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**The success story of Agatha Ngoma, a small-scale farmer in Zambia: Conservation agriculture for better yields**

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### Notes to broadcaster

In recent years, the threats posed by climate change, environmental degradation and food insecurity in Africa have become obvious to all. But rural families need practical solutions to the challenges of poor soils, poor rain and poor yields.

Conservation farming gives small-scale farmers an opportunity to achieve better livelihoods in the face of all these challenges. It consists of very simple methods of farming that include reduced disturbance of the soil during land preparation, no burning of crop residues after harvest, crop rotation, and reliance whenever possible on organic sources like compost and livestock manure for crop nutrients instead of chemical fertilizer.

In Zambia, many small-scale farmers still use traditional methods to cultivate their fields. They dig up a field and then make mounds or ridges on which to plant their crops. But because of drought, crop performance is always poor and yields are often very low. Many households run out of food between November and February or March the following year when they are able to harvest their new crops.

Conservation farming has made a great difference for resource-poor but viable small-scale farmers. Now many households have enough food throughout the year and sometimes even have a surplus for sale.

This program was produced in 2011 on Breeze FM in Chipata, eastern Zambia, but has been re-broadcast several times by demand of small-scale farmers. Agatha Ngoma is an example of the majority of rural women suffering under cultural customs that seem to enslave wives to their husbands. Her husband regarded her like an unpaid worker and a child-making machine. As a result, her family was large and poor. There are many women in situations like this in many rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa.

However, Agatha was ambitious. She participated in every development program that came to her area. As a result, she eventually got involved in conservation farming. Very soon, her life changed for the better. There was enough food at home and she was able to send her children to school without any support from her uncaring husband. As a matter of fact, she started to give him money for his daily bottle of the highly toxic *kachasu*, an illegal local brew. This contributed to his death in 2012. Although Agatha was strongly affected, the death of her husband seemed to give her renewed energy and she embraced conservation farming with vigour and passion.

This script is about how Agatha changed her life with conservation farming. You could use it as inspiration to research and write a script on conservation farming or a different farming practice which might be of benefit in your area. Or you might choose to dramatize this script on your station, 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 original people involved in the interviews.

The original full program, complete with intro, outro, sound effects and other breaks had a duration of thirty minutes. However, the script could be produced in two parts. It may be advisable to produce the interview with the extension agent as the first part of the program. If you do this, please remember to notify your listener that in the next program you will be talking to a farmer who is successfully practising what they have just heard.

**CHARACTERS:**

HOST/PRESENTER

VAINESS ZULU Extension agent

AGATHA NGOMA Small-scale farmer

KAWAMBA PHIRI Village headman

Signature tune up and out under

**HOST:** Hello, fellow farmers. My name is Filius Chalo Jere, your ever-caring host on *Farming is a Business!* In our program today, we shall meet an outstanding woman who has overcome heavy odds and succeeded in improving the livelihood of her family. She has achieved this by changing from traditional farming methods to what can called a new way of farming for her.

 As usual, the aim of this program is to show you that farming is not just scratching the ground aimlessly with a blunt hoe! If you follow proper methods, farming can feed your family well and improve your income!

Bridge (rural instrumental short piece, e.g. drumming for about 30 seconds

It has become common for many small-scale farmers to get poor yields season after season. Many blame this on poor rains and poor soils. However, today I shall take you to a rural area in Mshawa’s chiefdom, thirty kilometres out of Chipata, in eastern Zambia. I want you to meet Agatha Ngoma, an outstanding female farmer who is getting very good yields in spite of poor soils and poor rain. She adopted a method of farming called conservation farming. She started by using the Chaka hoe. But now she uses an ox-drawn ripper.

 I know that some of you are wondering what a Chaka hoe and a ripper are! However, do not worry because on our way to meet this successful woman, we shall stop to talk to the agricultural extension agent for that area. She is the one who told me about this farmer, and she will explain what these tools are.

 Now, we have no time to waste because we are going very far. So please put on your riding helmet and let’s go!

