

# Pack 100, Item 6

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**Delicious cassava recipes improve family nutrition**

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Notes to broadcaster

Cassava is one of the most important staple crops in many parts of Africa. But in Zambia, cassava is grown mostly in the Luapula and Northern Provinces, while maize is popular in most other areas.

Cassava has several advantages over maize. Firstly, it is very easy to cultivate and requires very little labour. It grows well in many different types of soils and even tolerates poor rainfall. Farmers have no storage problems with cassava because you can leave a tuber in the field for a long time and only harvest enough for immediate needs.

For many years, the government of Zambia has promoted cassava in areas where it was not a staple food. But adoption of the crop has been slow. Several studies have shown that people do not embrace cassava because they have little information on ways of cooking and eating it. So the focus in non-cassava areas is now on teaching farmers ways to prepare cassava so that it can be eaten when there are food shortages.

This script is targeted towards a particular rural audience in eastern Zambia that has always had a low regard for cassava. But it can be easily adapted to suit the situation in other parts of Africa.

You might choose to present this script 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 original people involved in the interviews.

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

Talk to farmers who grow cassava and farmers who have chosen not to grow cassava. You might ask them:

What special ways do families have of preparing cassava in your area? How do men like it served? How do women like it served? How do children like cassava?

What are the barriers or objections to growing cassava? Have you found solutions to these barriers or objections?

Estimated running time: 25 minutes, with intro and outro music

**PRESENTER:** It’s time again for us farmers to share information on how we can improve our livelihoods through better farming practices.

My name is Filius Chalo Jere and today I bring you the interesting topic of how cassava can be an important food in your home. Of course, I am aware that many of us Ngoni people in eastern Zambia have no high regard for cassava as a food crop. Instead, we regard it as the food of the Bemba people in the Luapula and Northern Provinces.

But have you noticed that the climate is changing and our maize is under threat because of low yields? Many of us have food shortages from October or November ─ when our maize grain stores are low or even empty ─ to March or April, when we harvest our early-planted maize.

Yet our traditional cousins, the Bemba, do not run out of their staple food, cassava, during this or any other period of the year. Please stay with me and together, we can discover how to make more use of cassava in our family’s diet.

Musical break (village singing)

**HOST:** I know your curiosity has been aroused about cassava. So stay with me as I search for information on this crop that we easterners have always sidelined.

You must have observed that the Ministry of Agriculture in Zambia has shifted from just urging farmers to grow cassava to talking about how we can prepare and eat the crop in our homes. I was curious to know how this information is being received by farmers, so I bicycled over to the district office and found an officer from the extension department.

Please, kindly introduce yourself to my farmers.

**NANCY:** Thank you. My name is Nancy Kaenga. I am a nutrition officer involved in teaching people how they can include cassava more and more in their diets. They are missing out on a very important crop.

**HOST:** Why do you say that?

**NANCY:** I am Bemba by tribe and grew up eating cassava. So I know how dependable cassava is when compared to the maize that is so much adored here.

**HOST:** Why do you think growing and eating cassava should be encouraged among people who are traditionally maize eaters?

**NANCY:** There are several reasons. One is that cassava grows well in different types of soil. There is also the problem of climate change. This has brought poor rainfall, and maize yields are dwindling fast. That is why farmers run out of their maize stocks late in the year. If they grew cassava as a staple food, side by side with maize, this would no longer be a problem.

**HOST:** But I have seen cassava in their vegetable gardens. In your opinion, why are they not growing cassava in big fields?

**NANCY:** Indeed, farmers grow some cassava in their vegetable gardens. But it is an inferior variety that gives poor tubers. Usually they plant it on the side as something they can dig up and eat raw or boiled as a mere snack.

**HOST:** How can you make people who have relied on maize all their lives change and start eating cassava?

**NANCY:** The idea is not to make them switch from maize to cassava, but to get them to grow cassava side by side with maize.

**HOST:** And how will you do that?

**NANCY:** People can accept a new crop quickly if it is good for food or for sale. As a nutritionist, I know that cassava is a very important food crop. My job is to convince people of that and teach them how to cook and eat cassava. When they start doing that, they will want to grow more cassava and the crop will move from their vegetable gardens to the field.

If you are a doubting Thomas who needs to see with your own eyes and hear with your ears, I have a motor bike outside. Let’s go to Kagunda village nearby. What you will see and hear is the same you can see and hear in many other villages.

