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**One head cannot lift a roof (Mutu umodzi susenza denga)**

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**Notes to broadcaster**

Cassava mosaic disease (CMD) is one of the most important cassava diseases in Malawi, and is known as *Khate la chinangwa* in Chichewa, the most common language in the country. CMD reduces the size of leaves and disfigures them (that is, they become twisted). Leaves of infected plants have a green and yellow mosaic pattern. Infected plants produce small roots, especially if they are infected early in the season.

The disease is caused by a virus, and transmitted from an infected to a healthy plant by insects called whiteflies. It is also commonly spread through cuttings from infected plants. There is no chemical control for the disease.

To manage CMD:

* Plant cassava materials with no signs of infection.
* Choose planting materials from a clean, disease-free field.
* Uproot and destroy symptomatic plants that show symptoms of CMD as soon as recognized by burying.
* Plant tolerant varieties. In Malawi, these include Sauti, Sagonja, Yizaso, and Chamandanda
* Practice crop rotation to avoid buildup of the disease.

This drama revolves around a widow called Ayaya whose cassava garden was attacked by cassava mosaic disease the previous year. Since cassava was the staple food in her area, she literally had no food to feed her family. In the next growing season, she decides to open a garden far from her neighbour’s farms to avoid infection of her crop from her neighbour’s gardens. When a man from her village named Kotokwa decides to open his garden close to hers, all hell breaks loose. It is through this conflict that Ayaya learns that there is more to preventing cassava mosaic disease than distance alone.

You might choose to present this drama as part of your regular farming program.

You could also use this script as research material or as inspiration for creating your own programming on cassava disease problems or similar topics in your country.

Talk to farmers and experts who are growing cassava or are knowledgeable about the crop.

You might want to ask farmers:

Do you know cassava mosaic disease?

Do you know how the disease is transmitted?

Do you know how you can prevent the disease from affecting your cassava crop?

And the experts:

Where can farmers get clean, disease-free cassava planting materials?

Estimated running time for the script: 20 minutes, with intro and outro music.

**CHARACTERS**

**AYAYA:** 40-year-old woman with four children. The oldest is a boy aged 15. She is a widowed cassava farmer who plants the crop mostly for food and sells the surplus to supplement the family income, which mostly comes from working in other people’s gardens in her village and the villages beyond.

**CHIMWENE:** Ayaya’s 15-year-old boy who is in a day secondary school within walking distance from home. He and his siblings help in their mother’s garden when they are not in school.

**MISOMALI:** A 45-year-old male farmer who appears to have a good grasp of farming challenges in the village. He is kind and easygoing, willing to share what he has in his garden, and willing to share his knowledge of farming challenges. Married.

**KOTOKWA**: A 42-year-old male from the same village. Married.

**SCENE ONE**

**FX:** AFTERNOON VILLAGE ATMOSPHERE.

BIRDS CHIRPING, SOUND OF GOATS, AND A DOG BARKING FROM A DISTANCE.

CHIMWENE HAS JUST COME FROM SCHOOL. HE PICKS UP HIS FOOD FROM THE

KITCHEN WHERE HIS MOTHER LEFT IT FOR HIM.

**CHIMWENE:** (APPROACHING) Mum, this cassava meal is bitter. How do you expect me to eat this?

**AYAYA:** I am sorry, my son, but that is what everyone in this house has eaten today.

**CHIMWENE:** Why didn’t you prepare the tasty cassava that we normally eat?

**AYAYA:** You mean you don’t know we harvested the last tasty cassava yesterday?

**CHIMWENE:** Are you serious, mum?

**AYAYA:** Don’t pretend that you don’t know we had little to harvest this year. Is it news to you that we uprooted most of the cassava due to the cassava mosaic disease?

**CHIMWENE:** I know that, but mum, I didn’t think we would run out so soon.

**AYAYA:** Well, we have run out. As a last resort, I tried to sieve out the bitter cooking water so that the cassava is less bitter, and that’s what we got. Anyway, it’s not as bitter as you make it sound, Chimwene.

