



Newsletter #1

INSSPIRE

June 2024



INSSPIRE to Enhance Evidence-based Education on Food Systems and Climate Change in Africa (and Beyond)

Harvesting Change: Uniting Minds in Food Systems and Climate Action

Yes, INSSPIRE Can Make the Food System Sexy!

Inspired for Regenerative Agriculture

A Recipe for Change: A Conversation with Sabina Di Prima and Dr Lillian Omondi



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Preface

Ins(s)piring the INSSPIRE

Why **INSSPIRE**? Whom do we seek to “ins(s)pire”? Is it merely a catchy acronym for a European project, or does the name conceal a more profound significance?

In my opinion, this question should consistently guide us as we navigate the implementation of our INSSPIRE project activities. I firmly believe that managing the project involves more than simply completing activities outlined in the project application form. As a collaborative endeavour, which primarily involves project partners from Africa (Kenya and Uganda) and Europe (the Netherlands, Spain, and Slovenia), but is also enlarged with partners from broader network of South-South and Triangular Cooperation (Ghana, Benin, and South Africa) it prompts us to continuously reflect on the essence of our “ins(s)pirational” mission – so that our actions align with the spirit that the name encapsulates. In essence, the question of “Why INSSPIRE?” should serve us as a compass, steering us towards a deeper understanding of the meaningful impact we aspire to make through our project.

“**And what constitutes this meaningful impact? As stated in the application form, our goal is to enhance current higher education curricula and study programs related to food systems and their resilience to climate change through the integration of evidence-based inclusive education.**

This implies strong collaboration with external stakeholders beyond academic confines and people in general as the

final beneficiaries of products, services, solutions.

“**The overarching “ins(s)piration” is to ensure that graduates possess the essential competences required to assume diverse leadership roles in the transformation of food systems and adaptation to climate change, thereby actively contributing to sustainable growth within their respective countries.**

But can we really achieve that? Recognizing that we may not have the power to change the entire world or even most of prevailing higher education practices, but we can undoubtedly “ins(s)pire” others through our positive examples, valuable recommendations, insightful observations, and, most importantly, collaborative cross-cultural endeavours aimed at achieving the common good. Perhaps, rather than striving to “ins(s)pire” our “EU reviewers” with affirmations of our project success, authentic “ins(s)piration” lies in adopting modesty in our words, while demonstrating strong commitment and strength through our actions.

We trust this first newsletter offers a glimpse into our “ins(s)piring” thoughts, initiatives, and actions, and, above all, we hope to get you ins(s)pired, so you will want to keep up to date with the INSSPIRE project in the upcoming newsletters.



By Dr Gregor Cerinšek, Real-life Learning Lab advisor (IRI UL)

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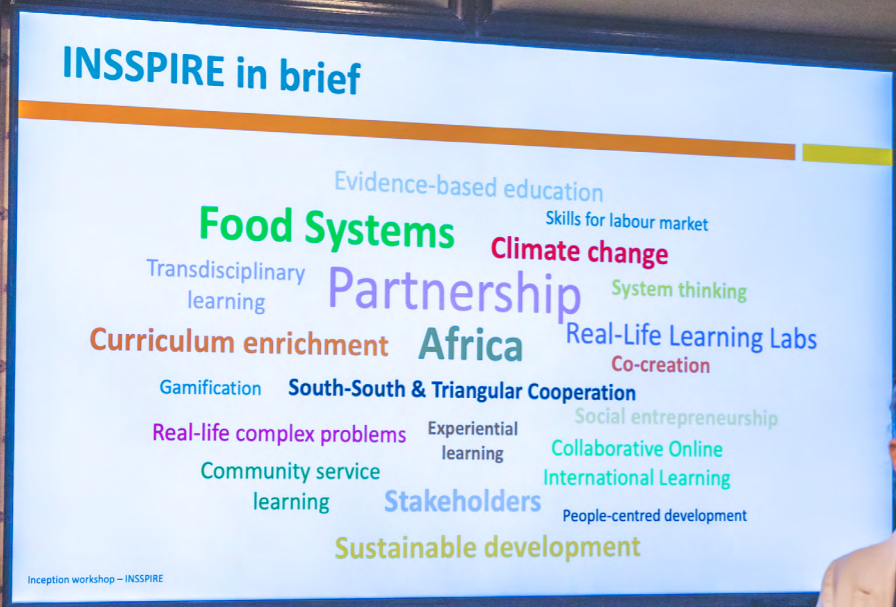
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INSSPIRE to Enhance Evidence-based Education on Food Systems and Climate Change in Africa (and Beyond)