 **SFX:** Motorcycle starting off

**HOST:** (Voice over lowered motorbike sound)The road is relatively good for most of the way. But one has to be careful because every once in a while, you come across a pothole that can really cause you to commit suicide. Such is the situation on many rural roads in Zambia.

It is the main crop marketing season and we meet many ox-carts along the way going to the market. Most are carrying bags of maize, while others are carrying bags of groundnuts and soybeans. These are some of the most popular crops among small-scale farmers here.

**SFX:** Motorcycle sound slowing down

 We have come to the home of the extension agent. Her name is Vainess Zulu. She is a charming young woman in her mid-twenties. She could very easily have chosen to do another type of job in town. But she said she loves living and working among the rural people to help them improve their lives.

 Her government house is very small and uses solar power instead of electricity. She uses a pit latrine behind her small house and gets her water from the communal borehole nearby.

 Today she is supposed to visit farmers on her motorbike. This is what she does most of the time. However, I asked her to wait so that she can explain to us about the Chaka hoe, the ripper and conservation farming in general.

**SFX:** Motorcycle sound lowering to a stop with a few revs

**VAINESS:** Yes, I love helping to improve the lives of these people. Many of them do not know that they are very lucky to have land at all. They can become very successful just tilling the land.

 As I told you on the phone, I have a meeting with a group of farmers who are ready to sell their crops. I want to advise them not to sell all their crops but leave enough aside for their families until the next harvest.

**HOST:** Do you really have to tell them to do that?

**VAINESS:** I am afraid I have to. Some farmers think money is everything. They sell almost all their food crops and spend the rest of the year struggling to find food for their families. This is not good because it delays them from working in their own fields.

 Anyway, you are most welcome. I still have a few minutes before the meeting. What do you want me to tell you?

**HOST:** Thank you for waiting for me. I will not take much of your time. I want to know a little bit more about conservation farming. You said it is a very good way of farming for small-scale farmers. What makes it good?

**VAINESS:** There are many reasons. However, conservation farming is especially good for farmers in areas where the soil is poor with very low rainfall. It helps to conserve and improve the soil and retains moisture.

**HOST:** How does it overcome the problem of poor soils and very little rain?

**VAINESS:** You may notbelieve this, but this way of farming involves simple practices of farming that could almost be said to be backward. Because the soil is so poor, I tell my farmers to dig basins in their fields, using a Chaka hoe. This is a very strong hoe that is especially designed to dig deep into the ground until it breaks the hardpan in the soil.

**HOST:** What is a hardpan?

**VAINESS:** A hardpan is the hard layer of compacted soil that develops below the topsoil over the years when farmers use methods that only shift the topsoil this way one season and that way the next season. The layer immediately below this topsoil becomes compacted and the roots of many crops usually fail to penetrate beyond this point. As a result, when there is drought, the crops wilt very quickly.

**HOST:** So the job of the Chaka hoe is to break what you call the hardpan so that the roots of crops can go deeper?

**VAINESS:** Yes, but there is much more to it. The Chaka hoe is made just the right size of a standard basin. This is fifteen centimetres wide and twenty to twenty-five centimetres deep and thirty centimetres long.

**HOST:** Does this mean farmers must measure every basin?

**VAINESS:** That would not be practical. I tell my farmers to use their feet to measure the length of each basin. Most of them have big feet that measure between twenty-five and thirty centimetres. As for the width, that is why the Chaka hoe is fifteen centimetres wide. For depth, I tell them to use the hand up to the wrist with the fingers fully stretched out.

**HOST:** It **s**eems there is a lot of emphasis on measurements. Why is this so?

**VAINESS:** Conservation farming is a very precise way of farming. Because of this, it is possible to calculate how much seed and fertilizer or manure a farmer will need and how much he or she can expect to harvest.

 My farmers work in plots that are fifty by fifty meters square. We call such a plot a *lima*. This means “to cultivate” in the local language. About seventy basins can fit into one straight row at 70 centimetres from the centre of one basin to the centre of the next. The rows must be 90 centimetres apart and about fifty-five rows can be made in one *lima*.

