individuals and organisations as catalysts of change.

Good Practise: What ABN Has Done

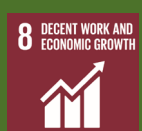
ABN uses innovative ways to solve the challenges facing Africa through sharing experiences, co-developing methodologies and creating a united African voice.

At a policy level, ABN has used international legal instruments like the Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), International Labour Organisation 169, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services to establish clear recognition of the critical role and value of the Indigenous and Local Knowledge System for informing policy formulation on biodiversity issues, as this knowledge system has evolved over millennia through interacting very closely with Nature. ABN works to create a united African voice on the continent on bio-cultural diversity issues, and also nurtures alliances with like-minded others by linking the local to global.

At ground level, ABN has pioneered African-centred methodologies for working with communities for the sustainable management of biodiversity and protection of community rights. It uses culturally-centred approaches to Africa’s social and environmental problems through sharing experiences, using diverse methodologies such as community dialogues, nature experiential learning, intergenerational learning and community exchange learning visits. ABN thus has created a new, very African, approach to sustainability and community resilience, closely linked to traditional practices. The premise is that only by restoring people’s strong and deep sense of connectedness to Nature and all that lies within it will people in Africa find ways to be resilient and to sustain their land and other natural resources.

ABN’s methodologies have been rolled out through its work with its partners. For example, [Maendeleo Endelevu Action Program \(MEAP\)](#) is an ABN Partner in Kenya, which subscribes to the ABN philosophy and principles. MEAP has benefitted from various ABN training and capacity building initiatives. It applies ABN methods in its work relating to three ABN thematic areas, including [Community Ecological Governance \(CEG\)](#) through promotion of Participatory Forest Management (PFM), which ensures communities living adjacent to government listed forests are involved in co-management of forests. The process creates opportunity for communities to exercise Community Ecological Governance, revive their Ecological Knowledge Systems and apply those knowledge systems within Participatory Forest Management Plans (PFMP).

ABN contributes to these SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) being achieved:



Good Practice: How ABN Is Working

ABN's work focuses on four thematic areas, which it promotes through initiatives with its partners. ABN also works to ensure that four cross-cutting issues are systematically addressed in all its areas of work: Gender; Youth; Networking; and Governance.

1. Community Ecological Governance & Sacred Territories

Since 2009, ABN has supported five partners to consolidate, integrate and further evolve innovative strategies of working with communities on Sacred Natural Sites & Territories and supporting governance systems, with its core methods including:

- community dialogues to analyse and strengthen relevant traditional ecological knowledge and practices, and build community ecological governance capacity;
- the creation and use of eco-maps and eco-calendars for agreeing land and biodiversity management and control within communities, and then with local and national governments.

These promote dialogue, analysis and negotiation to identify, agree and implement solutions that increase local ecosystems control and protection, and community rights and responsibilities.

Elders within the community play a vital role in upholding the ecological knowledge and customs practiced over generations which maintain the well-being of Sacred Natural Sites, ecosystems, territories and local communities. These customary governance systems recognise Sacred Natural Sites and Territories as *places where the laws of Earth can be read, and from which customs, spiritual practices and governance systems are derived to protect the territory as a whole*. Sacred Natural Sites and Territories are at the heart of ecological, spiritual and cultural practices, and governance systems of indigenous and local communities. Across Africa they are threatened by destruction from economic and other developments that erode the customary governance systems of their custodial communities, while custodians of sacred sites and elders who hold vital indigenous knowledge are also disappearing.

2. Community Seeds & Knowledge

The huge push from governments and corporations to use hybrid and genetically-modified seeds which require costly inputs like fertilizers is a common pressure faced by the ABN and the rural communities with whom the partner organisations work. This "Green Revolution" approach is a) unaffordable to many African farmers who struggle to cope with more extreme drought and flood impacts from climate change, b) harms biodiversity and c) concentrates the control of agriculture in corporate hands. Community Seed and Knowledge is an innovative ABN programme that builds climate resilience through reviving traditional seed diversity and promoting agroecology and local food sovereignty as the most effective and ethical way to feed the growing population and cope with climate change. It focuses on the central role of indigenous, locally-adapted seed and traditional knowledge, especially women's knowledge.

3. Youth Culture & Biodiversity

ABN's work on Youth, Culture and Biodiversity aims to restore confidence in indigenous ecological knowledge and practices by deepening peoples' sense of belonging with one another and the earth. This is achieved by bridging the knowledge gap between elders and youth on indigenous ecological knowledge, and by lobbying for inclusion of this knowledge in school curricula.

For example, Ethiopian and South African government offices are consulting ABN partners to advise on how to integrate traditional ecological knowledge into the school system.

Youth are actively involved in healing ecosystems and in campaigning when degradation happens due to various forces. In Ethiopia, youth who came out of this process are demonstrating leadership in critical positions in various government institutions and universities, because their confidence and their relationship with the earth was strengthened.

In Kenya, MEAP engages youth in agricultural activities and experiential learning in a forest setting, applying ABN methods within the Youth Culture and Biodiversity theme. The activity facilitates inter-generational knowledge transfer for ecological governance and ecological agriculture by enhancing the relevant skills and practices among the youth.

4. Strengthening Networking, Communication and Regional Advocacy

For this theme, ABN works through its 36 partners covering western, eastern and southern Africa, as well as strategic and international partners.