INSSPIRE project aims to: (1) stimulate experiential and inclusive education on food systems transformation through building intra-university capacity, (2) strengthening the university-community collaboration, and (3) enhancing inter-university partnerships.

The INSSPIRE project focuses on the challenges and opportunities of food systems and climate change, which are two of the most pressing issues for the future of our planet. The effects of climate change are increasingly evident in different sectors and regions worldwide, but particularly for food systems in Africa, where the impact is already significant. Food systems in Africa have been growing rapidly, largely driven by population growth and increasing urbanization, but often in an unsustainable manner, with negative consequences for both the environment and human health. Therefore, there is an urgent need to strengthen the sustainability

of Africa's food systems and adapt them to climate change.

Higher education plays a vital role in equipping future leaders with the knowledge, tools, and skills needed to address these complex challenges. Through trans- and inter-disciplinary learning, higher education institutions can contribute by delivering graduates who are able to tackle real-life sustainability problems. The key objective is to assure that graduates have the necessary competences to take on different leadership roles in the transformation of food systems and adjustment to climate change, thus contributing to sustainable growth in their countries.

“ By collaborating with different stakeholders and promoting research and innovation, higher education can help to transform food systems!

The INSSPIRE project works towards enriching the existing curricula of four partner universities from Kenya (Maseno University

and South Eastern Kenya University) and Uganda (Mbarara University of Science and Technology and Makerere University). The enrichment is done with up-to-date modules on food systems and climate change whereby theory and practice are integrated. Examples of curricula that benefit from such modules include those concerned with: agriculture and livelihoods; water and natural resources; economics and business; sociology and anthropology; spatial planning and environmental sciences. Modules are designed with the intent to bridge gaps between traditional disciplines, fostering a holistic understanding of the interconnected nature of food systems and climate change.

By using a 'learning by doing' approach, the INSSPIRE project builds the capacity of lecturers of the participating universities for the delivery of these modules, through curriculum enrichment trainings and workshops. Furthermore, INSSPIRE



strengthens the university-community collaboration to ensure societal relevance of the curricula and to provide students with practical experiences through Real-Life Learning Labs.

The project also enhances the inter-university partnerships by identifying opportunities for in-house internationalisation and building capacity on Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) at the partner universities.

The INSSPIRE project is a promising initiative that aims to make a positive impact on the education and development of food systems and climate change in Africa. By fostering knowledge co-creation, collaboration and innovation among universities, communities, and stakeholders, the project hopes to inspire a new generation of leaders who can address the sustainability challenges of our time.

Whether you are a student, lecturer, community member, policy maker or industry professional, we value your knowledge and

contribution to our growing community of practice. Help us INSSPIRE other people!

“Mind you, INSSPIRE is not a stand-alone project! It is part of the broader South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) network on food systems transformation led by VU Amsterdam and endorsed by the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Aurora European University Alliance. The network includes partners from: Austria, Benin, Czech Republic, France, Ghana, Italy, Kenya, the Netherlands, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, and Uganda.



For additional information on the South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) network, please visit our website.



Scan the QR code above to access the article on the SSTC network, written by Mekky Zaidi, Communication and Dissemination (WP6) co-lead (VU Amsterdam)



Real-life Learning Lab: RLLL is an experiential and problem-based learning and teaching approach where interdisciplinary groups of students work on real-life research and development projects that are practically oriented and demand-driven, i.e., addressing relevant needs of agriculture, industry, and society at large. The process presents an ideal combination of knowledge and experience sharing between higher education and societal actors.

