



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

Lungisa Huna and Norah Mlondobozi represents the Rural Women's Assembly, South Africa (RWA SA). The United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of South Africa last occurred during the 3rd Cycle (27th Session) in 2018 and the 4th Cycle is soon approaching. Since then, there have been some significant new developments, amongst these the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) in 2018.

RWA, CSAAWU, and Coastal Links (EC) promote the protection of rural women's human, civil and labour rights. We seek to initiate transformation projects in a way that acknowledges the importance of transforming gender relations. RWA links peasants, small -scale farmers and producers, farm workers, fishers, indigenous communities and rural, dwellers together in defence of the, commons (land, seeds, biodiversity and waters). Rural women in South Africa have limited access to land, seeds and access to food since women have a low social position within their community. The right to food and the rights of women, peasants and people living in rural areas are all linked especially rural women's right to land Women's access to land remains a struggle, yet women bear the brunt of working the land with little and no access to water.

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The world is facing many challenges and because of the Covid-19 pandemic, all countries in our SADC region and many in the Global South are facing a crisis of hunger that needs urgent attention. The current UN Country UPR Cycle is occurring during the UN Decade of Family Farming (2019-2028) when the world promises to eradicate hunger, ensure food security and aim to meet the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 1 and 2.

We believe that UNDROP is more than just a declaration. It is an opportunity to implement the human rights of peasants, small-scale farmers and other producers and people working in rural areas, including their right to food sovereignty recognized in UNDROP, and to redress their systematic and historic marginalisation. It is also an opportunity to realise and protect the right to food enshrined in UNDROP, in particular the right to food of rural women, the first victims of exclusion and discrimination. On 17 December 2019, nine UN special procedure mandate holders, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food who played a key role during UNDROP's negotiation, and four members of UN treaty bodies (e.g. the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Committee on Migrant workers, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child) issued a joint statement in which they committed to integrate UNDROP in their areas of work.

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In this Joint Statement, the UN human rights experts recommended that the monitoring of UNDROP's implementation should be integrated in the UPR, and that the UN Human Rights Council should create a new Special Procedure on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas. Other recommendations were that regional human rights committees and courts (in Africa, Asia, South-East Asia, Arab countries, Europe, and Inter-America - e.g., the African Commission on Human and People's Rights and the African Court on Human Rights) better protect the rights addressed under UNDROP, and that the African Human Rights Commission establishes a working group on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas.

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We are here as the Rural Women's Assembly with the primary theme of the Rights of peasant women and other women in rural areas; for the implementation of Right to our own seeds, The right to food and food sovereignty, and The right to land and other resources