**HOST:** (IN ALARM)I don’t like riding motor bikes. I like using my bicycle.

**NANCY:** (JOKING)Just like a Ngoni! But never mind. I will carry you as my passenger. You are not afraid of falling off, are you?

**HOST:** Of course not. Let’s go!

**SFX:**  Motor bike starting and moving off

**HOST:** (ABOVE SOUND OF MOTOR BIKE) My friends, I was lying when I said I was not afraid of falling off!

At first, the spare helmet felt like putting my head in a clay pot, and I had no idea how to tie the straps under my neck. Also, I am twenty years or more older than this rash young Bemba lady. So I did not know where to put my hands until she showed me.

We are now off the good road and onto a dirt road. It is not very rough and Nancy is avoiding the bad parts carefully. I am confident that I won’t fall off now and can afford to look around me.

We have just crossed a stream and are rushing through some smallholdings. It is mid-September, so the grass is dry and the trees are starting to wear new leaves. In the past, the small-scale farmers would have been busy clearing their fields. However, I have been very vocal about conservation farming on the radio and I’m happy to see no evidence of grass fires.

We have passed one village and are going through another. No, we are not going through this village. Nancy is slowing down.

**SFX:** Motor bike sound dying oUT

**NANCY:** We have arrived. This is Kagunda village where you can talk to the farmers about cassava instead of me.

**HOST:** Indeed, we have arrived and I am glad to untie the straps and take the clay pot off my head. The village looks neat and clean. Most of the houses are built of burnt bricks with corrugated iron roofs. They have open kitchens with a maize granary in front and a modern pit latrine at the back. A short distance from us, I can see a grass-thatched shelter with open sides that is obviously the village meeting place or *nsaka*.

It is pleasing to see a woman in the open kitchen cooking on one of the fuel-efficient cookstoves I have been talking about so fervently on my radio program.

As Nancy and I get off the motor bike, the woman comes outside to meet us with happy sounds of welcome, culminating in a big hug for Nancy. Then she breaks into ululation and suddenly many other women emerge from their homes to meet us. Some are carrying babies on their backs or show evidence of babies in their tummies. A group of curious village children gathers to see what is happening.

The woman from the kitchen is obviously the leader of the group, and as soon as the number of women has grown big, she leads them in a song of welcome.

**SFX:**  Song of welcome and ululation

**NANCY:** This is Mrs. Chosiwe Shanzi, and, mothers, this man is from Breeze FM. You’ll know him as soon as he opens his mouth.

**SFX:** ululation and sounds of welcome from many female voices

**CHOSIWE:** Welcome, and how are you? Nancy phoned me about your coming. I understand that you are interested in cassava?

**HOST:** Yes, more in how you eat cassava to be specific.

**CHOSIWE:** Okay, come, let’s go and sit in our *nsaka*. (ASIDE TO TWO WOMEN IN THE GROUP) Amake Tamara and Abelesi, please go and bring out the *nongo* of *munkhoyo* from my house and some plastic cups. (*Editor’s note: A* nongo *is a clay pot used to brew beer or traditional sweet drinks like* munkhoyo*).* The rest of us ─ let’s go sit in the *nsaka*. It’s a privilege to have the farmers’ voice here in the flesh, isn’t it?

**Women:** It is, it is!

**SFX:** people moving and then sitting on chairs, stools and mats

**CHOSIWE:** I guess we are all ready for you now. In the village, we don’t have soft drinks. But I am sure you will enjoy the *munkhoyo* that Amake Tamara has placed on the table. It is made from the roots of bush plants and has a unique flavour and natural sweetness.

Now, about cassava: it has been in this area for a long time. But we have always regarded it as inferior to maize. For that reason, we normally grow it in the garden, just as a by-the-way crop that can be dug up and eaten raw as it is, or boiled as a snack.

**HOST:** But Mrs. Kaenga told me that you grow a lot of cassava in your fields.

**CHOSIWE:** Yes we do, because the climate has changed a lot. The rains are poor and maize yields are often so low that we normally have a period of food shortage from October or November to March or April when we harvest our early maize.

**HOST:** So what’s the answer to this?

**CHOSIWE:** The answer was brought by Mrs. Kaenga here.

**SFX:**  Women ululating in confirmation and praise

**CHOSIWE:** Nowadays, eating cassava has increased in this area and we eat it in many forms. We like to grow sweet varieties like *Manyopola* and *Mweru* because they are a good replacement for buns or bread or fritters.

