

# Pack 111, Item 02

Type: Drama

March 2019

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**Maize farmers overcome postharvest challenges**

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**Notes to broadcaster**

Farmers, and especially women farmers, face many challenges in managing their maize crops. Rain before the crop is harvested or while it’s drying in the field, poor prices, lack of attention to quality standards, and difficulties with effectively storing maize are just some of the issues they face.

This drama highlights these challenges and offers practical solutions to solve them. In the drama, maize farmers from different places settle in a small town in Ghana called Adensukurom due to its wet climate. In spite of the good climate, they are faced with new challenges that threaten their unity and trigger conflicts and selfishness amongst them.

Fuseina is a strong, hardworking, and resolute young woman who is determined to restore peace and unity in her community. With the help and advice of her friend Nadia, Fuseina, Musah, and Nadia travel to the next town to ask for help with their farming challenges. They visit Maanan, the best farmer in the town, to seek advice, and receive useful advice from her and the MOFA officer, Zali. They learn about the right time to harvest their maize, how to dry their maize properly and keep it out of the rains, and also learn how to work together as a team. The farmers return to Adensukurom to teach the rest of the community’s farmers what they have learnt. They work together to restore oneness in their community and succeed in increasing the income from their farms.

You could use this drama as inspiration to produce a similar program on addressing postharvest challenges in maize farming. Or you might choose to present the drama as part of your regular farmer program, using voice actors to represent the speakers.

You could follow the drama by interviewing farmers and other experts about how they handle these kinds of challenges in their maize crops. Make sure to ask them about methods that work, methods that don’t work, and methods that sometimes work, or work under particular conditions. Invite listeners to call-in or text-in with questions and comments.

Topics for discussion might include:

* When is the best time to harvest maize to maintain good quality?
* What are the different ways that farmers in a community can work together to market their maize and receive a good price?

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

**CHARACTERS:**

*Fuseina:* 27-year-old maize farmer in Adensukurom. She is very outspoken and determined to help her people solve their farming problems.

*Nadia:* 60-year-old woman who is highly respected by the people of Adensukurom.

*Musah:* 30-year-old man who is very self-centred. He later learns to work with others.

*Maanan:* Successful 45-year-old maize farmer in the next town of Mayera. She gives the people of Adensukurom expert advice when they seek her counsel.

*Narrator:* Storyteller

*Townsfolk:* Takyi, Nii, Mabel

*Zali:* MOFA (Ministry of Food & Agriculture) officer

**Episode One**

**SETTING:** Under a big neem tree at the centre of Adensukurom.

**CHARACTERS:** NARRATOR, MABEL, FUSEINA, NADIA, MUSAH, NII, TAKYI

**SFX:** TWEETING BIRDS, rustling DRY LEAVES.

**NARRATOR:** The people of Adensukurom are in a meeting to discuss their problems—and to find solutions. Many of the farmers in this community have come from different places in search of a good climate. They settled in Adensukurom due to the wet weather, but this change in environment is presenting new challenges and they are finding it difficult to adapt to their new environment. They are also aware that the overall climate has changed and the rains are not as predictable as they used to be. They have lost most of their crops, and there is hunger and starvation in their community. In response, some farmers have become very selfish and refuse to work together.

Fuseina is a hardworking young farmer who is determined to bring change to her community. She calls all the farmers together for a meeting.

**SFX:** TWEETING BIRDS

**MABEL:** (FADE IN VOICE) As for me, I don’t see why I should wait and sell my maize with any of you. As a widow, who here helps me to take care of my children?

**SFX:** murmur from gathering

**FUSEINA:** Hello, people! Silence, please! I feel your pain, Mabel, but we are here to find solutions to our problems, not to point fingers or blame anyone. I know that this season has been difficult and we have all struggled to maintain our homes. But what has been the cause of all this loss?