Collaborative Online International Learning: COIL is a teaching and learning methodology that connects a study course of one university with another in a different region, country or setting. It facilitates the internationalization of curriculum strategies of partner universities in Kenya and Uganda.



By Sabina Di Prima, INSSPIRE Project Coordinator (VU Amsterdam)



A visual representation of the INSPIRE project and the South South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) based on impressions of the field visit held in Kisumu in February 2023. Credit goes to Anna Maria Segarra Gonzalez (URV) for her exceptional skills in illustrating a vivid and insightful visualization of the INSPIRE project.

Harvesting Change: Uniting Minds in Food Systems and Climate Action

The INSSPIRE project kick-off workshop marked a significant milestone in bridging academic insights with practical experiences. This event, attended by a diverse group of stakeholders ranging from seasoned academics to hands-on practitioners, signified more than just the commencement of a project; it symbolized the fusion of theoretical knowledge and real-world application. The workshop served as a melting pot where experts from various fields brought their unique perspectives, enriching the discourse on the intricate relationship between food systems and climate change. The participation of academics was particularly pivotal, offering a robust foundation of research-

backed information. This confluence of knowledge and practice will ensure that the project is grounded in the latest scientific understanding while remaining adaptable to the practicalities and nuances of real-world implementation. The dialogue opened up during this workshop illuminated the multifaceted nature of food systems, highlighting how they intersect with and impact climate change, and vice versa. It's a step towards a more comprehensive understanding of these complex systems, an understanding crucial for developing effective strategies to tackle the challenges they present. It also provided insights into desirable graduate attributes for the field and areas where institutions of higher learning could put more emphasis to ensure that graduates contribute effectively to the food systems and climate change realm.

In this dynamic setting, the workshop also served as a platform for a glimpse into what experiential learning for students would look like, whilst



emphasizing lifelong learning for lecturers and practitioners.

“**Students, the future change-makers in this field, gained invaluable insights by interacting directly with experienced professionals and academics. This exposure not only broadened their understanding but also provided them with a real-life context to the theories they learn in classrooms.**

For the lecturers and practitioners, the workshop presented an opportunity for continuous learning, a key aspect of staying relevant and effective in their fields. This environment of shared learning fosters a culture of continuous improvement and adaptation, essential in the ever-evolving landscape of food systems and climate change.

“**Lifelong learning emerged as a central theme, emphasizing that education and professional development do not end with a degree or a title but are ongoing processes that enrich personal and professional journeys.**

The workshop's hands-on approach to learning, with case studies, interactive sessions, and collaborative problem-solving, ensured that every participant, irrespective of their role or experience, walked away with a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the critical intersection between food systems and climate change. This collective elevation of knowledge and skills is a cornerstone in our journey towards developing sustainable and resilient food systems in the face of global climate challenges.



By Dr Lillian Omondi, MSU Institutional Coordinator & Societal Engagement (WP4) co-lead



The Logo Challenge

The logo competition, a creative initiative within our food systems and climate change project, opened an avenue for university students to actively engage and contribute to our mission. This competition was not just about crafting a visual identity; it was a deliberate effort to foster inclusion and mentorship. By inviting students to participate, we recognized and valued the fresh perspectives and innovative ideas that the younger generation brings to the table.

The competition became a platform for mentorship, where students could interact with professionals and academics, gaining real-world insights and feedback on their designs. This interaction was invaluable for the students, providing them with a rare opportunity to connect their academic knowledge with practical applications. Moreover, the inclusivity promoted by this competition embodied the project's ethos of collective collaboration across different sectors and age groups. The student-designed logo now stands as a symbol of this project's commitment to inclusive participation and the nurturing of future leaders in the field of food systems and climate change. It's a testament to the power of mentorship and the role it plays in shaping a more inclusive and sustainable future.