**CHIMWENE:** But mum, today in class we learned that this bitter cassava must not be consumed fresh because it is poisonous.

**AYAYA:** (ANNOYED) Chimwene, you are not hungry, are you?

**CHIMWENE:** Of course I am, mum.

**AYAYA:** Then don’t behave like a small child. Go on and eat your meal.

**CHIMWENE:** (GRUDGINGLY) I am not eating this poison.

**AYAYA:** Obviously you are not hungry.

**CHIMWENE:** I am going to Uncle Chithope’s. He still has some tasty cassava in his garden. He should be able to give me a few tubers just ...

**AYAYA:** Noo no no no … I will not have you begging from my relatives. I may be a widow, but I have managed to fend for myself and my children since your father passed on six years ago.

**MISOMALI:** (APPROACHING) Ayaya, I am just passing by on my way home from the field, and I thought I should find out how you and the rest of the family are doing.

**AYAYA:** Thank you, Mr. Misomali, we are doing fine. How are you and your family?

**MISOMALI:** God is favouring us with good health.

**CHIMWENE:** Mum is not telling the truth ...

**AYAYA:** Shiiiiii, Chimwene, shut up!

**MISOMALI:** No, let him speak, Ayaya. At 15, Chimwene is grown-up enough to speak his mind. What is it, Chimwene?

**CHIMWENE:** We may be doing fine health-wise, Mr. Misomali, but this home has no food. I came back from school and found this bitter cassava for food and I can hardly swallow it.

**MISOMALI:** Don’t stress. Go and get some tasty cassava from my garden which is near the forest.

**CHIMWENE:** (GOING OFF MIC) Thank you, Mr. Misomali. I am going right away.

**MISOMALI:** (CALLING OUT) You can get enough for two days.

**AYAYA:** I cannot thank you enough for this, Mr. Misomali. God bless you.

**MISOMLI:** It’s nothing really, Ayaya. Now I must be on my way.

**AYAYA:** My greetings to your wife.

**MISOMALI:** Consider it done**.**

**SCENE TWO**

**FX:** FIELD ATMOSPHERE WITH FOREST SOUNDS. AYAYA DIGGING AND MAKING RIDGES IN HER NEW CASSAVA GARDEN

**KOTOKWA:** (APPROACHES) Good morning, Ayaya.

**AYAYA:** Good morning, Mr. Kotokwa. How is your home? You, your wife, and children?

**KOTOKWA:** We are all doing fine. How about your home?

**AYAYA:** We are all in good health.

**KOTOKWA:** And I see you are preparing the garden alone. Why? Usually you are with your children.

**AYAYA:** They will join me when they come back from school.

**KOTOKWA:** I see. And this time you have decided to plant your cassava in this isolated garden. Why?

**AYAYA:** Well, I lost a lot of my cassava last year due to the cassava mosaic disease. My neighbour whose garden was close to mine did not uproot his cassava plants when they were attacked by the disease. I uprooted my infected plants and burned them, but the rest were infected from my neighbour’s garden.

**KOTOKWA:** So you felt this time you should plant your cassava far from the rest of the gardens to avoid cross-farm infections?

**AYAYA:** Of course, yes.

**KOTOKWA:** Well, you are not going to be alone here, because I am going to be your neighbour.

**AYAYA:** (SURPRISED AND SHOCKED) What? You are not serious!

**KOTOKWA:** Oh yes, I am going to open my new cassava garden on the other side of the forest. This used to be my late grandmother’s garden some five years ago, and that’s where I will plant my cassava this year.

**AYAYA:** You are not going to start a garden there!

**KOTOKWA:** What did you say?

**AYAYA:** You heard me right. I said “YOU ARE NOT GOING TO START A CASSAVA GARDEN THERE”!

**KOTOKWA:** Meaning?

**AYAYA:** Exactly what I said. I am the first one to come here anyway, away from everyone else to avoid being close to other cassava gardens. That way, I won’t become a victim of cassava mosaic s disease … and you are following me? I will not have it!

