

FLEAT III Zimbabwe

Statement on Food Sovereignty and Energy Justice

25 September 2025, Bulawayo

Introduction

We, faith leaders from Christianity, African Traditional Religion, Islam, the Brahma Kumaris, and environmental champions from all ten provinces of Zimbabwe, convened in Bulawayo from September 23 to 25, 2025, for the Faith Leaders Environmental Advocacy Training (FLEAT III), organized by the Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI), which is a multi-faith environmental justice organisation that actively supports faith leaders and their communities to take action for a just and sustainable future. Guided by the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), national policies, and our sacred traditions, we affirm that access to healthy food and clean energy are fundamental rights to be upheld, and care for our common home has been entrusted to us as stewards of creation.

Zimbabwe faces increasing climate impacts, including droughts, erratic rainfall, declining crop yields, biodiversity loss, and energy poverty, which threaten livelihoods and worsen hunger. Section 77 of the Constitution guarantees the right to food and water, and Section 73 affirms the right to a healthy environment. However, policies such as the Seeds Act [Chapter 19:13] and Statutory Instrument 61 of 2025 have restricted farmers' rights to indigenous seed systems. International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants, 1991 Act (UPOV 91), criminalises the ancient, essential practices of saving, exchanging, and selling farm-saved seeds. For our communities, saving seeds is not an act of piracy but one of long-held traditions that ensure survival, solidarity, and are a part of our cultural identity. To outlaw this is to undermine the very foundation of our food sovereignty.

We affirm that energy is essential to dignity, health, education, and livelihoods. Yet, millions in Africa lack reliable and affordable access, which is a clear moral and justice issue. In Zimbabwe alone, 60.7% of the population relies on firewood for their energy needs. National electricity access stands at 40%, with rural access at 19% and urban at 83%. Despite government initiatives, sustainable energy provision remains inadequate. We call for urgent investment in renewable, sustainable, and community-owned energy solutions to end energy poverty and ensure equitable access.

Restricted access to food and energy undermines constitutional rights and contributes to climate injustice, and reduces local climate resilience through the destruction of ecosystems for firewood and increased financial burdens on families who have to buy seeds in order to feed their families. We are united in our conviction that the Earth is sacred and entrusted to our care. Justice requires protecting the vulnerable and ensuring equitable access to essential resources.

Our Moral Authority

As faith leaders, this statement is based on our religious teachings, cultural traditions, scriptures, and practices, and we are convinced of the need for action by people of faith. Christianity calls for humanity to “till and keep” the Earth (**Genesis 2:15**); Islam affirms humans as *khalifah* (stewards of creation) (**Qur'an 7:56**); African Traditional Religions honour land, seeds, and rivers as sacred; and the Brahma Kumaris emphasise simplicity and harmony with nature. Guided by these principles, we recognise our moral and spiritual responsibility to safeguard the Earth and promote justice and equity for all.

In this respect, we recommend the following actions:

The Government of Zimbabwe:

1. Withhold adoption of the International UPOV 91 and initiate an inclusive process with small-scale farmers on the proposed Zimbabwe Plant Breeders' Rights Act Draft in order to create a plant variety law that safeguards Farmers' Rights.
2. Urgently call upon the African Union Commission on Agriculture to issue a definitive policy advisory against the adoption of the UPOV 1991 convention by Member States, as it is fundamentally incompatible with the goals of African food sovereignty and ecological resilience.
3. Review and amend the Seeds Act [Chapter 19:13] and place Statutory Instrument 61 of 2025 under further consultation with farmers, scientists, traditional custodians, and faith communities.
4. Place a moratorium on GMOs until a robust biosafety framework, liability rules, and labelling laws are reviewed.
5. Integrate food sovereignty as a central pillar of agricultural policy, prioritising agroecology, indigenous knowledge, open-pollinated varieties (OPVs), and community seed systems.
6. Advance energy justice for food security by accelerating the implementation of the National Energy Compact, expanding rural electrification, and investing in renewable energy systems that support entrepreneurship, small-scale farming, and rural livelihoods.
7. Promote a more inclusive governance through platforms that involve farmers, civil society, and faith leaders in shaping food and energy policies.

The African Union Commission on Agriculture:

1. Provide leadership by encouraging Member States to explore alternatives to UPOV 91 and promoting *sui generis* frameworks that reflect the realities of Africa.
2. Champion agroecology in CAADP and other continental agricultural strategies.
3. Establish continental biosafety guidelines that are based on the Precautionary Principle, the rights of farmers and consumers, and the protection of biodiversity.