*By Dr Lillian Omondi, MSU
Institutional Coordinator & Societal
Engagement (WP4) co-lead*

Through
the project
members' lens

Yes, INSSPIRE Can Make the Food System Sexy!

During my two-week stay in November 2023

at the Kenya-South Sudan border, I was tasked with capacity-building for sixty high school teachers on sustainable food systems. The purpose of the event was to empower participants with improved knowledge on green skills and become youth mobilisers on the food system in the drought prone and food insecure north-west Kenya. The interaction reinforced my conviction of a desperate need to catch



the youth and herd them in a food systems paddock. The learners agreed that though being college graduates, they face austere inadequacies in fitting in the food system, largely blaming the school curriculum they underwent. The conversations at the training setting brought to the fore the point that challenging the mindset of youth that agriculture is a life of toil, hardship and poverty is not easy.

The training muster invited a reflection on the INSSPIRE project's desire to contribute to having turnarounds in the way knowledge and skills are provided at universities through addressing the shortfalls in the existing curriculum. The concern is timely and worth all the miles. Action is urgently needed. The reconnaissance to establish SEKU's Real Life Learning Labs (RLLL) prescribes embracement of an integrated curriculum, implying learning that is synthesized across subject areas and experiences designed to be mutually reinforcing. The approach is reputed to develop the learners' ability to transfer learning to other settings. If combined with the ideals of the hidden curriculum, there is the potential of building youth attractions to the food system in a country where 60% of the population are under 35.

Kenya's formal job market can absorb less than 10% of labour-

market entrants and youth are expected to create their own jobs in the informal sector. For these reasons, the agricultural value-chain is a good place to be for young entrepreneurs. This is however often not the reality. There exist negative attitudes towards agriculture that turn many youths away. The problem largely lies in how the young people are socialized and educated about agriculture. At times parents tell children to grow up, succeed, and leave farming behind. This supports the narrative that farming is not for intelligent children. Schools often use agricultural activities as a punishment for wrongdoing.

Changes in the Kenyan educational curriculum have also led to agriculture being introduced as a subject only in high school. By then, young people have already made up their minds about the

field, incorporating all the negative stereotypes that they have picked up, ending up with a distant idea of what farming could do for them. They have very little incentive to choose agriculture as something that they would specialize in. When they join the universities, the teaching is not informed by dynamics. They can be taught how to employ creative thinking and use their innovations to make new products and attract sets of buyers. The youth are yearning for focus on the business side of things and innovation and how to turn something small into something larger. A youth and agriculture survey in SEKU reiterates that the youth prefer a food system characterized by entrepreneurship, job creation and digitalization. Agriculture that is attractive to the youth calls for torch shining towards consideration of access to investment and finance, scalable approaches and models that can be taken up, enabling policy environments for the youth, access to markets by the youth, business models that work, and access to a pool of appropriate skills, capacities and knowledge and ways to grow the youth in the food system.

“Cool” information communication technologies can be used as the hook to attract young people. The power of the media can challenge the mindsets of young people towards agriculture, with the aim to make the agricultural sector more attractive to the young people by showcasing success stories and innovations.

The archaic tools and technologies in the food system are a discouragement to the youth engagement in the food system, leaving little to make and colour the perceptions of the industry among youth. On its part, the governance system can

create an environment where young people can plug into the mechanized world which makes agriculture an erudite career. Emerging technologies are an entry point to engage young people in the running of farm ideas. This can be promoted through various channels, such as magazines or social media featuring appealing visuals that resonate with a diverse audience, encouraging a broad range of people to take an interest in agriculture.



“If Marvin Gaye were to resurrect, I would request him to do rendition his all-time classic song, Sexual Healing and lyric it as 'Get up, get up, get up, get up, Wake up, wake up wake up good INSSPIRE guys, we can't hold it much longer, let's do it and ensure agriculture is sexy for the youth...'



