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We Feed the World Exhibition



Women in Todjedi, Benin by Facrice Monteiro

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Tuesday 23rd of October 2018

Rowan Phillimore, Deputy Director at The Gaia Foundation (<https://www.gaiafoundation.org/>), talks about their stunning new photography exhibition, We Feed the World.

For the last three years The Gaia Foundation (<https://www.gaiafoundation.org/>), a not for profit organisation working on issues of ecological justice, has been compiling an ambitious photographic initiative to “*Celebrate and share the stories of the small-holder farmers who produce over 70% of the world’s food.*”

The resulting exhibition, We Feed the World (<https://www.wefeedtheworld.org/>), captures the triumphs and tribulations of the smallholder farmers and fisherfolk who bring food to the plates of hundreds of thousands of people every day.

We Feed the World was first conceived in 2015 by project director Francesca Price. She was increasingly frustrated with the common misconception that we need agribusiness and an industrial food system to feed the world. With evidence from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation showing that smallholder farmers produce over 70% of the world’s food (on just a quarter of the land), she felt it was time for a rebranding of who *really* feeds the world.

At the very heart of We Feed the World are the farmers themselves; their communities and their stories. Through these stories we try to show a true picture of the challenges facing small-scale farmers today, but also their incredible commitment and success with agroecological and regenerative farming practices. It would be these threads of commonality in farmers' stories that would connect them from Bolivia to Benin.



Debal Deb by Jason Taylor

Global networks of farmers

Finding and reaching out to farmers in remote regions around the world was never going to be easy, and We Feed the World relied on an incredible network of global allies who were able to connect the project with inspirational farming communities across the globe.

However, some of the incredible and moving stories featured in the exhibition were already known to The Gaia Foundation, who have been working for many years with communities on seed and food sovereignty and the revival of traditional knowledge, or supporting communities standing up to the unrelenting pressure of the extractive industries.

Colombia

One of these was in the province of Cajamarca, in Colombia where Bernain Vargas Fandino and his family are proud third and fourth-generation arracacha growers. Arracacha is a unique Andean tuber and the small town of Cajamarca, produces more than anywhere else in the world; an average of 100 tons per day.

In March 2017 the people of Cajamarca held a popular consultation and voted overwhelmingly to block plans to open a mega gold mine, *La Colosa*. The vote marked the end of a decade-long campaign against what would have been one of the largest and most polluting gold mines in the world.



Colombian arracacha farmers by Federico Pardo

With victory secured, focus turned back to the arracacha. Ethical Colombian restaurant chain *Crepes & Waffles* heard about community's incredible fight to protect their land and supported the local farmers with a market by including the arracacha on its menu. It is befitting that the humble arracacha is now heralded as the 'true gold' of the region and is depicted as such in a painting by famous Colombian artist Pedro Ruiz that also features in the exhibition. Photographs of Bernain Vargas Fandino and his family were taken by Colombian photographer Federico Pardo.

India

Another story featured in the exhibition is that of Debal Deb from Odisha in India, a farmer-cum-scientist who has cultivated 1420 rice varieties on just two acres of forested land. Some of the varieties in Debal's collection have the ability to grow for months under 12 feet of water, whilst others can tolerate high salinity.

A lone scientist with no financial support, he is determined to protect India's genetic wealth against corporate interests. The diversity of crops that Debal is now conserving is a critical contribution to the future of food and farming in an increasingly unstable climate. A powerful image of Debal standing waist deep in the Indian Ocean was taken by British photographer Jason Taylor who has built a close friendship with Debal over many years.

Zimbabwe

Further images showed the dryland area of central Masvingo province, Zimbabwe, where the vibrant community of Shashe is situated. This is the proud birthplace of the Shashe Agroecology School and ZIMSOFF – the Zimbabwe Smallholder Organic Farmers Forum - which represents 19,000 farmers across the country. The school trains farmers in agroecological farming techniques such as inter-cropping and water harvesting, organising farmer-to-farmer exchanges, seed swaps and food festivals.

Each year the farmers of Shashe come together for the Matatenda festival. A week-long ceremony to celebrate the harvest and give thanks to the seasons and the spirits of the rains. A key part of the ceremony is the sacred millet beer, which is prepared by an elected group of women over a fire for seven days.



Matatenda ceremony by Jo Ractcliffe

When the beer is ready, the community gather to partake in a ritual allowing them to communicate with the spirits and a procession is led into the forest where they offer a calabash of beer to the sacred Mubvumira tree.

Music, singing and dancing follows, and the rest of the beer and harvest food is enjoyed. South African photographer Jo Ractcliffe photographed Vongai Dube, Tendai Nago, Mhovai Matombo, Eucitina Wandai and Lettiica Chisweto preparing the 'seven day beer' to feature in the We Feed the World exhibition.

We Feed the World (<https://www.wefeedtheworld.org/>) is open to visitors 11am – 6pm daily until Sunday 21st October. A programme of talks and events accompanies the exhibition.

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