**NADIA:** It’s the rain. It did not stop raining and all the maize we harvested got wet.

**FUSEINA:** So how do we solve this problem?

**NII:** As for me, I am disappointed in Musah. We all decided to sell our maize to an organization, but he took his to the market on the blind side of everyone!

**MUSAH:** Shut up! Where is the guarantee that this organization will buy my maize at a good price? So if I think my maize won’t meet their standards, can’t I go and sell it to those who will buy it? Besides, I am not the only one who did that!

**NII:** But you are the one who started! And you know very well how people in the market disregard our effort and buy our maize at their own prices. If we don’t stand together, how will we overcome this problem? If we all keep selling our maize to buyers who don’t respect our work and efforts, how will we make any profit?

**FUSEINA:** Nii, Musah, I didn’t call this meeting for the two of you to start a fight. I won’t tolerate such nuisance from any of you. We need to think together in order to make some progress, not fight and point fingers!

**MUSAH:** Well, I will not sit here and listen to all this nonsense! Do you know what the rains did to the little maize that I harvested?

**FUSEINA:** Have you considered the fact that maybe your problem is that you decided to work alone? If we work together as a team, we can learn from each other’s mistakes and successes. Musah, this is not the time to lick your wounds, but rather you must clean them and rub them with some spirit. That’s how wounds heal. If your maize got spoilt, have you considered what you did wrongly?

**MUSAH:** (LOUD VOICE) Oh, so you called me here to teach me how to treat my wounds! Woman, what do you know about farming that I don’t already know? My God, how did I get here? The impudence—I am leaving!

**TAKYI:** Hmmn … so am I …

**MABEL:** I’m not staying either!

**FUSEINA:** Musah? Takyi, Mabel, please come back!

**NII:** Meeting adjourned. Let’s go to our farms!

**FUSEINA:** But we are not done!

**NII:** Woman, nobody has time for this. The next time you call a meeting like this, make sure you have a solution. Don’t come and ask us questions.

**FUSEINA:** But …

**NADIA:** Shhh. Sit down, Fuseina. Let them go. I know you are a fierce woman, but you must learn to be patient with people. Things will get better. Let them go.

**FUSEINA:** When will all this selfishness end? Why can’t we find a solution to our situation together? There is so much at stake right now. Since we moved into this community, farming has become very difficult for all of us. Even though it rains more in these parts than where we come from, the rains have become unpredictable and it spoils all our harvest.

**NADIA:** Exactly. This is why *we* must find a way to solve this problem. Maybe if we do, the rest will follow suit.

Tomorrow, let’s go to the next town of Mayera to see the best maize farmer of the year! Her name is Maanan. With her help, we may come up with solutions to this problem of postharvest losses.

**FUSEINA:** Hmmn, I don’t like this. But okay, I will give it a try.

**Episode Two**

**SETTING:** FUSEINA’S COMPOUND

**CHARACTERS:** MUSAH, FUSEINA, NADIA, MAANAN, ZALI

**SFX:** SWEEPING BROOM

**MUSAH:** Aha, where is she? Fuseina! Fuseina! Aha, you! Why do you always provoke me to anger?

**FUSEINA:** Ah, what did I do, Musah?

**MUSAH:** Are you asking me what you did? Woman, I am closing my eyes. Before I open my eyes, you will carry your harvested maize out of the warehouse! How dare you! You even took the space reserved for me.

**FUSEINA:** I took the space you left there. After all, you won’t be needing that space until next season.

**MUSAH:** Oh, so you also are mouthy…. (Fuseina makes a FEARFUL sound as he sCRAPES THE cutlass across THE soil SO THAT IT makes a screeching sound.)

