# english black

# Package 92, Script 4

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**Commercial farm activities can hurt local livelihoods: The case of Western Farms**

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### Notes to broadcaster

This script is a fictionalized account of how the creation of a commercial farm established on swampland in the Great Lakes area of Africa has affected the local farming community.

Odaba Swamp (a fictional swamp) is a wetland of over 200 square kilometres in the Great Lakes area of Africa. Two major rivers have their waters filtered and cleaned in the swamp. The swamp provides habitat for fish species that have disappeared from the Great Lakes. Endangered wild animal species also inhabit the papyrus in the swamp. It is also an important bird area.

For a long time, the large population around the swamp have depended on it for their livelihoods – fishing, farming and grazing. They also weave the swamp’s papyrus into mats, baskets and thatch roofs. Finally, they rely on the wetland for clean water.

Concerns about the swamp started several years ago when an American company called Western Farms Ltd, was granted a long-term lease to grow rice by the regional government authorities.

The company unveiled plans to build a hydroelectric plant and a major aquaculture venture, including fish farms, a fish processing factory and a fish meal factory. Construction of irrigation dikes and a weir, airstrips and roads began almost immediately. All these developments could potentially damage the fragile wetland ecosystem far beyond the several thousand hectares covered by the Western Farms lease.

This script looks at the working conditions for local people on the farm, and also hears from local farmers on the impact of Western Farms on their farming activities.

You could use this script as an inspiration to research and write a script on a similar topic in your area. Or you might choose to produce this script on your station, using voice actors to represent the speakers.

**Host:**  Hello everyone. Today you will hear part 1 of our programme on events at Odaba Swamp where an American company called Western Farms has started rice and fish farming. Stay tuned. I am your host and presenter, Rhoda Adala.

*Short musical break*

**Host:** We travelled to Western Farms and introduced ourselves to a superintendent as university students conducting research. We did this because Western Farms has a policy not to talk to any journalists. The superintendent greeted us coldly, then proceeded ahead of us. Then we went to a section of the farm. After driving for one kilometre, wewalked towards a group of male workers supervised by a woman.

**Interviewer:** How are you?

**Supervisor:** We are fine, thank you.

**Interviewer:** We would like to visit with you briefly.

**Supervisor:** Have you passed through the office?

**Interviewer:** No, we have not passed through the office. Are you the supervisor in charge of this section of the farm?

**Supervisor:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** We would like to talk to you.

**Supervisor:** Privately or here?

**Interviewer:** We don’t have any problem with talking here. We are university students and we are conducting research on human rights. And therefore we are in the field collecting data.

**Supervisor:** That is O.K.

*Voices of male workers and the sound of a passing motorbike in the background*

**Interviewer:** First, we would like to know what activities are taking place on this farm.

**Supervisor:** Basically, Western Farms was started in order to reclaim this land. This was a swamp. One major way of reclaiming swampland is by farming. We began with maize farming, but that did not do well because of floods that stunted the growth of the maize. This was stopped and the major project of rice farming began.

Apart from that, we have a venture in aquaculture, which is commercial fish farming. If you walk ahead, you will see ponds for intensive fish farming. On the other side, we are breeding fish. We are able to supply the whole country with fingerlings.

We don’t do banana farming as you might think from seeing these bananas. In between the banana rows, you can see water. The main activity is growing fish food in these waters, and that is duckweed. The bananas are here because duckweed is affected by high temperatures. The bananas provide shade for the duckweed.

We also do poultry farming. We are in need of phosphorus even for the bananas, and we find that chicken manure is very rich in phosphorus. So instead of buying DAP fertilizer, we use manure from poultry. We also sell chickens and eggs. But the key products at Western Farms are rice and aquaculture.

**Interviewer:** Can the farm products be purchased directly by the local community? Or are transported elsewhere for processing, and then returned to the community to be sold?

**Supervisor:** We have a rice mill on the farm and we also process our fish on the farm. It is directly beneficial to the community because they can get the produce from the farm before it is channelled to other people. We simply take them to the office to obtain receipts for their purchases.