**HOST:** Why do you say that?

**CHOSIWE:** Cassava is cheaper, readily available and more satisfying!

Normally, we dig up the tubers, wash off the soil and peel off the skin. Then we cut them into pieces and boil them in a pot. Good cassava cooks very quickly and sometimes you don’t even need to add any salt. Children can eat it directly and then just drink water. They can also eat it with tea in place of bread or buns. Cassava is even coming into our main food, *nshima*, right, Amake Tamara?

**A. Tamara:** So it is, my chairperson. We Ngonis are quickly learning how to use cassava meal for cooking *nshima*. We use a bitter variety called *Chambeshi* to make cassava flour.

**HOST:** Why do you use the bitter variety?

**A. Tamara:** It matures earlier than the other varieties and produces very big tubers. Its bitterness is also good because thieves do not often steal it.

**HOST:** That’s interesting. But how do you rate cassava compared to maize?

**CHOSIWE:** Cassava can stay in the ground for a long time. So we don’t need to harvest it all at once like maize, which has to be kept in a grain store. With cassava, we only dig up enough for our immediate needs. Usually, we uproot only one plant if we just want to prepare boiled cassava for breakfast for the family. But if it is for processing into flour, we need to dig up a few plants.

Cassava has a few additional benefits. You can use cassava stems as planting material, which is cheaper than purchasing maize seed. And cassava flour can be stored for two to three years without spoiling.

But, please, I see that you are not drinking your *munkhoyo*. Could it be that you don’t like it?

**HOST:** Oh, no, it’s actually very good. It’s only that this cassava talk is so interesting!

**CHOSIWE:** Thank you. Now, Abelesi, please explain how we cook cassava *nshima*.

**Abelesi:** Thank you, my chairperson. Cooking *nshima* with cassava flour is different than using maize meal. Maize meal needs to be cooked for a long time on the fire. It needs a lot of effort and uses a lot of fuelwood.

All you need with cassava flour is just to put a pot of water on the fire until it boils. Then you take the pot off the fire, put it on the ground and start adding cassava flour bit by bit and stirring until you have a thick porridge. That is your cassava *nshima*!

**HOST:** I wonder how it looks and tastes!

**NANCY:** Cassava *nshima* is solid, elastic and, of course, white in colour. When you eat it, it keeps you satisfied for the whole day. That’s why many of us Bemba people often eat *nshima* only once a day. After cassava *nshima*, all one needs is to drink water.

**HOST:** Hmm, how was it possible for people who were used to maize *nshima* to adjust to cassava *nshima*?

**CHOSIWE:** We couldn’t, so in the end, Mrs. Kaenga suggested mixing cassava flour with our mealie-meal. It was an instant success. The *nshima* was no longer like chewing gum and you no longer felt it sitting in your stomach like a stone. And you stay satisfied much longer. As a result, these days I use less meal!

**NANCY:** (JOKING) Just confess that cassava flour has reduced pressure on your maize store!

**CHOSIWE:** I must admit that using cassava flour in my *nshima* has improved my family’s household food security. Now we have food throughout the year, even during the dreadful hunger period!

**HOST:** That is good to hear. Did anything else happen after you were introduced to cassava?

**CHOSIWE:** Yes, we also learnt how to prepare cassava leaves as a vegetable relish to eat with our “hybrid” maize-cassava *nshima*. Cassava leaves are tougher than our ordinary village vegetables. So I pick the tender tips and wash them thoroughly in warm water. Then I cut the leaves into small shreds and put them into a pot on the fire. They need to boil for a long time, of course. When they are cooked, I add a little cooking oil and tomatoes, and my cassava relish is ready!

**HOST:** And nice, I suppose?

**CHOSIWE:** Of course! But most of us like cooking our cassava relish in the same way we cook our other indigenous vegetables ─ by adding groundnut flour or peanut butter. We prepare the cassava leaves in the same manner as in the cooking oil and tomato recipe. But after cutting them, I put them in an open winnowing basket to wilt a bit in the sun.

In the meantime, I shell my groundnuts and select the good ones. Then I fry the groundnuts, let them cool off for a while and rub off the skins. After that, I pound them until they turn into a paste.

But I don’t fry the groundnuts if I want to use groundnut flour. Instead, after shelling and selecting the good ones, I just pound them and sieve them to get fine groundnut flour.