By Dr Moses Mwangi, SEKU
Institutional Coordinator & Curricula
Enhancement (WP3) co-lead



Inspired for Regenerative Agriculture

Regenerative agriculture represents a promising path forward for sustainable food production and land management. The role of academia in training university students towards the implementation and sustainability of regenerative agriculture is pivotal. Through education, research, practical experience, networking, and advocacy, universities empower students to become the stewards of our planet's future.

Between 11th and 13th September, I was privileged to be a panelist in the Practical Action Regenerative Agriculture Conference in Kisumu. Practical Action is an Maseno University INSSPIRE Stakeholder. I was in a roundtable panel addressing issues of creating a policy environment for regenerative agriculture from the perspective of academia. I was able to position the approach taken by

the INSSPIRE project in building the capacity of students working with the community stakeholders to co-produce knowledge on regenerative agriculture that would be beneficial to both the students and the community stakeholders. Universities play a crucial role in educating students about the principles and practices of regenerative agriculture. Through dedicated courses, workshops, and research opportunities, students gain the knowledge and skills needed to implement regenerative practices. Academic institutions are hotbeds of research and innovation. Students and faculty engage in cutting-edge research to develop new regenerative techniques, technologies, and practices. This project contributes to the ever-evolving field of regenerative agriculture.

Through the INSSPIRE Project Maseno University intends to offer hands-on experiences through agricultural programs, research farms, and partnerships with local farmers. These experiences allow students to apply their knowledge and test regenerative practices in real-world settings.

“The INSSPIRE project will provide a platform for students to connect with experts, farmers, and organizations in the regenerative agriculture community. These connections are invaluable for building a strong support network and accessing resources and opportunities. The end game is the hope that the project plays a role in shaping agricultural policy through students and faculty, who can advocate for policies that support regenerative agriculture, whilst contributing to the broader adoption of sustainable practices.”

Traditional agricultural practices are deeply ingrained, and transitioning to regenerative agriculture can be met with resistance. The INSSPIRE project will foster a culture of openness to change and innovation. To make a meaningful impact, regenerative agriculture must scale up beyond research plots and demonstration farms. INSSPIRE project creates collaboration with local communities and farmers to promote widespread adoption with the students being key change agents. As the regenerative agriculture movement continues to grow, these students will play a crucial role in creating a more resilient and sustainable food system for generations to come.



By Prof George Mark Onyango, MSU Team Member & Intra-University Capacity Assessment (WP2) co-lead



Through the project members' lens

A Recipe for Change: A Conversation with Sabina Di Prima and Dr Lillian Omondi

Let us start from the beginning, why INSSPIRE? What motivated its name, and how does it reflect the project's mission? Who selected it?

Sabina: INSSPIRE is full of energy and full of dynamism and it also brings the idea of innovation and creativity, which is what is actually behind the project. Of course, there is a longer title behind it and each word is studied with great precision. **Dr Denyse Snelder, our scientific leader,** and I carefully brainstormed the name, ensuring



each word reflects our mission precisely. After drafting the proposal and sharing it with our partners, we all felt that INSSPIRE truly embodies the spirit of what we aim to achieve. It is not just about the knowledge we possess, especially the rich insights from our Kenyan and Ugandan partners, but it is also about how we integrate this into the curriculum to inspire effective solutions in food systems and climate change education.



"Our goal is not to revolutionize but to inspire positive change."

What concrete and practical impacts do you envision the INSSPIRE project could bring to partners and food systems?

Lilian: Reflecting on the name INSSPIRE, our focus is on societal impact and practical applications. A key challenge

based curricula that **connect** theoretical knowledge with real-world scenarios, ensuring relevance in their respective (particular/specific) fields.

Sabina: One major impact that we hopefully have through INSSPIRE is that



"We are bridging the gap between classroom theory and real-world practice"

in education, particularly in our context, is the disconnect between theoretical learning and practical application. A major impact of INSSPIRE will be transforming this educational experience. Our students will benefit from enriched, evidence-

we really learn how to bring the best out of the collaboration between partners from the global north and from the global south, with principles of respect and value for each other's knowledge and perspectives.





