

Type: Drama

March 2017

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**Garbage in, garbage out: Plant healthy cassava cuttings to keep your garden free of cassava mosaic disease**

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**Notes to broadcaster**

Cassava is the second most important staple crop in Malawi after maize, and is the main staple crop in the districts on the shore of Lake Malawi. The crop is becoming commercially important, and production has nearly tripled in the last ten years.

In addition to selling fresh roots at local markets, farmers can sell cassava to small-scale bakeries and producers of *mandaazi* and *kanyenya*. There is a large potential market for high quality cassava flour for breweries, and in the manufacture of biscuits and packaging.

This dramashowshow a dangerous disease called cassava mosaic virus disease can lead to 100% loss if it spreads, and describes how it can be prevented.

The drama is based on information gained through interviews with experts and farmers in Malawi. You might choose to present this drama as part of your regular farming program, using voice actors to represent the speakers. If so, please make sure to tell your audience at the beginning of the program that the voices are those of actors, not the people involved in the original interviews.

Or you could use this drama as research material or inspiration to create a program on preventing cassava mosaic disease in your own area.

Take note of the following points:

Planting good, healthy cassava cuttings is the first step to preventing cassava mosaic disease, and to a good harvest.

Two other ways to prevent the disease are by planting varieties which are resistant or tolerant, and by monitoring your cassava crop to detect early signs of the disease.

Cassava mosaic disease is spread by whiteflies which pick up the virus from infected cassava plants and spread it to healthy plants.

Whiteflies are difficult to manage. The best way to prevent the spread of cassava mosaic disease is to uproot infected plants and bury them off-site.

There are no pesticides available to deal with cassava mosaic disease. Neem may repel whiteflies and stop them from infecting healthy plants, but this has not been tested and verified by scientists.

Cassava mosaic disease can be devastating to cassava yields and farmers’ income, but it is not dangerous to human health.

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

**CHARACTERS:**

**FATSANI:** Well-known cassava farmer in Watch Village. He supplies high quality flour to Maldeco fisheries. Nasiwero’s husband.

**NASIWERO:** Fatsani’s wife.

**DAVIE:** Lives in Watch Village. One of his gardens is close to Fatsani’s cassava garden. Grace’s husband.

**GRACE:** Davie’s wife.

**JOHN:** Well-known cassava farmer who specializes in sweet cassava and sells to vendors. Recently, he joined Fatsani to supply high quality cassava flour to Maldeco fisheries.

SOUND OF DIGGING AND BIRDS

**FATSANI:** My wife, Nasiwero. (PLEASANTLY SURPRISED) Shaa! … this variety of cassava yields as much as that bitter variety called Sauti.

**NASIWERO:** True, my husband, Fatsani. It’s very high-yielding. It’s Manyokola, a sweet variety.

**FATSANI:** Look at this root—as big as my arm.

**NASIWERO:** And this one as big as your leg!

**FATSANI:** (LAUGHS) Ha! Ha! Ha! Why not compare it with your own leg?

**NASIWERO:** Well, you compared the first one with your arm, so I maintained the association.

**FATSANI:** Okay. I believe they are so big because we planted with the first rains, and we harvested when it was fully mature.

**JOHN:** Hi, Fatsani.

**FATSANI:** Yes, John, welcome.

**JOHN:** Ahhhh … This variety of sweet cassava, which I think is Manyokola, yields almost as much as Sauti, the bitter one.

**NASIWERO:** That was what we were rejoicing about just before you came. We were saying that we should plant this variety again if we decide to grow sweet cassava.

**JOHN:** Yes, it’s very high-yielding. But the problem with these sweet varieties is that they’re not resistant to cassava mosaic virus.… How I wish the cassava breeders would breed a sweet variety that is tolerant and resistant to cassava mosaic and yields as much as Sauti.

**FATSANI:** True. And for us who sell high-quality flour, we like it because it doesn’t produce a lot of fibre.

**JOHN:** (LAUGHS) Well, sweet varieties are for farmers who are not afraid of experimenting and trying new things.

**NASIWERO:** What do you mean?

**JOHN:** You know I make a lot of money from sweet cassava. So when the whiteflies come, I make sure I control them before they bring diseases into my garden, whatever it takes.

**FATSANI:** How do you control whiteflies? I thought there were no chemicals that could kill them?

**JOHN:** I thought I told you … aah, you don’t know?

**NASIWERO:** Don’t know what?

**JOHN:** Well, the scientists say that there is no pesticide that will manage the whiteflies that spread cassava mosaic. But we farmers are using neem to kill them and keep them away from our fields.

**FATSANI:** I use neem too. (JOKING) Instead of trying the impossible task of killing whiteflies with a gun, I tried neem.