But our prices are higher to the local community than in other regions. For example, if you go to the city, you will see that a two or five-kilo bag of our rice is much cheaper there compared to our local sales.

**Interviewer:** So the high prices mean that the locals are finding it difficult to buy locally?

**Supervisor:** Yes. Even the fish is sold per kilo and not by the piece as is the case at the lake. This makes it expensive even though it can be easily accessed.

**Interviewer:** Thank you for speaking with us today.

**Host:** That is the end of part one of our series on Odaba Swamp. Stay tuned for part two.

*Musical break*

**Host:** Good morning, dear listeners. Welcome to the second and final part of our series on Odaba Swamp. Today's theme is the impact of Western Farms on the local community around Odaba Swamp. We are going to hear farmers’ views on the project. Stay tuned!

*Ten second musical tune that fades under the voice of the interviewer*

**Interviewer:** I am in the Odaba Swamp area where the Western Farms project is based. I am talking to one of the community members. (*To community member*) What are your views concerning the impact of Odaba Swamp and the Western Farms project on the local community?

**Interviewee 1:** Thank you. I must say that we are not privileged by living near the project. We are now like slaves without any say on what formerly used to be our land, and even on the land that we currently have.

**Interviewer:** Can you briefly tell us what you mean?

**Interviewee 1:** We used to farm in this area. We could get a harvest even during the short rains, because the crops got enough water. But now we can’t grow crops during the short rains because we were moved to dry farms that need rain for a good harvest.

**Interviewer:** What is the possibility of you and other farmers irrigating your farms with water from the swamp so you can get good yields again?

**Interviewee 1:** It would be very difficult because you are not allowed to tap water from the swamp for your farm. If we cannot even take our cows to drink the water, do you think we will be allowed to use the same water for irrigation? Our cows are not even allowed to step in the undeveloped parts of the swamp to graze or drink water.

**Interviewer:** What about irrigating your farms by diverting water from the river?

**Interviewee 1:** This is too complicated and very expensive. We cannot afford it. It is easier using water from the swamp than the river. Crossing the raised river banks with water to the farm requires technology. But in the swamp, it only requires a little energy and it is done. Even if you manage to irrigate your farm, you may be offered very little money the following month to move elsewhere because they are expanding the project. If you fail to move, they block the river near your home or farm, then water floods your land. This forces you to move out, and then you are paid for settling where you don’t want to live.

*A neighbour draws close and joins the discussion*

**Interviewee 2:** I am also a farmer from this area.As much as we can try working on our farms, things are out of our control. Sometimes water from the river is blocked and our farms and homes are flooded, including our kitchen gardens that we rely on so much. With the flooding comes the challenge of water-borne diseases, and the stunted growth of our crops. This is done without our consent or knowledge. They don’t consider blocking the river *after* we have harvested. All this leads to low yields from our farms and the death of our cattle.

**Interviewer:**  Have you raised your concerns as a community with one voice?

**Interviewee 1:** We have done this several times through our leaders. They start with a lot of focus, but they are silenced somehow by being given some money. Then they go quiet.

**Interviewee 2:** A leader whose name I do not want to mention refused to take the bribe. But we hear he was threatened with dismissal from his work as a civil servant if he didn’t toe the line. I feel it is difficult to fight the odds at Western Farms because the owner seems to be politically powerful. I mean he has pocketed the politicians who are supposed to look into our issues.

**Interviewee 1:** Recently an area councillor took up the matter seriously and we expected good results. But by the end he also went silent. Now we do not know whether he was offered a package or whether he was threatened or intimidated. Despite being near the swamp and the river, we lack clean water for drinking and domestic use, and for farming and watering our animals.

**Host:** Dear listeners, we hope that you have listened to the farmers around Odaba Swamp. Thanks to the farmers for speaking with us today. Thank you, dear listeners, for your attention. Until next time, bye.

Raise the volume of the signature tune to end the program

## Acknowledgements

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