**HOST:** Phew, that must be a lot of hard work! I am sure it’s not easy to cultivate

 such a big area.

**VAINESS:** I agree, but the actual digging of basins is only required in the first year. However, I encourage my farmers to have three or four *limas* so that they can practice crop rotation. Crop rotation is essential, and very good for crops.

**HOST:** I have heard that. But cultivating three or four plots only increases the workload, doesn’t it?

**VAINESS:** Maybe it does. However, conservation farming especially favours women farmers.

**HOST:** How is that so?

**VAINESS:** Women like working in groups. In our area, they work in one field until they finish. This normally takes three days. Then they move to another field until they have helped every member of their group.

 After the first year, a farmer only needs to slash down the old field of trash. Conservation farming discourages burning of trash and crop residues. Instead, these must be slashed and laid between the rows of basins. They act as mulch that will conserve moisture and protect the soil from the direct heat of the sun. Eventually, the trash and crop residues rot down and become humus. Planting is always done in the same planting basins, year after year. With the hardpan broken, this is usually easy work, which again suits women. As for cultivating large areas, that is why I have introduced my farmers to the ripper.

**HOST:** What is a ripper?

**VAINESS:** A ripper is just a small, strong piece of metal, called a tine. It is fitted onto the frame of an ordinary ox-drawn plough. You must remove the ploughshares and mouldboards so that there is only this piece of metal.

When the oxen pull the plough, the tine just rips a straight deep line into the ground. By adjusting the plough, you can ensure that the rip-line is deep enough to break the hardpan. Like the rows of basins, the furrows must also be 90 centimetres apart. This is where the farmer applies the manure or fertilizer and plants the seed following the correct measurements and timing.

**HOST:** What are the correct measurements and timing?

**VAINESS:** The measurements for sowing in the rip-lines are different, depending on the basins and the crop being sown. For maize, the farmer must drop one seed every 20 centimetres. This must be done soon after the first good rains.

**HOST:** Why has it become necessary to introduce your farmers to the ripper?

**VAINESS:** In Zambia, small-scale farmers produce over seventy per cent of our maize. This is our staple food and many people in the towns depend on it. As a result, many small-scale farmers want to grow enough so they can sell some of their maize. To do this, they must increase the size of their fields. The ripper helps them to do this. It enables them to harvest enough for their needs and a surplus for sale. You always tell my farmers on radio that “farming is a business.” Indeed, it *is* a business!

**HOST:** I must thank you for being so gracious, madam. I find this subject very interesting. However, I am aware that you have farmers to meet and I must proceed to meet Mrs. Agatha Ngoma.

**VAINESS:** You are always welcome should you need some more information.

Please pass my best regards to Agatha. It’s only about ten kilometres from here, near the crop market depot.

**HOST:** There is a crop market depot along this road?

**VAINESS:** Yes, but it is a couple hundred metres beyond where you have to turn. You will find a baobab tree and a dust road to the right. That’s where you must turn. You will immediately see a big village with the dust road passing right through it. Agatha’s house is the first on the left side. Please tell her for me not to sell all her produce.

**HOST:** I will; thank you.

**SFX:** Motorcycle starts off

**HOST:** Dear farmers, I must say that was a treat. According to the extension agent, conservation farming is the answer to our farming, especially when you use the Chaka hoe and the ripper.

Let’s proceed to Mrs. Ngoma to find out just how these tools work.

**SFX:** Motorcycle starts off, with bird sounds in

 background

 I am passing through very beautiful country. The land is rolling hills, with pockets of green vales where farmers have cultivated their vegetables. However, most of the rainfed crops have been harvested and the fields are barren and waiting to be prepared for the next season.

**SFX:** Motorcycle sound indicates slowing down

 Ah, this must be where Vainess said I must turn to the right because there is this big weird tree. It is the only big tree around, as if it was deliberately left standing as a landmark. Tourists call this the elephant tree and, believe me, it is fit to be called an elephant of a tree!