**KOTOKWA:** But you have no power to stop me. Whether you came here first or not is not the issue. The patch of land where I want to plant my cassava does not belong to you.

**AYAYA:** I have no power to stop you? Why? Because I am a woman? Or because I am a widow? (STARTS WEEPING) Because I lost my husband? You want me and my children to die of hunger. (SHE STARTS CRYING LOUDLY AND TALKING ABOUT HER LATE HUSBAND) Mmmmmm, Aphiri, why did you leave us alone to suffer like this? Mmmm ...

**KOTOKWA:** Ayaya, are you crying because I said I want to open a cassava garden next to yours? Is that reason enough to start calling the dead spirits from the grave? Come on—stop it!

**AYAYA:** AYAYA CRIES EVEN LOUDER

**MISOMALI:** (COMES RUNNING, HAVING HEARD AYAYA CRYING AS HE PASSED BY ON HIS WAY TO HIS SUGARCANE GARDEN) What is going on here? I was on my way to my sugarcane garden when I heard her cry. Kotokwa, why is she crying?

**KOTOKWA:** Ask her.

**AYAYA:** (STILL CRYING) Aphiri, Aphiri! Why did you leave us alone to suffer like this? Aphiri, Aphiri, come and see how your wife and children are suffering!

**MISOMALI:** Ayaya, can you please explain what happened?

**AYAYA:** (STOPS CRYING AND SNIFFS AS SHE SPEAKS) Ahh Misomali, you know last year all my cassava was destroyed by the cassava mosaic disease, and right now I have nothing to feed my children. To avoid my cassava being infected by cross-garden transmission again this season, I decided to open my cassava garden far away from everyone else. But Kotokwa decided to follow me and open his new garden next to mine.

**MISOMALI:** Is that why you are crying? I came running, thinking Kotokwa is beating you or something.

**KOTOKWA:** Even I couldn’t believe it when she started crying.

**MISOMALI:** Actually, there is no harm in Kotokwa opening his garden next to yours. Do you know how cassava mosaic disease is transmitted?

**AYAYA:** Yes. When someone’s cassava garden is close to another cassava garden, the disease can come from that other garden into your garden.

**MISOMALI:** How does that happen?

**AYAYA:** I don’t know. All I know is that the disease comes from the nearby garden into your garden.

**MISOMALI:** Kotokwa, how is the virus transmitted from one cassava garden to another?

**KOTOKWA:** There are some small white insects that feed on the sap of the cassava. These carry the disease from one garden to another.

**MISOMALI:**  You are right. Where did you learn that?

**KOTOKWA:** From the farmer program on the radio.

**MISOMALI:** Ayaya, you say your garden was attacked by the cassava mosaic disease in the last growing season. How did you know your cassava was attacked by the disease?

**AYAYA:** The leaves of my cassava plants were deformed and somehow twisted. There were yellow patches mixed with green here and there.

**MISOMALI:** And what did you do when you saw the infected cassava plants?

**AYAYA:** Well, I uprooted all the affected plants and did what they said on the radio.

**MISOMALI:** What did they say on the radio?

**AYAYA:** That we dig a pit away from the garden and bury the infected plants.

**KOTOKWA:** I also heard that we can burn the infected plants.

**MISOMALI:** All that is correct. Now, Ayaya, if it’s the small white flies that transmit the disease, what would stop them flying from wherever they are to your garden here?

**AYAYA:** Nothing, I guess.

**MISOMALI:** There you go. While I agree that keeping distance can help in preventing transmission through whiteflies, distance alone is not enough. Both of you need to be vigilant. You must make sure you get your planting materials from a reliable source—and they must be disease-tolerant.