**NASIWERO:** (LAUGHS) Fatsani, don’t kill me with your jokes. How can you kill a fly with a gun?

**FATSANI:** (STILL JOKING) If something is difficult to kill, what else would you use to kill it?

But the agricultural officer told me that neem has not been thoroughly tested against cassava mosaic disease, so they can’t recommend it. And she said that it’s only worth trying in this area if there are five whiteflies or more on cassava leaves. Otherwise, the whiteflies don’t cause enough damage to warrant the expense of trying to control them.

**JOHN:** I know, but it has worked for me.

Anyway, I can see that whiteflies have infested the leaves of this cassava plant. And unfortunately, I can see signs of mosaic disease in these other plants.

**FATSANI:** You are indeed a cassava farmer. So you noticed that the cassava was infected even at this mild level?

**JOHN:** Oh yes. I told you: my biggest enemy is whiteflies. It’s very important to check your garden regularly, so you can detect signs of mosaic disease early.

**NASIWERO:** You are right. The whiteflies came when my cassava had already matured. If they had come earlier, we would have lost the crop completely.

**FATSANI:** For sure it could have been a disaster. Mosaic disease is no joke; it’s serious! You can lose your whole crop!

**JOHN:** I just want to know: what will you do with these infected plants? Are you going to get cuttings to plant from them?

**FATSANI:** Why do you ask such a silly question? Of course not!

Anyway, since we have a good market for high quality cassava at Maldeco, we might just grow Sauti, that bitter variety that’s resistant to mosaic disease.

**JOHN:** I just wanted to make sure that you were going to protect our cassava industry by not planting infected cuttings.

**NASIWERO:** These infected plants will be my firewood this year. We’ll pile them here to dry, and I can use them for firewood at home.

**JOHN:** Why can’t you dry them at home?

**FATSANI:** We’ll take them home later today…. For now, I’ll pile them close to our neighbour Davie’s place, and then take them home to finish drying when we get back from the market.

**DAVIE:** (APPROACHING) Mr. Fatsani, is that cassava filling your two ox-carts a sweet or a bitter variety?

**FATSANI:** Davie, this is sweet cassava. Don’t you know what the roots of my bitter cassava look like?

**GRACE:** Fatsani, I know they’re bigger. (LOWERS HER VOICE) Davie, my husband...

**DAVIE:** (QUIETLY)Yes, Grace …

**GRACE:** We must do something. (LOUDER) Two ox-carts from that small piece of land? You will get rich.

**NASIWERO:** Yes, it will bring me a lot of money. We didn’t even use any fertilizer, and one ox-cart will earn us more than 100,000 cash.

**FATSANI:** (WALKING AWAY) No … don’t take Nasiwero seriously. We didn’t make a lot of money.

**JOHN:** Grace and Davie, you should take Nasiwero seriously. You can make good money with sweet cassava.

**FATSANI:** Okay, you will have to choose who to believe. We are just leaving; we need to get to the market before the sun rises so that we can meet vendors from the city.

**DAVIE:** (LOUDER) Travel well, neighbour. All the best. (SOFTLY) Grace, you are right; let’s do something. Let’s plant some cassava on this land right beside Fatsani’s land.

**GRACE:** Yes, we can use those plants. When they pile them like that, I know they are drying. We can carry them to our garden and plant them.

**DAVIE:** Oh yes! I remember last time they gave us some to burn as firewood when they were heaped like this.

**SCENE TRANSITION**

**FX:** KNOCK! KNOCK! DOG BARKING

**FATSANI:** (CHASING THE DOG AWAY) Davie, are you there?

**GRACE:** (DOG STOPS BARKING) Fatsani, wait! Davie was bathing, but he’s dressing now and is coming.

**DAVIE:** (APPROACHING) Brother Fatsani, do you want me to come to town with you to buy a car with the money you made?

**FATSANI:** Davie! Stop that! Why do you always jump to conclusions?

By the way, where are my cassava plants?

**DAVIE:** Hey! Man, when you left this morning, didn’t you ask our family to look after that cassava?

**GRACE:** Aha! So you are angry, Fatsani, because we took the firewood you left beside our garden?

**FATSANI:** I am not angry because you stole my cassava plants, but because you planted contaminated cassava in a garden next to mine.

**DAVIE:** Stole? Did I steal your cassava?

**FATSANI:** Who authorized you to take my plants?

**GRACE:** You always give us firewood, and this time we chose to plant our share.

**FATSANI:** What *share* are you talking about? Did I say you could take them?

**GRACE:** No, we decided to get rich like you—and so we planted them.

**FATSANI:** I command you to uproot that cassava. It will spread cassava mosaic disease in this area.

**DAVIE:** No, we will not uproot them. We can pay you for the plants that you claim we stole from you. How much do you want us to pay?