 It is quite an imposing sight with a very thick trunk that would probably need ten people holding outstretched hands to encircle it. But the most spectacular thing is that it has no leaves at all. Instead, it just has a splay of naked branches that make it look as if it has been turned upside down, with its roots up in the air. But it has big round grey fruits hanging from these naked branches and doves, blackbirds and other birds seem to enjoy the setup. All round, the land is flat with bush and dry grass.

**SFX:**Doves and other bird sounds

 This must be Agatha’s village, too, only a few metres from the turnoff. It is very big and clean. The huts are in two parallel rows on each side of the dust road. There is an *nsaka* in front of each hut or house. This is a special place that is usually found at every village homestead. It is a clear sign of hospitality and readiness to receive visitors. It normally consists of just a grass-thatched roof on poles, with stools or mud benches inside.

 First on the left row of houses, I can see a little red-brick house with a neat roof of new corrugated iron sheets and a small veranda. It must be Agatha’s home. But, according to tradition, I must start by presenting myself to the village headman. His house must be that sprawling grass-thatched building on my right.

 For obvious reasons, the *nsaka* in front of the headman’s house is much bigger than the others. There is an up-turned stool on one side and a rickety old bicycle leaning against one of the roof supports of the *nsaka*. I see a white-haired old man weaving a reed mat in front of it. He must be the headman.

**SFX:**Motorcycle coming to stop with a few revs

**HOST:** *Hodi*! [**Editor’s note:** *Hodi* is the traditional way of respectfully asking to be admitted into someone’s presence in the Chewa/Nyanja languages]

**HEADMAN:** *Hodini*!You are welcome, *Baba*. My name is Kawamba Phiri. I am the headman of this village. [**Editor’s note:** *Hodini* is the traditional way of accepting a visitor’s polite request to be admitted. *Baba* is the traditional respectful title for male elders.]

May I help you?

**HOST:** Yes, *Baba*. I am from Breeze FM and want to meet Mrs. Agatha Ngoma. My name is …

**HEADMAN:** You don’t need to introduce yourself among us farmers. I recognized you the moment you said *hodi*. I must say it’s wonderful to meet the owner of the voice we hear giving us extension advice on the radio. However, Mama Ngoma is at the market depot near the turnoff. She is selling her maize. If you don’t mind, please come and sit on this stool. I will go and fetch her for you.

**HOST:** You don’t have to do that, *Baba*. If it’s OK with you, I will go back and find her at the depot. I can talk to her there.

**HEADMAN:** It’s *not ok* for a stranger to talk to someone’s wife away from the village. I shall go fetch her for you. It’s no problem at all because I shall take my bicycle. Just relax and wait.

**HOST:** Alright then, *Baba*. That will be very kind of you.

**SFX:**Footsteps, bicycle rattling away noisily

 I would love to walk around the village while the headman is gone. But I am sure that would be against tradition again. So I just have to content myself with roaming the village from my sitting position, using my eyes!

**SFX:** Chicken and goat sounds

 Chickens are all over the place scratching the ground for food. They are having a field day because there is a lot of spilt grain, especially near the granaries. The goats are also bleating from the edge of the village. Each one is tied to a shrub to restrain it from mischievous behaviour, and browsing. I can also hear pigs complaining in their pigsties where they are confined.

 Clearly, there is enough food in this village!

**SFX:** Bicycle bell and cycling

 Oh, here comes the headman. *(*Pause*)* No, this must be Agatha herself.

**AGATHA:** *Hodi*! I am Agatha Ngoma. The headman told me that you want to talk to me. I nearly declined to come because I am almost next in the weighing queue. But then he told me that you are the voice on *Farming is a Business* on Breeze FM. So I borrowed his bicycle in order to come quickly. He has remained to ensure that my bags are moved forward until they are ready to be weighed. When it is my turn, he will call me.

