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**Farmers’ cooperatives help Zambian farmers survive and thrive**

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Notes to broadcaster

The agricultural sector in Zambia, and in Africa as a whole, is faced with several challenges, including: the climate becoming harsher and thereby destabilizing crop and livestock production, farm inputs like seeds and fertilizers being unaffordable for small-scale farmers, and limited crop production because of small-scale farmers’ dependency on rainfed agriculture. Even in years of good rains, farmers are often faced with insufficient food or income during those months when farm labour is most required.

In this script, we discuss the practice of forming farmers’ cooperatives, and how these groups can help address the challenges that farmers are faced with today. In the Central province of Zambia, Mumbwa area, a group of farmers calling themselves the Nakabu Cooperative work together to produce maize seed and pigs for sale to sustain both their families and their agriculture business. The presenter speaks to a farmer from this cooperative who has seen the benefits of forming a farmers’ cooperative. The dialogue between the two is friendly and educational, yet it calls on all farmers to unite and form cooperatives to address the challenges they face, while at the same time achieving their main purpose of growing and selling their produce.

There is no doubt that farmers’ cooperatives provide a strong crisis mitigation strategy, and provide the following benefits:

1. Farmers’ requests from the Government and other stakeholders are met quickly when they speak with one big voice.
2. Farmers’ cooperatives help keep farmers as well as other villagers hard-working and their homes food secure, helping to stamp out hunger.
3. Farmers (even those who cannot read or write) learn new techniques in crop production, as they meet and teach each other.
4. By being in these groups, farmers have access to news and information, thereby become more aware of what is going on around them. This stops buyers from cheating them.
5. Farmers make better profits.

Other programmes on farmers’ cooperatives might include:

* A review of farmers’ cooperatives based on a series of interviews with farmers. Find out what crops they grow for sale, how much money they make per week or month, and what markets they find to sell their products.
* Programmes on the power of unity amongst farmers, and how cooperatives help them learn more about farming and produce more.
* Radio spots or advertisements which show how forming cooperatives can help meet Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the first MDG of working towards eradicating poverty in their villages.
* How farmers’ cooperatives can help farmers provide an education for their children.
* Encouraging farmers to diversify their crop production so as to feed their families a balanced diet and keep them healthy.

*Cue in signature tune, fade under presenter.*

**Presenter:** Good day to you all, listeners and farmers. I am glad you made a date with me on tonight’s edition of the *Zambia Today* programme. I am your presenter, Alice Lungu Banda. Tonight we feature a farmer representing a cooperative in Mumbwa, Central Province of Zambia. He talks to us about the cooperative he and 49 other farmers formed in order to sustain their agriculture business and, of course, provide their homes with food. Please stay tuned.

*Cue in music for 10 seconds. Fade out under presenter.*

**Presenter:** The agricultural sector in Zambia is faced with several challenges, including the climate becoming harsher, thereby destabilizing crop and livestock production. It is predicted that these climatic changes will continue to stress the country for some time to come. In drought years, the country has to rely on food imports as one way to ensure food security. The fact that farm inputs like seeds and fertilizers are unaffordable also adds to farmers’ difficulties. Relying on rain fed agriculture is also difficult for small-scale farmers. Even in years of good rains, farmers are usually faced with insufficient food or income between November and March when farm labour is most required.

There is no doubt that farmers’ cooperatives provide a strong crisis mitigation strategy in many rural communities in Zambia.

Before we speak with our farmer today, I want to provide you with a definition of a cooperative. This definition comes from the Zambian Ministry of Agriculture. A co-operative is any enterprise or organization owned collectively by its members and managed for their joint social and economic benefit and whose activities are not prohibited by law. A cooperative is a group of people with a common goal to do business and make a profit, and which sets certain rules for its activities and convenes regular meetings to monitor the operations of the cooperative. According to the international cooperative movement, a cooperative is marked by the following seven characteristics. Cooperatives have a voluntary and open membership; they are democratically controlled by their members; their members participate economically in their activities; they are independent of control by government or industry; they offer education, training and information to members; and they are concerned with their local community. The seventh characteristic is that there is cooperation between different cooperatives.

We will be back. Please stay tuned.