On a personal note, what did inspire you to get involved with the INSSPIRE project, and how has your involvement impacted you professionally and personally?

Sabina: Participating in INSSPIRE is a personal privilege and aligns perfectly with my PhD research on nutrition-sensitive agriculture. This research is crucial for developing sustainable and resilient food systems, emphasizing not only production but also consumption to enhance nutrition, especially for women and young children.

My involvement has been a significant opportunity, allowing me to extend my focus from Southeast Asia, which forms the empirical part of my PhD, to a broader scope involving African countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Benin, and South Africa. INSSPIRE has been an enriching platform for learning from my colleagues in these regions.

Lilian: Firstly, the expansion of my professional network has been invaluable. Engaging with diverse individuals from various institutions has not only broadened my perspectives but also continuously fuelled my passion for learning. Secondly, as an educator, the process of enriching the curriculum has been particularly rewarding.

Our current approach to curriculum development, characterized by its diversity and innovation, has allowed me to incorporate the latest content and teaching methodologies. This ensures that my students are not only engaged but also exposed to contemporary discussions, which is fundamental in their educational journey. If you are not having discussions about what is current in your classroom, then you are not really doing justice to your students. Lastly, on a personal note, I have seen a real growth in my project management skills.

Finally, for a bit of fun: if the INSSPIRE project was a dish, what would it be and why?

Sabina: It came to my mind straight away. For me, INSSPIRE is a delicious Italian minestrone. It is the best thing a mother can do just by mixing whatever is available in the fridge. It shows creativity, innovation, and flavour. It's a wonderful way to bring ingredients together, regardless of their color, origin, or how long they've been stored. Simply combining a variety of delicious, nutritious vegetables can result in a delightful dish. Somehow, nature always works its magic, ensuring that any combination of vegetables you have on hand turns out incredibly tasty. So that is INSSPIRE.

Lilian: That is very strange because it is very similar to what I was thinking. There is one dish that I make, and

it is my daughter's favourite. It is called pilau. And it is a mixture of everything. So, you have to put in meat and vegetables, and then you put in rice in one pot and cook it all together. And she seems to love it for some reason. I was going to go with that because I think INSSPIRE is a mix of many ideas, many people from diverse backgrounds, not just professionally, but also geographically, who come together to bring up something nice and something interesting.

At the end, call it pilau, call it minestrone, it is the variety and the fact that somehow the flavours blend together. That makes it delicious, and it is the thing that you want to go back over and over.



by Tamara Smolej - Communication and Dissemination (WP6) co-lead (IRI UL)

Some Project Facts:

INSSPIRE is funded by the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education programme which supports international and multilateral partnerships between organisations active in the field of higher education.

INSSPIRE objectives:

- Building intra-university capacity at programme/course and institutional level in four partner universities in Kenya and Uganda.
- Strengthening university-community collaboration to ensure societal relevance of curricula on food systems and climate change.
- Enhancing inter-university partnerships through South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC). Developing and exchanging innovative teaching & learning approaches for sustainable development.

Duration: 3 years, from January 2023 until December 2025.

Project ID: 101083056 — INSSPIRE — ERASMUS-EDU-2022-CBHE

Collaboration with other projects and initiatives: INSSPIRE is not a stand alone project, but it is part of the South South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) framework, endorsed by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and the Aurora European University Alliance.

INSSPIRE Aim: the project aims to develop higher education staff capacity for the delivery of courses and modules on food systems and climate change and to equip students with skills and real-life experiences for transformation of food systems and their future labour market success.



INSSPIRE Project partners



The Netherlands

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU)



Kenya

Maseno University



Kenya

South Eastern Kenya University



Uganda

Mbarara University of Science
and Technology (MUST)



Slovenia

Institute for Innovation and
Development of University of Ljubljana



Uganda

Makerere University



Slovenia

Faculty of Electrical Engineering,
University of Ljubljana



Spain

Universitat Rovira
i Virgili (URV)



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