# 

# Pack 101, Item 8

Type: Script

March 2015

# \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Kenyan woman embraces conservation farming and betters her life**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### Notes to broadcaster

Conservation agriculture is an approach to farming which involves using specific practices to maintain the soil and other natural resources, while improving yield and food security. It includes practices such as mulching with crop and plant residues, rotating crops, and minimally tilling the soil – and avoiding or minimizing other practices which disturb the soil surface. In western Kenya, conservation agriculture includes using organic or green manure from locally available plants such as *Tithonia*.

In western Kenya, difficult climatic conditions and poor farming practices have contributed to the loss of soil and vegetation cover. This reduces soil fertility and leads farmers to depend too much on the rains because soils are not as able to retain water. Without moisture in the soil, crops which are susceptible to dry conditions and may wilt and be totally lost. But this can be corrected by introducing farming practices like conservation agriculture which, over a period of months and years, improve soil structure and increase yield.

In Kenya, about 80 % of farmers are small-scale and prepare their land by hand. After slashing crop residues, some farmers burn the residues to lessen their work, and then hand-dig their fields. Families who can afford to sometimes contract farm labourers to plough with oxen after slashing. The farmers then use a hoe to dig planting holes, and later weed with a hoe. According to conservation agriculture, these practices disturb the soil and damage its ability to hold nutrients and water for better plant health.

This script presents the story of a widow who was isolated from other members of her community until she joined a farmers’ group. The group members started by growing their staple crop, maize, and were then introduced to conservation agriculture. After the widow was introduced to sustainable farming practices through the group, she diversified her farming and her livelihood and changed her life for the better.

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 your own programming on conservation agriculture or similar topics in your country.

Talk to farmers and experts who are practising conservation agriculture or knowledge about this type of farming. You might ask them:

What are the local farming problems that conservation agriculture could address?

Have farmers been successful with conservation agriculture?

What are the barriers to adopting minimum tillage to disturb the soil as little as possible and other conservation agriculture practices, and how can these be addressed?

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

**Characters**

Host

Jenipher Awino, a farmer

SIGNATURE TUNE

**Host:** Greetings, listener, welcome to the program. Today we will hear the story of a woman farmer who changed her life by embracing conservation agriculture. The woman is named Jenipher Awino, and she lives in the village of Bar Kite in western Kenya.

Ms. Awino became a widow fifteen years ago and almost gave up on life after falling into total poverty. But she eventually broke through her social isolation to join other community members in a farming group that embraced conservation agriculture and changed her life. Take a walk with me to her field as she unfolds her life story.

sign tune then FADE OUT. motorcycle coming to a stop Then sound of a digging HOE

**Host:** It’s ten in the morning when I arrive at Jenipher Awino’s farm after contacting her by phone. She is still in the field weeding her tomatoes.

(CALLING)May the day break.

**JENIPHER AWINO:** (COMING ON-MIC) May the day break. How are you?

**Host:** Fine, thank you, and you?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** (NOW ON-MIC) Fine, thank you too. Welcome home.

**Host:** Thank you, but please hear my wish that you continue weeding

as we chat.

**JENIPHER AWINO:** Okay.

**Host:** Can you tell us how you started farming and what crops you were growing at first?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** I started farming when I was still with my parents, so that is some time back. When I got married, I knew just one way of farming, the way I learned from my parents.

I prepared the land by slashing the weeds a little, then turned over the earth in the planting bed with a hoe to make it soft and even. After this, I dug planting holes and later on hand-weeded the farm with a hoe. But I never had a good return with these practices even though I put all my energy into it.

My late husband was doing casual jobs repairing and maintaining cars. But we were not able to provide adequately for our young family. When he died 15 years ago, my first child was only 10 years old. I continued to farm the same way after the death of my husband because I was not exposed to any different practices, apart from what I had known for years.

**Host:** Was farming the only thing you were doing, or were you engaged in other things that brought you income to support your family?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** I was also weaving soft brooms for sale in the market. I started this when my husband was still alive. I also did farm labour.

**Host:** How did your situation affect your relationships with the people around you?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** I was living in a three-by-three metre house. This stopped me from thinking about anything positive happening in my life. I isolated myself from community members. I thought that by struggling alone, I would manage my problems.

But this didn’t work. Then I was introduced by a friend to a community group called *Tego Yie* (*Editor’s note: a Luo phrase meaning* strengthening faith) in a village in Ugunja sub-county. This was the beginning of my transformation. It was five years ago when I joined the community group. The group had a vision to change livelihoods through farming.

**Host:** Was it easy for your friend to convince you to join the group?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** Lots of women in my village belong to groups where they practice activities like merry-go-round to make income (*Editor’s note: A “merry-go-round” is the local term for a Rotating Savings and Credit Association*). But I was feeling left out; I felt that I could not fit into their systems because their economic status was higher than mine.

**Host:** What changed your mind?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** I started not only attending group meetings but also community meetings convened by the local administration – the chiefs and assistant chiefs. At the community meetings, I heard about a project run by the Ministry of Agriculture and some non-government organizations to practice conservation agriculture with farmers groups. Our group was one of the groups involved.

**HOST:** What exactly was the training on conservation agriculture about?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** When I joined the group, the training taught intercropping maize with legumes. I was ready to learn any new thing that would make my life better.

We were trained by the Ministry for a season, which was three and a half months. There was a demonstration area with four different plots. One plot was maize intercropped with green gram, another was maize intercropped with beans, another with dolichos lab-lab, and another with cowpeas.

