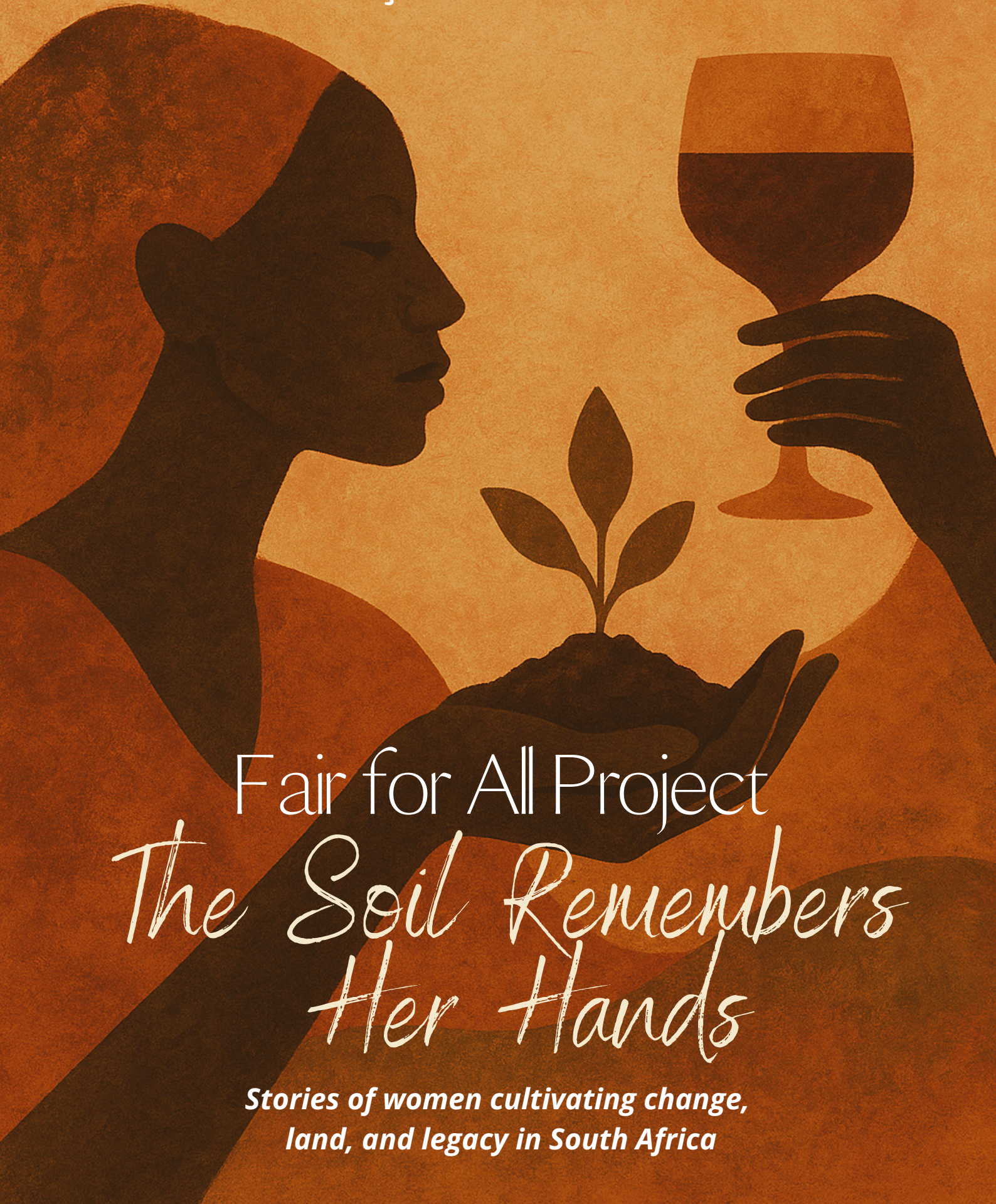




GRAÇA MACHEL TRUST



Fair for All Project
*The Soil Remembers
Her Hands*

*Stories of women cultivating change,
land, and legacy in South Africa*

FAIR FOR ALL PROJECT



Preface

The Soil Remembers Her Hands brings to life the stories of 14 women from different parts of South Africa who are rewriting the future of agriculture from the ground up. In spaces marked by poverty, exclusion, and climate uncertainty, these women cultivate more than crops—they cultivate dignity, employment, and generational change.

Their stories illustrate systems-building from the ground up: both formal and informal job creation, mentorship for young people, ownership of land and businesses, and climate-smart agriculture.

This collection celebrates and reminds us that equitable economies take root when we trust, fund, support and follow women's leadership.

Introduction

Across South Africa's landscapes—from the rural villages of the Eastern Cape to the slopes of Stellenbosch's vineyards—a quiet revolution is underway, led by women who nurture the soil, build businesses, and uplift entire communities. This document collects the inspiring stories of women entrepreneurs who grow crops, craft wine, and cultivate opportunities, equity, and hope.