**GRACE:** Yes, we can pay you.

**FATSANI:** I do not want your money, but …

**DAVIE:** (INTERRUPTING) … But what? You just want us to remain poor. Are you happy to see us poorer than you …?

**FATSANI:** (INTERRUPTING) … The plants were diseased.

**GRACE:** If they were diseased, why do you want us to uproot them? Did we plant them in *your* garden?

**DAVIE:** He does not want to us to have money like him.

**FATSANI:** No, it’s not that; it’s not that I don’t want you to get rich. I just don’t want you to spread the disease. Didn’t I offer you some cuttings before?

**GRACE:** You did. But why are you worried about a disease that is in *our* garden?

**FATSANI:** It’s because the disease is very dangerous, and it can spread to the whole area if we are not careful. We won’t make any profit from cassava if the disease multiplies.

**GRACE:** Hmmm … Your plants were better than the cuttings which one NGO gave the farmers in a village I visited. And the farmers planted *those* cuttings.

**FATSANI:** Yes, I know that some NGOs are not aware that they are distributing diseased cuttings…. But that doesn’t mean that those farmers benefited from the cuttings.

So uproot these ones before the whole area is contaminated.

**DAVIE:** I have heard you, but I will not uproot them until I see how dangerous the disease is.

**GRACE:** We will not uproot. We won’t uproot simply because a jealous person is forcing us to uproot.

**FATSANI:** I am warning you: the disease is dangerous and could wipe out cassava farming in this area.

**DAVIE:** We are ready to face it.

**FATSANI:** I have tried everything, but you are not taking any of my advice.

Okay, I will give you some clean cuttings to plant in your garden. I will not charge you much for that.

**DAVIE:** Thank you for that. I will buy them and compare them with the cassava I already planted—the variety that I know is high-yielding. But I will not uproot those ones.

**FATSANI:** You are leaving me with only one option—to report to the village headman that you stole my cassava plants.

But if you just uproot them, you can keep them as firewood.

**DAVIE:** What did you say!

**FATSANI:** I will report to the chief that you stole my plants!

**DAVIE:** No, please don’t! It should not reach that far. Let’s agree.

**FATSANI:** Agree on what? ... I have tried to reason with you, and now I’m going to the chief.

**GRACE:** No, wait! … If we uproot them, will you let us keep them?

**FATSANI:** You can keep them as firewood.

**DAVIE:** Are you going to give me the clean planting material you promised?

**FATSANI:** If you agree to uproot the infected ones, yes.

**DAVIE AND** **GRACE:** Ok, we will uproot them.

**FATSANI:** Thank you. I am going. Do as we agreed.

**GRACE:** Are you going to report us to the chief?

**FATSANI:** No. It’s okay now.

**GRACE:** Thank you, Mr. Fatsani. (SOFTLY) My husband, let’s uproot this cassava and plant it in my village’s garden.

**DAVIE:** (SOFTLY) Oh yeah, brilliant; I never thought of that. (NORMAL VOICE) Fatsani, consider it done. But we can plant the clean cuttings that you give us in the garden close to yours, right?

**FATSANI:** No problem. I just want to protect the cassava growers in our area.

**GRACE:** Thanks.

**SCENE TRANSITION SONG**

**FX:** CROSS-FADE INTO SOUND OF BIRDS AND HOLD UNDER BELOW

**DAVIE:** Grace, Fatsani was right. This cassava that we took from Fatsani is sick; look at it!

**GRACE:** The plant is stunted like a malnourished kid.... The leaves are curled, twisted, and misshapen like Indian hemp (LAUGHS) … and they have these yellowish-green patterns on them.

**DAVIE:** You’re right.

**GRACE:** What astonishes me is that in the gardens we planted with Fatsani’s clean cuttings, the cassava is big, and there are cracks in the ridge to show that the roots are developing. But not here. Why?

**DAVIE:** Yes, you’re right, my wife. Let’s dig up some cassava to see what is down there.

**GRACE:** Ok …

SOUND OF DIGGING

**DAVIE:** Hey, I am dead! Look at the roots! No cassava at all. Just very small roots.

**GRACE:** I can’t believe this. Let’s dig up another one.

SOUND OF DIGGING

**DAVIE:** We should have just uprooted these plants and used them for firewood. We wasted our energy by planting them here.

**GRACE:** You insisted that we plant them.

**DAVIE:** We wanted to compare, remember.

**GRACE:** Fatsani was right to warn us. This was a total waste of energy. I can hardly face him. I feel like the earth should open and swallow me up.

**DAVIE:** I just feel very weak. No energy. Let me sit down. Huwwu (SOUNDING VERY TIRED).

**GRACE:** Why are you tired? Isn’t that a sign that your blood pressure has risen?

**DAVIE:** Maybe. I am thinking about how much time I wasted on things that I was warned about … But if Fatsani insisted that we should uproot the plants, doesn’t that mean that the disease can infect humans? He mentioned that it’s a virus.

