



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

## Focus: Drought

Drought is one of the problems that affects the communities in Zambia. The shortened rainfall patterns cause the crops to wilt.

Drought brings about higher food prices – causing the cost of living to rise, too.

As a result, many families may not get the necessary nutritional varieties that they need – leading to malnutrition - especially in young children, who need balanced meals for their growing bodies.

Farmers are affected by drought in that they may lose their investment. Farmers depend mostly on crops for income and therefore drought causes a loss in that income.

Drought often means wells and other water sources may dry up – meaning people, mostly women and children, have to walk longer distances to find water.

Therefore, there is a need to invest in an early warning system to make sure that communities can prepare in advance for natural disasters – such as droughts or flooding.

# The Weekly Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

## The Problem: Drought and communities

Drought can bring with it the loss of livestock. Animals rely on water and when the supplies dry up – the livestock die.

For instance, most farmers depend on cattle for their livelihoods, but when cattle are unhealthy due to water shortages it affects the farmer's ability to survive – and this can bring about food shortages.

When there is drought there is a scramble for water – not just for livestock, but for people, too. The water shortages often trigger water borne diseases such as diarrhoea – since people are forced to drink unsanitary water.

Fishing, too, is affected by water shortages – as there is not enough water for all the fish to survive.

This leads to a loss of income for fishermen.

Farmers, especially in the southern province, experience short rainfall periods and this has led to food shortages – requiring relief agencies and the government to bring in emergency food supplies.

It's ironic because in the 1960's the southern province was the food basket of Zambia, but the change in rainfall patterns has changed everything in the region.

In addition, the southern province has experienced huge deforestation due to farming activities. Trees were cut down in order to plant crops – and this has led to soil erosion.

In order to deal with climate change effects, such as drought, there is a need to use adaptation measures such as drought-resistant crops – and other income-generating activities -- such as bee keeping.

## Activities for Journalists

To adapt to the effects of climate changes, such as drought, there is the need to introduce drought - resistance crops such as cassava. Cassava is an important alternative to the staple food -- maize which is used to make nshima.

Nshima can also be made from cassava. The advantage of having cassava, especially in a changing environment, is that this plant is easy and cheap to grow. All that a farmer has to do is to plant the pruned stem and water it until it gets firm.

Besides cassava, there is a huge need to educate people about planning trees on their farms – which can help mitigate the effects of climate change – by reducing carbon and putting oxygen into the air and reducing soil erosion. Fruit trees are especially good to plant because the fruit can be eaten – adding nutrient to a person's diet.

The most immediate social impact of deforestation occurs at the local level with the loss of ecological benefits provided by forests. Trees prevent erosion, help control flooding, helps treat water and are important for many other reasons. Forests are particularly important to the world's poorest people who rely on natural resources for their everyday survival. By destroying the forests we risk our own quality of life, gamble with the stability of the climate and local weather, threaten the existence of other species and undermine the

valuable benefits provided by biological diversity.

Drought affects women and children in that they have to draw water from distant places. It means children may not be able to attend school on time and their performance in class will be affected. By making communities aware of these issues and by offering practical solutions, people will understand how to prevent and reduce adverse environmental effects associated with deforestation and forestry activities and they can take appropriate action when possible.

Interview an agricultural officer. What are they doing to encourage farmers to raise less maize and more drought-tolerant crops like cassava? Besides cassava, what other crops do they recommend that farmers plant?

Interview a farmer who grows a variety of crops to find out how he/she has reduced their dependence on only one cash crop such as maize?

Work with your local forestry office and organize tree plantings in your community.

### Useful Link

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