**HOST:** Thank you so much for coming away from the market to talk to me. I heard about you from the extension worker and came to see whether what she told me about you is true. She sent her best regards and said please don’t sell all of your crops.

**AGATHA:** (Laughing with amusement) That’s just like Vainess, always worrying about us going hungry. However, she was saying that out of habit because she knows that I can’t do that. Anyway, how is she?

**HOST:** Quite fine and fit, I must say. I left her taking off to meet some farmers. Now, I know that you do not have a lot of free time. So I shall try to take very little of your time.

**AGATHA:** I will appreciate that. But please let’s go to my home and we can talk freely.

**SFX:** Footsteps and sounds of village chickens, goats,

 etc.

**HOST:** I was right. Agatha’s house is the one I identified when I arrived. Like the other houses and huts, it has a pit latrine behind. Indeed, Agatha is right to say Vainess was talking out of habit because she must be aware that her best farmer has already packed enough food for her family in her granaries. There is an *nsaka* almost as big as the headman’s, with a mud bench all round for sitting on.

**AGATHA:** I had to build a big *nsaka*. I receive many visitors because of my work.

Please let’s sit down and tell me what you want to know.

**HOST:** Thank you. First, please tell me about yourself. The extension agent told me about you. But it would be good to have it from you again.

**AGATHA:** My name is Agatha Ngoma and this is Kawamba village in Chief Mshawa’s area. I am married with six children, two of whom are girls. Do you need any other details about me?

**HOST:** Yes, where is your husband, Mrs. Ngoma?

**AGATHA:** (Giggle)You don’t need to worry because my husband is not that type of person. If he came and found us talking, he would only greet you politely and disappear into the house. He trusts me and knows that most visitors to our home are for our good. With beer and whatnot, most of our men here are seldom home. So a woman must become a man; otherwise the children will starve – and the man, too. You understand what I mean, don’t you?

**HOST:** I think I do. Forgive me if I caused you to touch on something sensitive. I am interested in your conservation farming activities, especially the equipment you use, like the Chaka hoe and the ripper. For how long have you been involved in this type of farming?

**AGATHA:** I have been practicing conservation farming for the past six years. It is through this type of farming that I have developed to the point where I can proudly claim to have become the chief breadwinner of the family instead of my husband. He tries his best, going up and down looking for something. But he always comes back drunk, uncaring and empty-handed. Nevertheless, conservation farming has enabled me to build this good house for my family. I have also managed to buy some oxen and I am able to send all my older children to school.

**SFX***:* Baby sounds

**HOST:** All that because of conservation farming?

**AGATHA:** Yes!

**HOST:** What’s the secret of this way of farming that has made you succeed so much?

**AGATHA:** The secret is that when you cultivate a small area, you harvest a lot. For instance, if you plant only half an acre of groundnuts, you can harvest ten bags or more. Normally, you would need a full acre to harvest the same quantity using traditional methods of farming.

 When I first took up this type of farming, I planted one hectare of maize and got 120 bags weighing 50 kilograms each. I had never harvested so much maize before. It made me see that conservation farming is a very good way of farming, indeed. (**Editor’s note:** Agatha’s yields improved immediately, in the same season. But, depending on the climate, the soil and other conditions, it may take longer to get similar yields in other locations, in some cases up to four years.)

**HOST:** What makes it possible to get such big yields?

**AGATHA:** It’s simple. With conservation farming, you do only what is necessary and at the right time. For one, you don’t need to dig up every inch of land the way we used to do. You only dig up the part that you need to use. So I no longer clear my fields of grass or crop leftovers from the previous season as I used to do. I also prepare my fields early by ripping and I apply cattle manure or compost well in advance. Because I do all these essential farming activities early, I am usually able to sow my seeds early. (**Editor’s note:** Early sowing is vital to take advantage of the moisture in the soil and to minimize the loss of soil nutrients during the first rains.)

