

## COMMONS

KNOWLEDGE VOLUME III LAND

WATER

## TRANSFORMATION:

## A Call to Action

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This September, at the Terra Madre meeting in Torino, Italy, University of California, Berkeley, professor and agroecology activist Miguel Altieri challenged the Slow Food movement and the mission of "Good, Clean, and Fair" food for all. He argued that the movement has to find a way to make sure that poor and vulnerable people access such food. This is a story of the movement making such access possible. It is the story of the radical transformation of food systems and indigenous self-determination in development through tactical commoning. It is the story of communal sanctuary gardens of traditional knowledge by indigenous Bakiga farmers in southwest Uganda.

Many long years of colonialism followed by guerrilla fighting and civil war destroyed much of Uganda's traditional food systems and food traditions. Despite recent political stability, the people of Uganda still struggle in systems of corruption, poverty, severe food insecurity, and hunger. The loss of traditional home gardens with the commensurate loss of traditional crops, horticultural practices, and food systems has contributed to the severe food insecurity of the region.

In Uganda's southwest, recently displaced indigenous Bakiga farmers can be found living on the edge of the Kashohe-Kitome rain forest, where they still maintain their traditional home gardens. These dynamic and complex traditional food systems help them to sustain their communities in the face of extreme vulnerability. Poverty, systemic corruption, disease, and food insecurity lead to high rates of child mortality and lower life expectancy and quality.

The Bakiga traditional food system is based on each family maintaining a subsistence-based home garden. These diverse intercropped systems of bananas and other fruits are designed to meet all family nutritional and medicinal needs. Any money that can be earned, such as from selling the odd sack of beans or bunch of bananas, is used to pay school fees and perhaps to buy some salt or soap, which are not all that common in households.

Slow Food's 10,000 Gardens in Africa Project was started as an answer to the problem



of food insecurity in Africa. As Slow Food vice president Edie Mukiibi said at Terra Madre this year, "Even though people say we are hungry, we still need to eat 'Good Clean, and Fair' food." Slow Food president Carlo Petrini said, "I would like to ask the missionaries to stay home. I have a lot of confidence in Africans. Africans know how to do things for themselves." The overarching idea is that local African farming communities can organize and engage in developing their own systems of food security and food sovereignty through interaction with the Slow Food community.

The 10,000 Gardens in Africa Project in this Bakiga community is an example of tactical commons. Through the gardens, the communities have decided that traditional knowledge can be preserved in the common space. The struggle against the systems of poverty and destruction of traditional knowledge happens collectively and openly as a solidarity movement. The gardens serve as a sanctuary for traditional crops, traditional farming knowledge, and traditional horticultural practices. Slowly, these community gardens are coming together with the enthusiasm and energy of the youth and the traditional knowledge of the elders as well as the financial support of the Slow Food convivia in Germany.

One big question for us, as Slow Food activists, was about how to get it started. This was a carefully orchestrated approach generating cooperation among everyone involved. We had to consider how to present the idea of a communal garden in the village and how to present Slow Food and the radical notion that the community members, already very busy with maintaining their own gardens, finding school fees, dealing with illness and extreme poverty, now should take on the task of maintaining their dving Bakiga food and horticultural traditions. In a community where each family produces its own food in a small home garden, building gardens in the commons requires the generation of a new social architecture. The enthusiasm and active voice of the youth together with the support of the village chair were all part of the establishment of the garden.

Without the support of Slow Food Uganda and financial support from the German convivia, the project would not be possible. Slow Food Uganda has helped bring the message of Slow Food as a solidarity movement to the hearts of the community members. Knowing that they are not the only people facing these problems, and knowing that they have the support of other poor communities and peasant farmers around the world and across Uganda, has inspired the communities to action. German Slow Food members have supported the project by sending funds to the 10,000 Gardens in Africa Project as well as bundles of gardening tools. The convivium members in Germany even had the forethought to send rechargeable solar lights and headlamps, knowing that the twelve hours of darkness at the equator makes it hard to maintain a garden.

Now the Bakiga people work together to grow a common garden. The orchestration of the establishment of this project was complicated and slow by definition. For the Bakiga communities on the edge of the Kashohe-Kitome rain forest, the Slow Food 10,000 Gardens in Africa Project is part of the global resistance against corporate ownership and capitalist usurpation of traditional knowledge and indigenous peoples' lands. In this case, the Slow Food garden is a sanctuary for traditional crops and traditional knowledge.

It is critical that establishing the garden begins with a dialogue with local communities about the purpose of the garden and the idea behind Slow Food. The garden should serve community needs while also stopping the loss of traditional knowledge and the loss of traditional crops and crop practices. If organizers are not clear about the intention of the Slow Food movement, communities may choose to plant economic gardens for generating funds for the community. Herein lies a danger for the Slow Food movement in implementing these gardens. Another danger is that the gardens will be lost over time without sustained activist solidarity and financial support from Slow Food. If the gardens are to be sustainable, recognition and funding from the international convivia should be regular and sustained. Convivia abroad should agree to adopt Slow Food gardens and pay regular fees for their upkeep and for further development.

Editor's note: Learn more about what's going on in Africa at the Oakland Institute, which focuses on land grabbing and other development scandals that displace traditional peoples from farm-based livelihoods with false promises, corruption, and debt traps. It's cool to think about Slow Food offering a platform for more horizontal engagement between agricultural communities in the North and South.—SvTF