**NADIA:** What is going on here? Musah … why are you threatening Fuseina with a cutlass?

**MUSAH:** Tell her to stop messing with me. She has taken my space at the warehouse.

**FUSEINA:** I only used the leftover space …

**MUSAH:** Shut up!

**NADIA:** You keep quiet, Musah. Stop all this noise and come with us. We are going to see Maanan in the next town.

**MUSAH:** Who is Maanan?

**NADIA:** She won the best farmer recently and we are off to see her for some advice. I suggest you come with us and stop all this noise making. Channel all that energy into something positive. And maybe, instead of fighting Fuseina all the time, you should consider marrying her!

**MUSAH:** Hah, never!

**FUSEINA:** I won’t marry him either!

**NADIA:** All right … quiet, you two and let’s get going.

**SFX:** honk from a bus

**NADIA:** Aha, the bus is in, let’s go… hurry! (AMUSED) So all that noise was because of some space in the warehouse?

**FUSEINA:** Yes. (SPITEFULLY) A space he won’t even use.

**MUSAH:** You know very well that women farmers are not allowed to use the warehouse.

**FUSEINA:** Oh, so if we cannot use the warehouse with the men, then why are we allowed to help you shell and grade your maize? We must all help each other to grow. Hand go—hand come! (*Editor’s note: A Ghanaian saying that means that one good turn deserves another*.)

**NADIA:** Exactly!

**MUSAH:** Whatever! So what are we going to do at Maanan’s farm?

**NADIA:** We are going to seek her counsel on how to manage postharvest losses.

**MUSAH:** Hoh, I know that. I usually leave the maize on the plant even after it matures, so that by the time I am harvesting the maize, I am taking it straight to the market. This way I don’t lose much of the crop.

**FUSEINA:** Do you dry them at all?

**MUSAH:** They will dry by themselves.

**FUSEINA:** That is so wrong. Maize must be harvested in a timely manner, usually about three months after planting the seeds. It could be contaminated with aflatoxin or it may grow mould if it is left on the plant after it has already matured.

**MUSAH:** Not true. You think you know it all, eh?

**FUSEINA:** (FRUSTRATED) You see, Nadia, this is why he always takes the lead to sell his maize—even when we have collectively decided to sell our produce together! He thinks he knows everything!

**NADIA:** Shhhh, get down, we are here.

*Agoo* … *Agoo* … please, is anyone here? (*Editor’s note:*Agoo *is a word that is equivalent to knocking*).

**MAANAN:** (Responding from afar) *Ameern*. I am coming. Please hold on. (*Editor’s note*: Ameern *is a standard response to the greeting*, agoo)

**MUSAH:** Wow, this farm is big. And you say it belongs to a woman?

**FUSEINA:** Hahaha, why do you sound surprised? Women are also capable of doing well with their farms.

**MUSAH:** I never said otherwise.

**FUSEINA:** Your actions say it all.

**NADIA:** (COMMANDING VOICE) Can we not fight already?

**MAANAN:** (SURPRISED) Well, I can see you are already well acquainted.

**NADIA:** Good morning, Maanan.

**MAANAN:** Good morning. You are welcome. What a pleasant surprise. I have been expecting Zali the MOFA officer, and I didn’t know you were coming. Please sit down. You are welcome.

**NADIA:** Sorry, my friend. I knew you would be here today, so I brought my friends Musah and Fuseina with me to come and learn from you. As you already know, we are farmers from Adensukurom. And we are really struggling to make ends meet. We make very little from the maize we harvest because we lose about 70 to 80% of it. It’s been worse this year because of the prolonged rainfall. We need some advice.

**MAANAN:** Hmmn, the rains has affected all of us in some way. Thank God I was smart about it. Otherwise, I could have lost everything. My first advice would be to harvest your maize crop in a timely manner. If you harvest your crop late and it is rained on, it can grow mould which can lead to aflatoxin contamination.

**MUSAH:** Really?

**FUSEINA:** Tell him, tell Musah!

**NADIA:** Fuseina, this is not the time to point fingers, we are learning!

**FUSEINA:** Oh, sorry. Please continue, ma’am.

**MAANAN:** Because of the unpredictable weather these days, you should harvest the maize with the husk intact. This will protect it if the rains come unannounced. Immediately after, do your best to quickly separate the rain-damaged husk from the maize. Then clean your harvest containers before adding maize to prevent contamination from old maize residues.