**HOST:** How early is that?

**AGATHA:** Soon after the first good rain at the end of November. By that time, my maize, groundnuts and sunflowers are usually already in the ground. As a result, they receive enough rain and are vigorous and able to withstand the first dry spell. That is the secret of increased yields. It’s just so effective that I shall never go back to my old ways of farming.

**HOST:** How were you farming before you took up conservation farming?

**AGATHA:** It was slavery. I had to clear the fields during the hot months of September and October. After that, I had to burn the crop residues and make ridges on which to plant my crops. We call that *galauza* in our Chewa language. [**Editor’s note:** Chewa is the local language spoken widely in eastern Zambia, Malawi and parts of Mozambique.] It is back-breaking, I tell you!

 However, in the year 2001, Vainess came to introduce a project called the Programme Against Malnutrition. She wanted people who were ready to take up conservation farming. She said we would get free seed as an incentive.

 After years of breaking my back with *galauza*, I was ready to try anything new. However, many people declined because it meant hard work at first. Vainess brought a strange hoe with a very long handle and told us that it was a Chaka hoe. She showed us how to dig planting basins one by one with this hoe. But it was heavier that the ordinary hoe. For that reason, many people failed to use it properly and continued with *galauza*.

 However, I did not give up because I always want to try anything that promises to improve my farming. That year the rains were exceptionally poor and many crops wilted. Many people had very poor yields. But my crops thrived and my yields were wonderful. Vainess was very happy and said the poor rains were good for her project.

**HOST:** How could she be happy when people had a poor harvest? It meant hunger among the people!

**AGATHA:** Yes, and Vainess wanted them to defeat hunger. She said the people would now see clearly that with conservation farming, it was possible for a farmer to get good yields even with very little rain.

**HOST:** What makes it that effective?

**AGATHA:** The planting basins that I had dug with the Chaka hoe were the answer. After digging, I had applied good quality cattle manure in each basin and filled it up halfway with soil. (**Editor’s note:** If farmers use poor quality manure, as is common in many parts of Africa, yields will be lower,) Soon after the first good rains, I sowed my crops and filled the basins. The basins captured a lot of water. So my crops were able to grow very quickly.

On the other hand, the young crops had a lot of food because the manure in the basins was not washed away by the rains the way fertilizer gets washed away from the *galauza* ridges. Their roots were also able to go deep and follow the moisture when there was drought. But my neighbours who had used *galauza* were in trouble. The ridges got dry when there was drought. Their crops wilted because their roots failed to penetrate the hardpan.

**HOST:** But your crops did fine?It sounds like a big success!

**AGATHA:** Yes, some started saying I was using witchcraft! Yet the only magic that I used was conservation farming. So I decided to teach many people about the benefits of conservation farming. To do this, I travelled to the surrounding areas of Katamanda, Mapala, Mafuta and Vizenge. I also invited anyone who was interested to come and see what I was doing.

**HOST:** But that was not your work. It is the work of the extension agent.

**AGATHA:** You are right. But sometimes people get convinced more quickly when they hear something from a fellow farmer. They had not followed what Vainess had told us and so they had harvested hunger. I had hunger in my home too. But now it was gone because of following Vainess’ advice. I felt it was my duty to convince them about conservation farming. I couldn’t stand seeing people going hungry – especially the children!

**HOST:** Oh, this is touching. But how successful were you in your work?

**AGATHA:**Still, it was not easy to make people leave their old ways. However, those who listened to me and took up this way of farming have developed just like me. I usually appeal to my fellow women to adopt conservation farming. They are often downtrodden by their husbands, and others are poor widows who cannot afford to buy fertilizer.

**HOST:** Vainess told me that you are now involved with another project on conservation farming that is being promoted by the Research Into Use program.

**AGATHA:** Indeed, I am.

**HOST:** What exactly is your involvement with this project?

**AGATHA:** This program is actually a graduation from the Chaka hoe to the ripper, which is a kind of plough that opens up a narrow deep furrow in which to sow your seeds. It means using draft oxen and increasing the size of my field. This is good because the Research Into Use program wants to uplift us poor farmers from endless hunger and poverty to household food security and prosperity. This project trained us in many conservation farming practices suitable for use with a ripper and oxen.