**GRACE:** I thought it was a virus for plants. Can it affect human beings? Let’s ask him before we dig further.

SCENE TRANSITION

**FX:** SOUND OF BIRDS

**FATSANI:** (SURPRISED) Shaa, Davie … is this the garden where you planted the cassava I tried to prevent you from planting?

**DAVIE:** Yes, Fatsani, this is the one. Thank you for agreeing to come and see our misfortune.

**FATSANI:** Is it misfortune or was it a bad choice?

**GRACE:** Since we were determined to plant the diseased plants, it’s our own bad choice.

**FATSANI:** What you did is no different than what people do when they refuse to move away from flooded areas. This is inviting death.

**DAVIE:** So it’s true that the mosaic virus can kill people?

**FATSANI:** No, I don’t mean that. It’s a plant disease, not a human disease, and it can’t hurt you. I just mean that you invited loss to come your way.

**GRACE:** Okay. Yeah, you are right. But we can eat the small cassava roots that we find in the garden here, right?

**FATSANI:** Yes, you can eat. Look, the bad thing is that you have spread the disease in this area.

**DAVIE:** We are sorry. But what can we do?

**FATSANI:** Dig up all the cassava plants and bury them. There’s no time to dry them now before the rains come.

Look, these small insects are whiteflies. They’re the ones that spread the cassava mosaic virus when they eat infected plants and then eat clean cassava.

**DAVIE:** Okay—so that is how the mosaic disease spreads?

**FATSANI:** Yes. We have to make sure that the whiteflies don’t have any more chances to eat this infected cassava. Uproot it and bury the plants.

**GRACE:** Let’s dig up all the cassava, and we can use the plants as firewood.

**FATSANI:** I am afraid not. If you want to use them as firewood, take off all the leaves and bury them right here. Then you can use the stems for firewood. The cassava industry is at stake. Can’t you see?

**DAVIE:** We understand you. We made a lot of money from planting the clean cuttings you gave us. So we will not even use these plants for firewood. We have already done enough damage.

Thank you, Fatsani, for your advice. We will bury all these plants.

**GRACE:** Yes, my husband, Davie. Let’s dig up all the cassava immediately.

**FATSANI:** Yeah, dig it all up and bury the leaves. You have already caused a lot of damage here. I will start spraying neem on my garden right away.

**GRACE:** Why?

**FATSANI:** To keep away the whiteflies, in case they travel to my garden from here and infect it.

**DAVIES:** We will spray neem in our other new garden—the one that is close to yours.

**FATSANI:** Yes, you better do that. So, Davie and family, remember that planting clean and healthy cassava cuttings is the first step to preventing cassava mosaic virus disease. But not all healthy plants are clean; some can be carriers of the disease that might manifest in the next season.

**GRACE:** Yes. We have learnt the hard way and will never plant infected cuttings again. Look at these short plants with nothing, no roots at all!

**FATSANI:** Clean plants make a good harvest. Remember that cassava mosaic virus is spread by whiteflies from infected cassava plants to healthy plants. So make sure you uproot infected plants and bury them off-site, alright?

**GRACE:** Yes, sir.

**FATSANI:**  (LAUGHS) Now you are calling me “sir.”

Okay, remember you can use neem leaves or neem seed powder to keep whiteflies away from your garden and stop them from infecting healthy plants. Although this hasn’t been tested and verified by scientists, we farmers are trying it anyway. If you promise to do all these things, Davie and Grace, you can join our co-operative which sells high-quality flour.

**DAVIE:** Thank you, Fatsani. We think you should be the lead cassava farmer in this area. You are not jealous and you want every farmer to profit from the crop. And yes, we will agree to join your co-operative. Thank you.

**FATSANI:** You are welcome. I am at your disposal.

SIGNATURE TUNE

**PRESENTER:** Dear listeners, you heard what happened to our friends Davie and Grace when they didn’t listen to their friend’s advice. But if they didn’t believe Fatsani, why didn’t Davie’s family ask the agricultural officers about the disease before planting?

No, they had to learn their lessons the hard way. Don’t make the same mistake!

## Acknowledgements

Contributed by: Gladson Makowa, of Story Workshop Educational Trust, Blantyre, Malawi.

Reviewed by: Mrs. Stellia Victoria Mangochi,Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development, Nkhotakota District Agriculture Office, Nkhotakota, Malawi

**Sources of information**

Interviews:

Prof Vincent Saka, Plant Pathologist, Crop Science Department, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), November 23, 2016

Stella Mangochi, Crops Officer, Nkhotakota District Agricultural Office, November 23, 2016

Andrew Nganga, Research Technician, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, November 25, 2016, December 21, 2016.

*This script was created with the support of CABI Plantwise through Farm Radio Trust.*