When you plant your cassava, please make sure that you plant only seeds that are not infected with the virus. And check your cassava every two weeks or even weekly if you can. This will help you to see if your cassava has distorted leaves. As soon as you see a plant with distorted leaves with yellow and green patches, uproot it and take it away from the garden, and bury or burn it. And plant disease-tolerant varieties—to avoid your cassava being infected in the first place.

**AYAYA:** But the resistant variety is a bitter type that can’t be eaten fresh.

**MISOMALI:** I know, but you can process it into cassava flour, and that way you will never suffer from hunger throughout the year.

**KOTOKWA:** You see, it’s not just about how close the gardens are. I can have my garden close to yours, but both of us should be vigilant and examine our plants frequently. That way, we can protect our cassava and have high yields.

**AYAYA:** Mmm, you just want to justify starting a new cassava garden next to mine.

**MISOMALI:** Not really, Ayaya. You see, there are a number of ways to prevent cassava mosaic disease. As farmers, we should avoid planting other crops such as tomato in or close to our cassava gardens.

**AYAYA:** Why?

**MISOMALI:** Because crops like tomato are alternative hosts of the whiteflies which transmit the disease. Instead, we can plant cowpeas and maize which are non-hosts and don’t attract whiteflies.

**AYAYA:** Well, I didn’t know that.

**KOTOKWA:** I also learned from the farmer radio program that avoiding planting cassava next to an infected garden is one way of avoiding the disease.

**MISOMALI:** That is correct. Mr. Kotokwa. What is important is that, as cassava farmers, we—and I mean the whole community—must cooperate with each other in following these preventive practices if we want to avoid the disease in our gardens. A single person’s negligence can destroy the good preventive measures of a whole community.

**AYAYA:** Mr. Misomali, although you are just a cassava farmer like the two of us here, you seem to know a lot—as if you were an agricultural advisor.

**MISOMALI:** (LAUGHS IT OFF) Ayaya, there is a saying that once bitten, twice shy. I had a devastating attack of cassava mosaic disease in my garden two years ago and made it a point to learn about the disease to avoid another attack.

**KOTOKWA:** Well, one of the challenges that I am facing is finding clean virus-free planting seeds. Maybe your knowledge can come in handy here, Mr. Misomali.

**MISOMALI:** You can seek advice on where to source virus-free cassava planting materials from the following research stations in Malawi: In the Central Region, from Chitedze Research Station in Lilongwe and Chitala Research Station in Salima. In the Northern Region at Mkondezi Research Station in Nkhatabay, at Baka Research Station in Karonga, and at Lunyangwa Research Station in Mzuzu. And in the Southern Region at Bvumbwe Research Station in Thyolo, at Makoka Research Station in Zomba, and at the Kasinthula Research Station in Chikhwawa.

**AYAYA:** But what if these stations are far from here, Mr. Misomali? How else can a small farmer like me get information on where to source clean cassava planting materials?

**MISOMALI:** You are raising a good point, Ayaya. Another way is to find out from our agriculture advisors. They can link us with farmers or farmer clubs that are multiplying clean cassava planting materials. I think there is such a club just two villages away from here.

**AYAYA:** (LAUGHS) Well, Mr. Kotokwa, I am sorry for my outburst. However, it was a blessing in disguise. How would we have learned this much about the disease if it were not for this encounter? They say knowledge is power. Once again, my apologies.

**KOTOKWA:** (LAUGHING) Not at all, Ayaya. Both of us should thank Mr. Misomali for coming to our rescue.

**MISOMALI:** CHUCKLE OF APPRECIATION

**AYAYA:** Will you accept my hand of reconciliation, Mr.

Kotokwa?

**KOTOKWA:** Yes, from the bottom of my heart.

## Acknowledgements

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Reviewed by: Andrew Mtonga, Department of Agricultural Research Services, Chitedze Research Station, Malawi

**Sources of information**

Interviews with cassava farmers from Mulangala Village in Mulanje District, Blantyre Agriculture Development Division, Malawi.

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