**HOST:** Hmm, that is a very long process!

**CHOSIWE:** But we are able to do several things at the same time. So by the time your peanut butter or groundnut flour is ready, the cassava leaves should be ready for cooking.

When the leaves are properly cooked, I add my peanut butter or groundnut flour instead of adding cooking oil. Then I add salt, stir vigorously for some time, and then remove some fuelwood from the fire so that my cassava relish can simmer on a slow fire. After that, I add some tomatoes and onions. We call such relish *gwada wovundula*. My children love it so much that I have to use a bigger pot for cooking *nshima!*

**HOST:** Hmm, I must say you have aroused my appetite for cassava relish with peanut butter and groundnut flour. By the way, which of the two tastes better?

**CHOSIWE:** I can’t judge that. But before you go, you may taste some cassava relish with groundnut flour left over from yesterday. Next time you come, we shall prepare the other recipes for you.

**HOST:** I can’t wait for that cassava buffet. I wonder what else Mrs. Kaenga has taught you about cassava

**CHOSIWE:** (GIGGLE) This Bemba woman is worth keeping! She has taught us many other wonderful ways of cooking cassava. We have even written our own cassava cookbook!

**NANCY:** Indeed, I have done my best to get these people onto cassava. They grow a lot of groundnuts. So I created special recipes, mixing boiled cassava pieces with peanut butter. If it is done properly, the peanut butter covers the cassava pieces like icing and makes such a good breakfast. Many children carry cassava prepared in this way to school in their lunch boxes to eat at break time. It’s so satisfying and nutritious!

Another recipe that people have learned to like is eating cassava with groundnuts. For this, after washing the cassava, the tubers are peeled but not cut into pieces. Then they are soaked in water and left for a few days. When they start to smell stale …

**HOST:** … (INTERRUPTING) Smell stale? But smelling stale is a sign that something is getting rotten!

**NANCY:** (LAUGHTER) How typical of an Ngoni! You don’t have any idea about fermentation. That “staleness” gives the cassava a special flavour that only a true Bemba can appreciate!

Anyhow, after removing them from the water, you put them outside to dry completely in the sun.

**HOST:** Doesn’t that make them too hard to bite?

**NANCY:** The cassava is not eaten dry. You take only as much as you want to eat and soak it in a basin of clean water. Then you strip it lengthwise by hand and roast the wet strips slowly on a charcoal fire. At the same time, you fry some groundnuts and salt them. You eat the roasted cassava one strip at a time and throw in the salted groundnuts.

In Bembaland, we call it *kalundwe nembalala*. It is so popular that women sell it by the roadside. But it’s more than a snack. After eating and drinking a cup of water, you get fully satisfied. With such wonderful cassava recipes, it’s no wonder we Bembas are so strong and healthy!

**CHOSIWE:** (GOOD NATUREDLY) Not just you Bembas, Mrs. Kaenga. Just look at how strong and healthy the children in the whole village are. They are not Bembas, are they?

**NANCY:** That is exactly what I mean. All Ngonis are suddenly healthy because of the wonderful cassava recipes from Bembaland!

**HOST:** I watched in silence as the Ngoni and Bemba woman argued amicably. Then I asked for my cassava relish and, wonder of wonders, one woman had sneaked off to the kitchen unnoticed and we were served *nshima* with the cassava relish. I bit my finger eating that wonderful relish, it was so good.

So please give cassava a little more respect and cultivate it in your fields this year. As the Kagunda women have confirmed, it’s a plant that you can utilize from top to bottom. You can use the leaves for relish, sell the stems to your fellow farmers to plant and, of course, the tubers will replace buns and bread for your breakfast ─ and give you your blessed *nshima*!

What a superb crop cassava is!

## Acknowledgements

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Reviewed by: Mrs. Nancy Kaenga, nutritionist, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Chipata, Zambia

**Sources of information**

Interviews:

Mrs. Nancy Kaenga, nutritionist, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Chipata, Zambia, September 22, 2014

Chosiwe Shanzi, Chairperson, Amake Tamara, Abelesi and other members of Kagunda Women’s Club, Chipata, Zambia, September 22, 2014

Dr. Martin Chiona, Plant Breeder/Root & Tuber Specialist, Mansa, Luapula Province, Zambia. Interviewed in Chipata, Zambia, September 17, 2014

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