**MUSAH:** This means that I must clean my wheelbarrow very well before carry the new maize from my farm, right?

**MAANAN:** Yes, that is very important.

**NADIA:** Okay, so how do I know that my maize has fully matured?

**MAANAN:** Good question. You have to look out for the signs.

**FUSEINA:** Yes, I know—when the maize plant becomes yellow and dries up.

**MAANAN:** Good, or when the husks of the drying maize feel like paper or they fall or droop down on the stalk.

**NADIA:** Oh—sometimes I see a black layer at the base of the maize, where the maize grains connect to the cobs.

**MAANAN:** Right, these are all signs that tell you to harvest your maize immediately.

**FUSEINA:** What if it is still raining like it did this season?

**MAANAN:** You must monitor your field and try your best to harvest on a sunny day. Don’t forget to remove and separate damaged husks from the maize immediately to avoid contamination. You can also apply Aflasafe to your farm to reduce aflatoxin levels.

**FUSEINA:** Yes, I heard Aflasafe is good, but I’m not sure since it’s new in the market.

**MAANAN:** If you can afford it and it’s available where you live, Aflasafe is a good solution. You apply it to your field and it reduces aflatoxin levels by a huge amount.

**NADIA:** Okay. When do we apply this product?

**MAANAN:** You only need to apply Aflasafe one time during the cropping season. You spread about 10 kg on each hectare by hand broadcasting, two to three weeks before crop flowering. So it is important to know when your crop will flower. You can take guidance from your local seed supplier or Aflasafe distributer. Try to find out the individual characteristics of the seed variety you are growing to make the decision of when to apply it easier.

**FUSEINA:** Wow, thank you for this information.

**MAANAN:** You are welcome. Also, make sure to keep your cleanly harvested maize away from pets.

**FUSEINA:** Ah, we can’t keep pets away from our maize all day. We are not always in our farms.

**MAANAN:** Then I advise that you dry your maize close to you, where you can keep watch and drive pets away. Pets can drop dirt or feces into your maize and contaminate it**.**

**FUSEINA:** Then it would be good for us to carry it from the farm to the house.

**NADIA:** Yes, you can build a shed for it at home.

**MAANAN:** Also, when drying, keep your harvested maize away from the ground.

**MUSAH:** So that is why you dry your maize on tarpaulins here?

**MAANAN:** Yes. As you can see, I have raised a number of sheds on bamboo sticks. This helps me dry my maize off the ground, and at the same time all the pets, pests, and stray animals don’t have access to it. When I am not around, I cover it with a big black plastic sheet and secure it firmly with a stone on all four sides.

**MUSAH:** Good. Such a brilliant idea. I think we men can help the women build something similar for their maize. This way, we can help each other by moving from one shed to the other to sort the maize out.

**FUSEINA:** Yes. If we had more of these sheds, we could all dry our maize without any problems, and we could even finish in good time to sell it to the companies that come around.

**MAANAN:** Very good. This is how the farmers of Mayera survive. We help each other and benefit from it together. And if you can store your maize long enough, you may get better prices than if you sell it right away.

**FUSEINA:** Exactly, because during the harvest period, many farmers come to the market to sell their maize, and this affects the prices and allow buyers to beat our prices down in a bargain. But after the harvest season, we can sell the stored maize at a better price.

**MUSAH:** Hmmn, sounds encouraging.

**NADIA:** Is it okay to sort the maize out whilst we are drying it, or do we have to do it before drying it?

**ZALI:** (COUGHING) Hello …

**MAANAN:** Aha, there you are, Zali. I have been expecting you. Please have a seat and join in the conversation. These are my visitors from Adensukurom and we are discussing how to handle maize after harvest in order to stop postharvest losses. Nadia just asked if it is best to sort the maize whilst drying or before drying.