*Cue in music for 10 seconds. Fade out under presenter.*

**Presenter:** Welcome back. The following programme shows farmers working together to produce maize seed and pigs for the sustenance of their families as well as their agriculture business in Mumbwa’s central province of Zambia. The name of the cooperative is Nakabu Cooperative. I had the opportunity to talk to a farmer who is a treasurer of Nakabu Cooperative, Mr. Laban Chiyabuka.

Mr. Chiyabuka, welcome and thank you for accepting our invitation to come and talk about Nakabu Cooperative on *Zambia Today*.

**Farmer:** You’re welcome and thank you for having me here.

**Presenter:** Mr. Chiyabuka, why did you form the Nakabu Cooperative?

**Farmer:** In 2006, I cultivated two hectares of land and planted maize with a view to selling it to sustain my family. But, unfortunately, that year Mumbwa was hit with a drought and I ended up harvesting very little, too little to even eat at home, let alone to sell and get my six children to school. Life became difficult for me and my family.

Because I was not going anywhere with my farming, I sat down with four of my friends who were also farmers in my area and we discussed the idea of forming a farmers’ cooperative in order to do farming seriously and find ways to survive. We had our first meeting at my home where we discussed what we would grow and sell. At the second meeting, we agreed on the name of the cooperative and the amount of money we needed to contribute towards the business. We also agreed, of course, on whom we thought could be invited to be part of the cooperative so as to increase our capital. The amount of money we agreed on was fifty thousand Zambian kwacha (US $12.50).

**Presenter:** How many members did you have at first?

**Farmer:** There were a total of 49 members who were interested in the idea and who registered. All members have an equal vote – one member, one vote, so everyone is equal in the co-operative. After putting our money together, we bought maize from farmers in nearby villages, then traveled to Lusaka and sold the maize to a milling company. It was easy for us to sell the maize because we were a group, and had a large volume when we combined our harvests. Otherwise, it is not easy to just go to a milling company or any other company to sell something.

With the profit we made from that sale, we visited the Zambia National Farmers Union offices where we had our cooperative registered and sought advice on what crop to grow with or without rain. We wanted a crop which could give us some profit during the winter season, from May to July. But we did not get what we wanted. However, around that time, people from an agriculture company calling itself Conservation Farming Unit came to our area to teach farmers to grow crops with the use of conservation farming methods. That is when myself and my other two friends saw the idea of growing maize seeds to sell to our fellow farmers in our village. We spoke to the coordinator of the Conservation Farming Unit about our idea and he seemed pleased with it. We then spoke to his superiors. They were happy with our idea and sent a group of people to train us to grow maize seed. It is important to learn together, especially when we are operating our own businesses, and are not operating under the control of another company or the government.

**Presenter:** How long did the training take and what exactly did you learn?

**Farmer:** The training took three months and we learned a lot of things. We learned the right type of soils on which to grow maize seed, how to deal with diseases if there is an outbreak, as well as the importance of keeping your field weed-free until harvest time.

**Presenter:** Was it free of charge?

**Farmer:** No, we paid some money towards the training course. But it was worth it; also, some farmers were allowed to pay in instalments.

**Presenter:** When did you put what you learned into practice?

**Farmer:** Immediately after we completed the training, we invested the money we had made earlier into the project of growing irrigated maize seed. We managed to produce 20 bags of maize seed, which we sold to local farmers. We did not make much profit, because we sold the seeds to local farmers at a lower price due to the fact that we had just started our business and our product had not yet won the trust that other seed companies had won. Thus, most farmers opted to buy from ordinary seed companies in town. In the following year, we doubled our production and increased the price of the seeds a bit. Thus, we were able to make a little profit.

**Presenter:** We will be back in a minute to continue our discussion with Mr. Chiyabuka from Nakabu Cooperative.

*Cue in signature tune. Cue in presenter with voice over.*

**Announcer:** In case you’ve just tuned in, you’re listening to *Zambia Today*. On today’s programme, we are talking with a farmer who is also a treasurer of Nakabu Cooperative, Mr. Laban Chiyabuka. He is telling us about the benefits he and 49 other farmers in Mumbwa have experienced after forming a cooperative in their village, and how their lives have changed for the better.

