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.



Beverly Farmer Kotze

Uncorking change in South Africa's wine industry



"They didn't make space for us at their table. So we built our own — and now everyone's asking for a seat."

Beverly Farmer Kotze is a 54-year-old trailblazer in South Africa's wine industry and the CEO of ***Women in Wine****—the first wine production company in the country to be entirely owned, led, and managed by women. Born and raised in Paarl, a town in the heart of South Africa's wine-producing region, Beverly began her career in public relations and communications at a major wine corporation shortly after the country's transition to democracy in 1994. Witnessing persistent inequalities in the wine sector—particularly affecting Black women and farmworkers—she co-founded Women in Wine in August 2003 with 19 other women. Through bold partnerships and innovative business strategies, Beverly has led the brand to success both locally and internationally, all while advocating for transformation in an industry historically marked by racial and gender exclusion. A wife and mother of two, she has spent more than two decades championing equity, policy reform, and women's leadership in the South African wine sector.*

"The people who made the wine were completely erased from its story."

The boardroom fell silent when Beverly Farmer Kotze walked in. Wearing her signature bold colours and heels, she didn't fit the traditional image of a winemaker. At the time, she was the public relations manager for a major South African wine company. "They'd serve bottles worth R5,000 (about USD 260) at meetings, while the farm workers who picked those grapes couldn't afford a loaf of bread," she recalls, her voice edged with conviction. That stark inequality—so visible yet ignored—sparked a bold idea in 2003 that would reshape her life: What if Black women owned the story of South African wine and the business behind it?

Today, as CEO of Women in Wine, Beverly leads South Africa's first women-owned wine production company, but her path to this moment has been anything but conventional. It began with a simple yet revolutionary realisation during her PR days. While coordinating lavish wine events in air-conditioned banquet halls, she noticed the stark contrast between the Black hands that pruned the vines and the White hands that held the crystal glasses. "The people who made the wine were completely erased from its story," she says, her voice tinged with the frustration that first fuelled her mission.

> *"It was never designed for women like us. But it was exactly this, that became our reason to enter."*

In 2003, she rallied twenty Black women—farmworkers, marketers, and financiers—to form Women in Wine. Their approach turned industry conventions upside down. Instead of following the traditional, capital-intensive route of buying land—a nearly impossible barrier for Black entrepreneurs—they focused on what they could control: branding and distribution. "We partnered with established cellars but insisted our names be on the labels," Beverly explains, her eyes lighting up at the memory of their first bottling run. "Our model proved that you don't need generations of family wealth to claim your place in this industry."

Despite its global acclaim, the South African wine industry has long been exclusionary. White-owned family estates dominate the vineyards, distribution networks, and export corridors, leaving Black producers, particularly women, on the margins. Access to land, capital, and established distribution channels remains heavily disproportionate. This imbalanced structure has entrenched systemic inequalities, where those who labour in the fields seldom see boardrooms or ownership documents. "It was never designed for women like us," Beverly says, reflecting on the industry's resistance to transformation. "But it was precisely this that became our reason to enter."

> *"Every policy we help change is a step towards dignity."*

Advocacy has been central to Women in Wine's journey. Beverly and her team have consistently advocated for policy reforms, challenging outdated export rules, financing models, and procurement practices that have historically marginalised Black women. "For years, the system treated us as if we were invisible," Beverly reflects. Their advocacy has led to significant changes, including modifications to export subsidies and procurement policies that now better recognise Black-owned brands. This activism transcends business; it defines their identity as women. "Every policy we help change is a step towards dignity," Beverly says. "It means we're no longer merely workers or token suppliers — we are decision-makers shaping the industry." For Beverly and her team, policy change reinforces their identity as winemakers and as agents of social and economic justice.

Accessing markets has been both Beverly's strength and her greatest challenge. Women in Wine now supplies major South African retailers such as Shoprite and Spar—two of the country's largest supermarket chains—but getting to that point took years of determined negotiation. "With Shoprite, it wasn't just about getting our wines on the shelves," she explains. "It was about proving that we could deliver consistently, even though we didn't have the financial backing that the big industry players enjoy."

International markets have also been a mixed bag. While the company has made inroads into the U.S., China, and West Africa, Beverly notes that Black-owned brands still face pricing discrimination and subtle gatekeeping. "We don't always have the deep pockets for international marketing campaigns," she says, "so we rely on telling authentic stories and building trust." Despite the hurdles, she remains determined: "We've proven that South African wine isn't just about terroir; it's about who gets to tell the story."

"Fair for All came at the right time. It affirmed that we are not alone, and it gave us the tools to make our impact deeper."



The journey with the Fair for All project has been another vital aspect of Beverly's recent growth. Since joining in 2022, Beverly credits the initiative with helping Women in Wine enhance its internal governance, strengthen its value chain, and refine its social justice mandate. "Fair for All came at the right time," she states. "It affirmed that we are not alone, and it provided us with the tools to deepen our impact." Beverly recognises that they are still mid-journey. "We still have so much to implement — gender audits, supply chain reforms, and documenting how we treat our workers — but we're making progress." For Beverly, Fair for All has delivered technical support and reaffirmed the vision she initiated years ago: establishing a wine company where dignity and justice are as essential as profit.

“They now know that success isn’t just about money — it’s about bringing others along.”

Her proudest moment came in 2020, at the height of COVID-19 alcohol bans. Beverly organised a protest in which ten women winemakers marched to Parliament with their children in tow. "We stood there in the rain and said, 'Our livelihoods matter too,'" she recounts, her voice catching slightly at the memory. The image of these determined women, many of them single mothers, made national headlines—and the bans were lifted shortly after.

For Beverly, this journey is also profoundly personal. Her children, now young adults, have observed every step of her climb. “They’ve seen me fight when there was nothing left to fight with,” she reflects. “They now know that success isn’t just about money—it’s about bringing others along.” Beverly’s story has shaped how her children understand community, justice, and perseverance. They have absorbed lessons in resilience, dignity, and what it means to carry the hopes of others.

"Last year, our first farmworker's daughter became a certified winemaker."

Being Black is inseparable from the work Beverly does. “Being Black means you enter every space knowing the odds are against you—but you enter anyway,” she says. For her and the women she leads, their identity is not an obstacle but a declaration. “It’s what makes our story necessary, urgent, and powerful.”

Now at 54, Beverly's focus has shifted to nurturing the next generation. Through Women in Wine's apprenticeship program, she is creating opportunities that never existed before. "Last year, our first farmworker's daughter became a certified winemaker," she says, pride swelling in her chest. Her vision for the future includes an African Wine Academy to train Black viticulturists, equity partnerships with ethical retailers, and a groundbreaking "Truth Label" that would disclose workers’ conditions on every bottle.

“Transformation isn’t just a buzzword we throw around at conferences. It’s about who gets to plant the vines, who gets to bottle the wine, and ultimately, who gets to savour the fruits of this land.”

As the late afternoon sun bathes the Stellenbosch mountains outside her office window, Beverly reflects on the long journey to transformation. “Transformation isn’t just a buzzword we toss around at conferences,” she says thoughtfully. “It’s about who gets to plant the vines, who gets to bottle the wine, and ultimately, who gets to savour the fruits of this land.” Her words resonate with the core of her mission—to challenge and redefine ownership and equity in the South African wine industry. She smiles as she adds, “They didn’t make space for us at their table. So we built our own—and now everyone’s asking for a seat.”



“We’re no longer just workers or token suppliers — we are decision-makers shaping the industry.

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