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.

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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.



Elizabeth "Libby" Peterson

A lioness in the vineyard



"Every bottle of Libby's Pride carries not only wine but the enduring imprint of a love story marked by courage, loss, and resilience."

Elizabeth "Libby" Peterson, a 71-year-old pioneer, is one of South Africa's longest-standing Black women entrepreneurs in the wine industry. Born and raised in Ravensmead, Cape Town, Libby began her professional life as a bookkeeper and credit controller. In 2002, she was invited to help establish South Africa's first Black-owned wine brand, ***Lindiwe Wines****, where she became the only woman among the founding directors. Despite the collapse of Lindiwe Wines due to structural and financial barriers, Libby refused to abandon the industry. In 2009, she launched her brand, Libby's Pride Wines, symbolised by the lion, her star sign's emblem, and a symbol of African dignity. Through grit, faith, and self-funding, she secured shelf space in major retailers like Shoprite and Pick n Pay and gained access to export markets to Denmark, the UK, and China. Libby is a fierce advocate for transformation, women's rights, and fair participation of Black entrepreneurs in the wine sector, continuing to fight for inclusion and equity.*

"They gave us a R3 million (about USD 160,000) loan, but forbade from purchasing stock. How do you sell air?"

In the rolling vineyards of South Africa's wine country, where tradition often outweighs transformation, Elizabeth "Libby" Peterson stands as a defiant figure. At 71, her hands—once accustomed to balancing ledgers as an accountant—now cradle wine bottles bearing her name: Libby's Pride, crowned with the emblem of a lion. Hers is a story of resilience, showcasing a Black South African woman who refused to allow a male-dominated industry to dictate her legacy.

Libby's journey into wine was accidental. In 2002, a friend recruited her to help launch Lindiwe Wines, South Africa's first Black-owned wine brand. The name, derived from isiZulu and isiXhosa, means "the one we have been waiting for," symbolising the hope for transformation and representation in an industry long closed to Black entrepreneurs. "I didn't even drink wine," she laughs. However, when a hotel client asked her to describe the wine's flavour profile, and she fumbled, Libby realised she had to learn. She enrolled in a crash course at the Cape Wine Academy, awakening a palate—and a passion—she never knew she had.

Yet the industry was unforgiving. Lindiwe collapsed under financial strain, leaving Libby disillusioned. "They gave us a R3 million (about USD 160,000) loan but forbade us from purchasing stock. How do you sell air?" she recalls. The failure left its scars: legal disputes, near homelessness, and the loss of her husband to a rare lung disease. "Grief could have consumed me entirely," she reflects.

"Grief could have swallowed me whole."

The collapse of Lindiwe was devastating, but nothing could prepare Libby for the blow that followed—the slow, painful deterioration of her husband. Diagnosed with a rare lung disease, he was given less than two years to live. "Those were the hardest words I've ever heard," she says, her voice softening. Yet, he fought for six. During those years, Libby's life became a delicate balancing act between being a caregiver and clinging to her fading dream.

She stepped back from trade shows, wine expos, and markets, devoting herself to hospital rooms, home care, and quiet prayers instead. "He said to me, 'Libby, if this is what you love, you must keep going. Promise me you won't stop,'" she recalls, tears threatening to fall. That promise became the compass guiding her through the fog of grief. There were mornings when the vineyard felt like a cruel reminder of absence when lifting a bottle seemed too heavy. But she returned, driven by his words and memories. Every bottle of Libby's Pride carries wine and the enduring imprint of a love story marked by courage, loss, and resilience.

In 2009, a chance encounter at a wine fair reignited her passion. A winemaker encouraged her to start her own brand. "He said, ' Your name is your power.'" Thus, Libby's Pride was born—a tribute to her Leo zodiac sign and the "pride of Africa." Without funding, she negotiated a deal: Linton Park Wines would produce her bottles while she managed sales.

Her breakthrough came when two of South Africa's largest supermarket chains, Checkers and Pick n Pay, began stocking her wines—opening up national retail visibility and access to mainstream consumers. "I walked into stores and saw my lion on the shelf—that was a victory." However, the industry's gatekeepers remained ruthless. When a new manager took over at Linton Park, she was sidelined for other Black entrepreneurs. "They pitted us against each other," she says. "Unity among Black brands? That terrifies them."



"They say we 'whine'—but how else do you protest when locked out?"

Libby's struggles mirror systemic barriers: international buyers dismiss her at trade shows, retailers demand costly label changes, and transformation funds favour white-backed "equity" farms. "They say we 'whine'—but how else do you protest when you're locked out?" she asks.

Yet her pride endures. She exports to Denmark and the UK, although shipping samples remains a financial hurdle. "Every order feels like a miracle," she admits. Her latest dream? A game lodge in the North West, where she intends to build a wine cellar to uplift other Black brands. "I'm not done," she declares.

"He's the one who holds the fort when I'm out fighting."

Through the trials, her son has been her quiet yet steadfast anchor. "He's the one who holds the fort while I'm out fighting," she says. Whether assisting with logistics or managing small details behind the scenes, his support has ensured that Libby's Pride remains more than just a dream.

"At some point, I stopped asking for favours and started demanding fairness."

Libby's entry into advocacy arose from frustration and necessity. After facing repeated rejection, Libby realised that the issue extended beyond individual prejudice—it was systemic. "At some point, I stopped asking for favours and started demanding fairness," she says. She immersed herself in policy forums, trade negotiations, and transformative debates, often as the only Black woman in the room. "It wasn't comfortable, but I knew that if I didn't speak up, they'd continue as if we didn't exist."

She lobbied for equitable market access, fair treatment in distribution networks, and financial mechanisms that genuinely support Black-owned brands. Her voice grew sharper with each overlooked application and every biased regulation. "I had no choice but to become an activist," she explains. Today, she is a prominent figure in industry spaces where transformation is often treated merely as a box-ticking exercise. For Libby, advocacy is not just about herself but also about the next generation of women winemakers.

"Fair for All has been a breath of fresh air."

Libby's advocacy efforts have gained strong allies through the Fair for All project. This initiative has provided her with platforms to share her story, training in value chain inclusivity, and strategic networking opportunities with other women entrepreneurs facing similar challenges. "Fair for All has been a breath of fresh air," she states. "They don't just talk—they listen, equip us, and walk alongside us." Through Fair for All, Libby has deepened her understanding of export regulations, ethical sourcing, and how to navigate the often-invisible power dynamics within the wine value chain. More importantly, it has connected her with women across the country who, like her, are fighting for representation and fairness in the food and wine industries.

"I want to see Black women owning cellars, exporting without begging, and telling their own stories through wine."

What keeps Libby awake at night is not the struggle itself but the fear that young Black women will continue to be excluded. "I want them to have it easier than I did," she says. "I want to see Black women owning vineyards, exporting without begging, and sharing their own stories through wine." This passion fuels her late nights and early mornings, tireless mentorship, and unwavering commitment to change.

Libby's advice to young Black women entering the industry is candid: "Have a backup income. This business will break your heart before it rewards you." Yet her eyes still sparkle as she discusses the craft. "Wine isn't just a drink—it's a story. Mine is written in resilience."

Libby's lion emblem gleams as life continues—a silent roar against an unequal industry. Her fight isn't just for shelf space; it's for the next generation to inherit a fairer table.



"Wine isn't just a drink—it's a story.
Mine is written in resilience."

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