These women—many of whom launched their ventures after the age of 45—are more than just farmers or founders. They serve as community anchors, mentors, and changemakers. Their achievements include exporting wine to global markets, supplying fresh produce to major retailers, winning international awards, founding agri-cooperatives from backyard gardens, and acquiring farmland through sheer determination and vision. Additionally, some have pioneered agro-tourism sites, received national recognition for innovation, and have become role models within their communities.

The Fair for All Project

The Fair for All project has been instrumental in elevating their journeys. Through access to training, linkages to markets and networks, the initiative has not only provided practical tools; it has also restored visibility and dignity. Fair for All affirms what these women have long understood: that fairness is not charity; it is justice.

This document, featuring remarkable stories of women, does not merely celebrate achievements; it honours pain, persistence, and purpose. It invites readers to bear witness to women who are growing more than crops—they are cultivating futures, transforming systems, and laying the groundwork for a more just economy, one enterprise and one mentee at a time.

The Fair for All project is reshaping South Africa's agricultural value chains to be more inclusive and sustainable, with women playing a central role. Led by the Graça Machel Trust (GMT), in partnership with Oxfam South Africa (OZA), Women on Farms Project (WFP), and the Centre for Competition, Regulation and Economic Development (CCRED), it brings civil society, research, and advocacy together for lasting change.

Launched in 2021, Fair for All emerged in response to persistent challenges faced by women in agriculture—limited land access, market barriers, and exclusion from leadership. It promotes fairer business practices, stronger policy frameworks, and more equitable trade and finance systems. The project reflects GMT’s mission to amplify women’s voices, advance economic justice, and build transformative networks.

“Fair for All is not just a project. It is a movement to unlock the potential of women in agriculture and ensure that they are recognised, rewarded, and respected as key drivers of Africa’s food systems.” - Shiphra Chisha, GMT’s Director of Programmes

Building on this vision, **Mandisa Dyantji** from Oxfam South Africa adds, “Women are the backbone of rural economies, yet they are consistently marginalised. Through Fair for All, we are committed to challenging this reality and driving meaningful change in trade, finance, and governance.”

Together, their voices reflect the heart of the Fair for All Project: a collective determination to reshape value chains so that women are no longer sidelined, but are placed at the centre of Africa’s agricultural future.

The numbers behind the stories

Together, the fourteen women featured in this document directly employ over hundred and fifteen people across farms, agri-processing facilities, marketing operations, and wine production sites. Most of these workers are Black women and youth—many are entering the formal economy for the first time. Their enterprises also provide support for indirect employment through seasonal work, packaging suppliers, transporters, and professional services.

Over 75 individuals have been mentored, trained, or supported through internships, school outreach programmes, and community learning initiatives by our 14 participants. For these women, mentoring is not merely a side activity—it is intricately woven into the very fabric of their work. They actively pass on their hard-earned knowledge to the next generation.

The downstream impact is equally significant. Several businesses provide vegetables to local schools, early childhood centres, and nutrition programmes, while others support neighbouring cooperatives and smallholder producers. These initiatives are not merely farms or businesses—they are essential lifelines.

These figures reveal that each entrepreneur is not only building a business but also actively creating employment and nurturing others. They demonstrate the ripple effect of uplifting women entrepreneurs: they become catalysts for broader economic participation and community upliftment. It also affirms the Fair for All project's theory of change that supporting women in agribusiness unlocks both social and economic value across communities.

Behind these successes lie profound personal sacrifices. Some women have sold their houses to finance their first bottling run. Others have encountered rejection, loss, or exhaustion—struggling through divorce, bereavement, and burnout. One woman lost both her home and business in a single year.

Through all this, they persist. These women continue to support others while also rebuilding themselves. Intergenerational skills transfer is a defining aspect of their work. Many are preparing their daughters and sons to take the baton—training them in the fields, in boardrooms, and at markets.

In a world facing climate uncertainty, these entrepreneurs are adapting as well. They are using indigenous seed varieties, adjusting planting schedules, and investing in sustainable farming practices. For them, climate resilience is not just an abstract policy—it is a matter of survival.

Ownership is a thread woven through every story. These women are not merely participants in agriculture—they are transforming its structures. They are reclaiming land, creating under their brands, and asserting their right to be visible and heard in boardrooms, markets, and policy spaces.





Kwanele Nyawo

A Toast to heritage, resilience, and dignity

"This is bigger than me. This is about women being seen and respected as builders of wealth and custodians of culture."

Kwanele Nyawo, a 39-year-old entrepreneur from Ladysmith in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, co-founded Khulu Fine Wine, a boutique wine brand that celebrates Zulu heritage and African excellence. A former client relations professional and radio broadcaster, Kwanele fully transitioned into the wine industry in 2021, driven by her passion for storytelling through wine. As a mother of one, she balances family life with the challenges of building a business in a male-dominated industry. Beyond winemaking, she is a passionate advocate for women's inclusion in the wine industry. She actively participates in the Fair for All project, collaborating with other women entrepreneurs to advocate for policy change and greater access for underrepresented groups.