During the training, we left the land undisturbed by only uprooting weeds, and not digging up the soil. Sometimes we used a hoe to just scratch the weeds off the soil. But we didn’t break the soil surface, so the soil remained fertile and retained its capacity to hold water. Also, the crop roots were not exposed, which makes them vulnerable to winds. We spaced the crops so that the maize would form a canopy that didn’t allow weeds sunlight or space to grow.

As a group, we recorded data from planting to harvesting. One week after planting, we all checked the number of maize leaves per plant, the height of the plant and the length of each leaf. We did this again in week two, week three, week four, and continued until the maize tassled.

The maize was mature and ready for harvest after 105 days. I loved every bit of what we were doing and this was my eye-opener.

**Host:** How was this an eye-opener for you?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** After learning from the demonstration sites, each of us did the same tests on our own farms. I chose to do a maize-bean intercrop. I could only afford to slash the weeds and couldn’t afford to use a mechanical planter. I weeded by uprooting unwanted plants and shallow weeding with a small hoe that did not interfere with the soil. We agreed as a group that we would visit each other’s farms to motivate each other and see how we were all doing. This made me do my best.

At harvest time, I was all smiles. From the same one acre where I had never got more than one 90-kilo sack, I harvested 12 90-kilo bags.

This was the beginning of my successful journey. It was the first time in my life I had sold my farm produce in the market and still had some left for my family. This was my motivation and I vowed never to return to the abject poverty that had affected my personality in the village.

**Host:** Was this the only thing you learnt?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** After this first activity with the group, non-governmental organizations kept interacting with us through the local administration. An NGO called Farm Inputs Promotions Africa trained us to grow organic vegetables. I grew local vegetable varieties, mainly for the market. The NGO also trained us to raise poultry, and introduced us to poultry units and basic poultry management. I built a poultry house where the birds are kept, and are protected from predators with a wire mesh fence. These birds have been supplying eggs to farmers. The farmers give the eggs to their chickens to sit on and hatch.

I also joined different farming enterprises. The Kenya Agricultural Research Organization and an NGO called Rural Energy and Food Security Organization taught us to grow bananas by using planting materials that had been cultured in a sterile environment in nurseries through what is called tissue culture. This involved a one-year farmer field school.

Also, I received a dairy goat from Heifer International, and I sell the milk. I also have a new venture processing orange-fleshed sweet potato and selling crisps and chips to a nearby primary school. I make flour for porridge, using orange-fleshed sweet potato, soybeans, and sorghum to make the flour.

**Host:** Are you able to pinpoint the benefits of conservation agriculture?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** After getting involved with conservation agriculture, I said goodbye to buying maize from the market because I produce enough for my family. Conservation agriculture involves less work and less time, it’s high-yielding, the soil structure is maintained, and it prevents crops from withering because of drought.

Because there’s minimum tillage in conservation agriculture, the soil is not eroded, and this increases its capacity to hold water.

But conservation agriculture is only easy for those who patiently do their farm work; results do not come overnight. In conservation agriculture, it’s important to cover the soil at all times. So I mulch the farm, using maize stalks or *Tithonia*, which also adds nitrogen to the soil. I use only composted farmyard manure for fertilizer.

**Host:** Has your work inspired other villagers – or your relatives?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** I am currently a village-based agricultural advisor and a trainer of trainers. I have diversified my farming and now grow many different crops, and this has earned me a lot. I have moved from a ten-by-ten foot grass-thatched house to a semi-permanent house.

And I have earned people’s respect in the community, which motivates me to keep working not just hard but smart. Through the knowledge and skills I have gained, people visit me from within the community and from other countries. I am even called a professor, despite my primary level of education.

**Host:** Do you have any other success stories apart from the high yields, reaching the market, and building a house?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** From my farm proceeds, I took my firstborn son to be educated in mechanics. He is living in a distant town practicing what he learnt. He came home one day and saw that I had sold a bunch of bananas for 1500 Kenyan shillings, and a bunch of vegetables for 500 shillings. What he was doing wasn’t earning him good money, so he decided to pack up and come back home to practice farming like me.

With the money I make from farming, I bought him a motorcycle to use for a transport business. Through his hard work, he has been able to buy two more motorcycles and has a fully-furnished gym. His businesses are doing well and he built his own house after having a very poor one for a long time.

**Host:** What is your dream?

**JENIPHER AWINO:** My dream is to see my children through schooling up to the level of their wish. I also have a dream of buying a van to sell my products in the market. I also wish to build a better house than the one I live in.

**HOST:** Thank you, Jenipher Awino, for taking us through your journey of hard work and determination.

And, listener, you can do it too! Jenipher started small and listened to her big dreams.

Today, we walked together through Jenipher’s farm and heard the story of a woman who is growing maize intercropped with beans and doing zero tillage, and also has banana orchards and sells eggs.

You can start using the same practices: zero tillage, using correct spacing, correct weeding and correct time of weeding, right harvesting methods, and not interfering with the soil – all for better yields and improved livelihoods.

Bye bye until we meet again on our next farmer program. This is your presenter, (presenter’s name).

Fade in signature tune then out

## Acknowledgements

Contributed by: Rachel Adipo, program officer, Adaptive Research and Information Technology Program, Ugunja Community Resource Centre.

Reviewed by: Getrude Kambauwa, Chief Land Resources Conservation Officer, Land Resources Conservation Department Headquarters, Malawi Ministry Of Agriculture, Water and Irrigation Development; Wycliff Kumwenda, Farm Services Manager, National Smallholder Farmers’ Association of Malawi; Peter Kuria, Programme officer for African Conservation Tillage Network, Kenya

**Sources of information**

Interview with Jenipher Awino, farmer and village-based agricultural advisor, October 16, 2014.

 Project undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD)

*This script was written with the support of Irish Aid.*