**HOST:** Please tell me some more about this program.

**AGATHA:** The project gives selected farmers one ox and a ripper to help them increase the size of their fields. But to benefit from this program, you must follow all the rules of conservation farming. These include no burning of trash or crop residues, early digging of planting basins, early planting, crop rotation and so on.

 If you already have an ox of your own, the project gives you another so that you have a complete pair to pull the ripper. If you have no oxen at all, you need to buy one ox before the project can give you the other. You must also increase your area under conservation farming. When you are through preparing your own fields with the ripper, you must be willing to plough for other farmers around you who want to practice conservation farming.

**HOST:** You told me that many people were reluctant to adopt conservation farming because the Chaka hoe was heavy and different from the ordinary hand hoe. How have people responded to the ripper using ox draft power?

**AGATHA:**Very well, indeed. You see, people look at oxen as a household asset, so many became interested. But not everyone could benefit from this program at the same time because the project had limited resources. So the project has turned this into a revolving fund. The first people to benefit are expected to pay for the ox in instalments. These instalments will help to purchase more oxen for others. The ripper, however, is free.

**HOST:**The whole concept of ox draft power in conservation farming must be new to some people. How has the project ensured that it succeeds?

**AGATHA:**  Training! Every new participant first undergoes training in how to manage oxen: how to feed them properly, how to ensure that they are healthy, and how to train them to pull farming tools.

 This training is so thorough that even I managed. First, we train the ox to stay under the chain and yoke. Next, we take it for a walk to the fields to get it familiar with its future workplace. After that, we train it to pull a log and then an ox-cart. After that, we get it to pull the ripper.

**HOST:** How have farmers around you benefited from you after you received the ox and ripper?

**AGATHA:** They have benefited a lot. Over thirty have already approached me to rip their fields this season. Because of that, I have already ripped my field so that I have enough time to help them.

**HOST:** But helping others must take a lot of your time and effort. Do you do it for free?

**AGATHA:** Not exactly. I charge them a very small amount of money for my services. Depending on the size of the field, sometimes I just ask for a chicken or some groundnuts or maize if they have no money. My aim is to encourage as many people as possible to adopt conservation farming.

**SFX:**Fade baby sounds

**HOST:** I am amazed that you have done so much. What would you say to other women who might think that what you are doing is men’s work?

**AGATHA:** They are wasting their time if they are thinking like that. In conservation farming there is no male or female. If anything, I would say conservation farming is especially good for female-headed households because it lightens the burden of farming. But the benefits are incredible!

You see, many women in the rural areas face big challenges in finding money for expensive inputs like fertilizer. However, conservation farming encourages practices that conserve soil fertility and promotes the use of compost, cattle manure and planting trees like *musangu* and *Gliricidia sepium* that improve the fertility of the soil.

**OFF-MIC:** (Headman’s voice, calling) Mrs. Ngoma, Mrs. Ngoma, hurry up! You are next!

**AGATHA:** Oh, sorry, you just have to excuse me now because I must go back to oversee my bags getting weighed at the market depot. However, I have enjoyed talking to you because I know you will put it on radio, and many more people will learn about conservation farming.

**HOST:** Indeed, I will. Please go, and thank you!

**SFX:**Footsteps hurrying off, baby whining

**HOST:** Whew, what more can I add to that? A woman assuming the role of breadwinner in her family: controlling oxen, ripping the hard ground and helping others to get rid of hunger and poverty through conservation farming.

Nevertheless, I must go and try this thing out right away!

 But, of course, I shall be back with you next week, same day and same time. So look out for what I shall bring back from my experience with the oxen and the ripper!

Signature tune up, hold for five seconds, and then fade out

## Acknowledgements

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## Website of Zambia National Farmers Union Conservation Farming Unit: [www.conservationagriculture.org](http://www.conservationagriculture.org). E-mail: cfu@zamnet.zm

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