



*We are the Guardians of Land,
Life, Seeds and Love*

MEDIA STATEMENT

Rural Women's Assembly October 2025

RWA INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN/WORLD FOOD DAY 2025 STATEMENT

As we commemorate the 2025 International Day of Rural Women on 15 October and World Food Day on 16 October, we are compelled to confront a harsh reality: in Southern Africa, hunger, landlessness, debt, and poverty are escalating crises that threaten the very fabric of our communities. The future of food security and the future of rural women are indelibly linked—our survival depends on addressing the systemic injustices that have kept us marginalized for too long.

This year's World Food Day theme, "Hand in Hand for Better Foods and a Better Future," underscores the urgent need for shared responsibility and transformative action within our food systems. Meanwhile, the International Day of Rural Women reminds us of the vital roles women and girls play in feeding families, stewarding natural resources, and confronting climate change. Yet, despite our critical contributions, we face persistent barriers—limited land rights, water access, decision-making power, and economic opportunities—that weaken local food systems and silence the voices of those who sustain them.

Hunger and food insecurity are not natural phenomena; they are the results of injustice. Across Southern Africa, millions suffer from food shortages exacerbated by climate change, inadequate infrastructure, and economic instability. In 2024, drought alone destroyed over one million hectares of maize in Zambia, forcing the government to declare a national disaster. In Lesotho, nearly one-third of the population faces severe hunger, and in South Africa, over 1,000 children die annually from malnutrition despite record food exports. These tragedies highlight that hunger is a symptom of unequal power relations and corporate control over land, seeds, and markets—concentrations of power that deny us our rights and sovereignty. Women produce between 50% and 60% of Africa's food but own only about 5% of arable land. This stark inequality undermines our capacity to decide what, how, and for whom we grow food. Policies favor industrial agriculture and export crops over local food systems, further marginalizing women and smallholder farmers. In South Africa, rural women's access to land remains severely limited, reflecting broader regional trends of land capture and dispossession.

Despite these obstacles, rural women are the backbone of agriculture and food production in Southern Africa. We work tirelessly—growing, harvesting, and managing farms—not only to feed our families but also to sustain local economies.



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Our traditional knowledge, coupled with innovative practices, drives sustainable food systems and income generation. Yet, our rights are continually overlooked: access to land, credit, training, and decision-making platforms remain out of reach for many of us. This neglect is unacceptable. True food sovereignty and security can only be achieved when women's rights are at the core of agricultural and food policies. We call for the recognition of our leadership, knowledge, and caregiving roles. We demand our voices be included in decision-making processes regarding land rights, resource access, and trade policies. When women participate fully, we strengthen local food systems, reduce hunger, and promote equitable development.

Our 2025 submission to the United Nations emphasizes that food must be recognized as a human right, not a commodity for profit. Governments must implement policies rooted in justice—such as the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP), support farmer-managed seed systems, and uphold laws that ensure women's meaningful participation. Land reform initiatives like “One Woman, One Hectare” must be prioritized, along with the protection of community seed systems and corporate accountability for human rights and ecological sustainability.

We reaffirm that ending hunger requires political will—a resolve to confront and dismantle the power structures that perpetuate inequality. Without addressing land dispossession, corporate dominance, and gender discrimination, the harvest will continue to fail the hungry. We stand united in demanding recognition of women's leadership, seed rights, and equitable access to resources as essential steps toward ending hunger and realizing the right to food for all. Together, we call on governments, civil society, and all stakeholders to commit to transformative change—because the future of food security depends on justice, equality, and the empowerment of rural women. The time to act is now. The harvest of justice and dignity depends on it.

The Rural Women's Assembly (RWA), is a self-organised network of rural women, movements and organisations based in eleven different countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, and in six provinces in South Africa. For media enquiries, please contact: saruralwomen@gmail.com