*Cue out signature tune for 5 seconds.*

**Presenter:** Mr. Chiyabuka, why do you think farmers in your village prefer to buy maize seed from your cooperative and not from seed companies in town?

**Farmer:** I think it is because our seed has proved to be generally good and yields good results for the farmers. Apart from that, it costs less as compared to seeds bought from seed companies. Our seeds cost sixty thousand Zambian kwacha per 10 kilograms (US $15). By comparison, seed companies sell their seed for seventy thousand Zambian kwacha per 10 kilograms. Besides, local farmers who need seed in large quantities can buy our seed in the village without having to spend time and money booking a vehicle. Most, if not all, seed companies in this country do not deliver to the farmers’ doorstep. So we capitalized on those advantages and, fortunately, we’re growing bigger by the day. Also, since we are from the community and we are the neighbours of the other farmers, they trust us. They know that our profits will benefit the community and not just flow into the city like when they buy from another company

**Presenter:** You seem to be doing fine. Do you face any challenges in your seed business?

**Farmer:** Of course we have challenges. Like you mentioned earlier, the climate has really changed and been harsh on us farmers. Unlike the past when we used to have droughts, we now have too much rain which leads to floods in many parts of our village. Too much rain is causing our crops to grow poorly because the field is waterlogged. This hinders us from keeping our fields weed-free. Sometimes the floods carry away our crops with their strong current. So, if the rains continue like this, we are afraid we may not yield anything this coming season.

**Presenter:** How do you mitigate your loss?

**Farmer:** We do not only grow maize seed - we ventured into pig rearing as well. This has proved to be a very good idea. We have been selling pigs to a company known as Real Meat. As a cooperative, it was again easy for us to enter into a contract with a meat company. And so we signed a contract with this company and we sell our pigs at ten thousand Zambian kwacha (US $2.50) per kilogram. Therefore, depending on the number of pigs and how big the pigs grow, we are able to cover any losses in the maize seed business. Meanwhile, I am glad to tell the listeners and my fellow farmers that we feed the pigs well and prevent any possible outbreak of disease in pig pens. As a result, when we take them for sale, they weigh at least 35 kilograms each, hence giving us a good profit. Also, we are talking with other cooperatives in Zambia. There are so many cooperatives with different skills. We are visiting each other to learn from one another. Also, as individual farmers, we could not afford to hire an agricultural extension worker, but as a group, we can. So we have learned new techniques to reduce damage from flooding and to conserve water in times of drought.

**Presenter:** When you sell your pigs to Real Meat Company, how much money do you make on a good day?

**Farmer:** We make as much as eight million Zambian kwacha (US $2000).

**Presenter:** That is a considerable amount. What do you do with such money?

**Farmer:** We re-invest some and share the rest amongst ourselves for our families.

**Presenter:** What differences have you seen in your lives from the time you started this cooperative?

**Farmer:** There has been a lot of progress in my life as an individual as well as for the other members. Speaking for myself, all my six children are in school now; the older ones have even gone as far as university. I used to live in a grass thatched hut, but now I am in a big nice house with roofing sheets on it. My personal business - which is pigs also - is doing extremely well. So I cannot complain much.

**Presenter:** As we come to the end of this interview, what words of encouragement do you have for your fellow farmers who are still struggling with their farming business?

**Farmer:** My advice to them is that they should unite as farmers and come up with an idea to grow something, and then they should not procrastinate but just do it quickly. I think the Government, the Zambian National Farmers Union, or any agriculture company will more easily help a group of farmers than an individual, because the farmers will then speak with one big voice. It is almost impossible to do business with one person. Nakabu Cooperative is doing fine, even with all the challenges in the agricultural sector in this country, because we are united and because we work together in order for us to secure the future of our families. So all I can say now is, farmers and listeners out there - form farmers’ cooperatives and you will never go wrong.

**Presenter:** Well, indeed farmers and listeners you’ve heard for yourselves what Mr. Laban Chiyabuka has said. I hope this edition of *Zambia Today* has taught you one or two things that will enhance your farming business. For any questions or feedback, you may write a letter to the producer, *Zambia Today* programme, P.O. Box 50015, Lusaka. Until next week when we bring you another educational programme, on behalf of the production team, I am Alice Lungu Banda saying good night.

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Contributed by: Alice Lungu Banda.

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