ABN Methodologies Used Across The Four Themes:

ABN works to build the capacity of whole partner organisations in the approach and methodologies of ABN, which focus particularly on the following eight methods:

- Community dialogue - at the heart of ABN processes;
- Experiential learning - for example in a forest setting or at sacred natural sites;
- Eco-cultural mapping and Eco-cultural calendars
- Earth jurisprudence - humans are part of a wider community of beings and the welfare of each member of that community is dependent on the welfare of the Earth as a whole.
- Exchange visits - between relevant projects / communities
- Community research - as a basis for documenting seed knowledge in communities.
- Inter-generational dialogue - to connect youth with elders.

Areas of Strategic Emphasis

ABN are strengthening their emphasis on:

1. Capacity building to embed the ABN approach and methodologies deeply into the Partner organisations and into the communities they work with. The aim is to support the emergence of 'learning centres of Indigenous and Local Knowledge (ILK)' for the ABN approach and methodologies.
2. ABN as a coalition of Partners.
3. ABN's cross-cutting issues of Networking, Gender, Youth and Governance.
4. Beginning to spread ABN's approach and methodologies beyond ABN Partners by establishing carefully planned and managed strategic partnerships, and by producing published and accessible guidelines and case studies on ABN's approach and methodologies.
5. Working closely with the Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA), feeding issues and stories from the work of Partners on the ground into AFSA's continental voice.
6. Establishing ABN country nodes.

In January 2019 ABN was recognised as one of just 15 organisations to receive an Outstanding Practice in Agroecology award from the World Futures Council, out of 77 nominations from 44 countries.



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE ACTION



15 LIFE ON LAND



16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



Permaculture Ethics & Principles in Action

Although not directly involved currently in permaculture education, ABN fully embodies the ethics of Earth Care-People Care-Fair Share, at all levels.

Permaculture principles in action in ABN's work include:

Design from pattern to detail -

- building capacity to use ABN methodologies across partners;
- defining the need for pan-African legal recognition through the African Commission of Human and Peoples' Rights to protect and value indigenous knowledge and sacred sites / territories.

Small and slow solutions - building on each step and on small successes, both locally, regionally and across Africa.

Integrate rather than segregate - ABN works together with other civil society organisations and networks, creating strength to achieve their mutual goals, for example through AFSA.

Make a small change for the largest effects - whilst the Resolution 372 is 'no small feat', as a single change, secured from within a global human rights system, it can bring huge benefits.

Working With Nature - valuing and protecting sacred sites and indigenous knowledge that allow individuals and communities to learn direct from nature.

From Inspiration to Action

ABN is a fantastic example for the to be inspired by and to learn from its example, to emulate in your own projects and movements:

- using established systems of international law and human rights to protect indigenous knowledge and sacred sites, and empower community rights from local to national levels;
- providing practical training that enables people and communities them to meet their needs more effectively.

What experience from ABN could help your project, community or network:

- a) to link high level working on protecting human rights through international and national law more directly to practical training in agroecology methods, community resilience and capacity building?
- b) to be willing to take on a big vision, big opposition and big challenges like ABN, whether across a continent, nationally, regionally or locally?
- c) to identify a set of effective and culturally appropriate methodologies, then building capacity to use these through the network to generate local individual and community benefit?

The Difference arising from the Lush Spring Prize

ABN is using the £25,000 in funding from the 2018 Established Projects Award to support its work networking, campaigning and lobbying to influence policy, regulation and public opinion.

"Sacred places have great ecological, socio-cultural and spiritual importance to the communities that live adjacent to them. Winning the Lush Spring Prize funding really means a lot. It means that the work we are doing with communities in Africa to protect these areas to regenerate our biodiversity and ecosystems, really matters globally. The funding will go a long way to support work on the ground, and lobby for appropriate policy in countries party to the African Union. We would like to really build understanding amongst our partners and lead them in getting their governments to integrate this resolution into the laws of their country, building capacity of custodians, and raising the profile of sacred sites. The publicity the award comes with will also help in profiling our work at an international level."

Simon Ndonco Mitambo, ABN's Regional Programmes Coordinator.

Legal Status, Structure & Size: Project start date: 2003

ABN became a Trust in 2010. It has a 5-member ABN Board, and an ABN Secretariat of 5. ABN operates as a coalition of its 36 members, working across 12 countries, with active membership emphasised to ensure ABN's activity is representative.

Funding, Finance, Resources

ABN receives funding from a variety of sources, for its core activities and partnership projects focused on specific outcomes such as research and publications. The £25,000 Lush Spring Prize Established Project Award was received in 2018.

Potential Areas for Collaboration with Project (Local, Regional, National or International)

ABN Needs: to make donations to support ABN's work contact abnsecretariat@africanbiodiversity.org

ABN Offers: [ABN publications](#) cover a range of themes including: Seeds; Mining / Extractive Industries; The Network; Agroecology; Culture; GMOs; ABN Principles; Pastoralism; Diversity; Sacred Natural Sites; Biofuels; and Climate Change.

Contact Information

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International Permaculture Education Network (IPEN)

Increasing the effectiveness and coherence of permaculture education internationally

IPEN Case Studies have been enabled by the Lush Spring Prize

IPEN website: <https://www.permaculture.org.uk/ipen>