I was fascinated by how wine was not just a product, but a culture, a story."

Born and raised in Ladysmith – KwaZulu-Natal – South Africa, Kwanele Nyawo has always understood the delicate balance between hardship and hope. After losing her father at just six months old, she was raised by a determined mother who instilled in her the values of hard work, discipline, and dignity.

Kwanele's professional life initially took her far from the vineyards. She was a client relations manager, a radio broadcaster, and a dedicated community builder. "I have always believed in multi-tasking," she smiles, reflecting on the years she balanced radio, business, and the responsibilities of raising a child. However, the seed for her wine journey was planted much earlier. In 2010, while focusing on client relations in corporate, Kwanele was drawn to the wine industry by business associates who introduced her to winemaking, branding, and distribution. "I was fascinated by how wine was not just a product, but a culture, a story," she recalls.

There were those who doubted that a Black woman could create a wine worth pouring."

Still, it wasn't until 2021—amid the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic—that Kwanele decided to embrace the industry fully. "I felt God telling me, 'This is the time,'" she recalls and working with one trusted partner, she got started.

In naming her brand, Kwanele returned to her roots. Khulu, is a Zulu word meaning great or majestic and it speaks to her vision of celebrating the exceptional wines of the Western Cape while honouring her heritage.

"People whispered that I was just fronting for someone else. They thought I was just a face, not the hands behind the brand."

In 2022, she officially launched Khulu Fine Wine, securing placements in local retail outlets and several boutique wine shops across the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng.

By 2023, Khulu Fine Wine had been listed in several wine bars and hospitality venues in Durban and Johannesburg, two of the top three major cities in South Africa. Its presence grew steadily through word-of-mouth and Kwanele's determined networking efforts.

However, alongside these small victories came the sting of misinformation. "People whispered that I was merely fronting for someone else," she shares. "They believed I was just a face, not the hands behind the brand." Others dismissed her, suggesting she lacked the technical knowledge to understand wine production fully.

"There were those who doubted that a Black woman could create a wine worth pouring," she says. The insinuations were painful but familiar to many Black women navigating historically white, male-dominated industries.

*“I don’t just want to sell wine.
I want people to sip dignity, to taste legacy.”*

By mid-2023, Kwanele encountered increasing challenges in the retail space. “The market pressured me toward quantity over quality,” she says. “It felt like I was compromising the essence of my wine.” The strain culminated in 2024 when she decided to withdraw from certain retail chains and reposition Khulu as a boutique, direct-to-consumer brand. “I chose to sacrifice volume for dignity,” she explains.



Since the shift, Kwanele has focused on private clients, curated tastings, and supplying exclusive establishments. Khulu Fine Wine is now featured in select lodges, fine-dining restaurants, and private wine clubs, with a small but growing export presence that began in late 2024.

Despite this progress, what keeps Kwanele busy and focused is not just spreadsheets or supply chains; it is the weight of building something bigger than herself. “I think about dignity all the time,” she confesses. “Am I doing justice to the Khulu name? Will my family be proud of this brand when I’m no longer here?” The tension between retaining the soul of her brand and the constant financial strain occupies her thoughts daily. “I don’t just want to sell wine. I want people to sip dignity and taste legacy.”

*“This is bigger than me.
This is about women being seen and respected as builders
of wealth and custodians of culture.”*

Kwanele is also deeply concerned about other women in the industry. “So many women are navigating this journey without resources, networks, and mentors,” she says. She speaks of women who juggle caregiving, farming, marketing, and production—often unsupported and unseen. “We don’t just experience financial exclusion; we endure emotional isolation. The boys’ club still dominates many spaces we need to access.” She stresses that without deliberate structural change, many talented women will continue to be locked out or forced into partnerships that strip them of control over their brands. “This is bigger than me,” she says. “This is about women being recognised and respected as wealth builders and custodians of culture.”

“Fair for All provided me with structure, insight, and a network of women who understood the journey.”

The Fair for All project became a lifeline. “Fair for All provided me with structure, insight, and a network of women who understood the journey,” she says. Through this community, Kwanele refined her business model and advocated for policies that promote fairer access for women in the wine industry.

Yet, the dream is far from complete. Kwanele envisions Khulu Fine Wine exporting globally, opening a tasting room, and creating an experience where wine blends with storytelling and cultural pride. “I want to build a brand that my children and grandchildren will inherit,” she says. “It’s not just about wine—it’s about legacy.”

Her advice to young women entering the field is clear: “You cannot cry your way into the industry. You must have grit, discipline, and patience to grow, like vines.” .” Even when setbacks come her way she presses forward, bottle by bottle.

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