**ZALI:** Oh, good question. It is important to sort the maize just before drying so that you can separate all the infected cobs from the good cobs.

**FUSEINA:** I usually dry my maize in the sun. And I now know that I have to raise it off the ground to avoid pest and disease problems.

**ZALI:** Yes, it okay to dry your maize in the sun, but you must keep turning the cobs to quicken the drying process. Drying your maize prevents growth of fungi and bacteria, and insect or mite infestation. You can use a moisture meter to check the moisture level in maize and determine if it is ready for storage.

**MUSAH:** Hmmn, we don’t have this meter in our town.

**MAANAN:** There is another way to go about this.

**FUSEINA, MUSAH, NADIA:** Please tell us!

**MAANAN:** You can mix some grains and a teaspoon of non-iodized salt in a dry jar with a tight cover. Shake and roll the jar for two or three minutes. If the salt doesn’t clump together or stick to the sides of the jar, then the moisture level is below 15% and the maize is ready for storage.

**SFX:** All clap.

**FUSEINA:** Wow, I can’t wait to try all of these new tricks. Next season is going to be fun!

**MUSAH:** Work and happiness.

**NADIA:** Exactly. (They all laugh). Good to see you two getting along. It’s a miracle to have both of you in a meeting this long without either of you getting on the other’s nerves!

**FUSEINA:** (Laughing) Oh, that’s not true …

**MUSAH:** Well, I am glad I came. This meeting has been very insightful.

**MAANAN:** And I am glad we could be of help to you. Go and put everything into practice. And if you have any challenges, you can call on us for help.

**NADIA:** Thank you so much. We will take our leave now.

**MAANAN:** You are most welcome.

**Episode Three**

**SETTING:** TOWN OF ADENSUKUROM

**CHARACTERS:** NARRATOR, NII, TAKYI, MABEL, MUSAH, FUSEINA, NADIA.

**SFX:** TWEETING BIRDS, RUSTLING DRY LEAVES.

**NARRATOR:** Fuseina, Nadia, and Musah happily go back to Adensukurom. They gather the farmers and share with them everything they have learnt. Together, they all agree to help each other become better. The men help the women build sheds in their backyards or close to their homes to serve as drying platforms as well as mini-storage facilities to keep their maize before sending it to the market. Also, part of the warehouse is given to women who wish to store their maize for up to three months. During the new harvest season, farmers take turn helping each other shell and grade their dried maize before bagging it. There is peace and harmony in the town and farmers are happy because they are getting better prices for their stored maize. They are excited about their progress.

**SFX:** TOWNSFOLK MURMUR

**NII:** Takyi, hurry up. We have to weigh the other bags too. The truck will soon be here.

**TAKYI:** Yes, there you go.

**SFX:** Bag hits the ground with a thuD.

**TAKYI:** Next!

**NII:** Please be careful. This maize is the result of our sweat and hard work.

**TAKYI:** (SOUNDING SURPRISED) Look. Is that Musah I see coming?

**NII:** Wow, he finally decided to join us to weigh and sell the maize together?

**MABEL:** Well, is that not the right thing to do? I know now that we are better off selling our maize together. Today, I made three times what I usually make from selling my maize in the market. Over there, the middlemen at the market place just look at the bag and name their price!

**NII:** Exactly. But not anymore—the middlemen, market women, and buyers must all come and buy it just like the companies and maize processing factories who buy in bulk from us. We weight each bag and sell at a standard price per kg.

**MABEL:** (CLAPS) Then it’s a win-win for all of us. But this only worked because we stood our ground together. I regret being so selfish earlier on and I have learnt my lesson. Marketing together is a lot easier than selling individually. Paying my children’s school fees will be a lot easier this term.

**TAKYI:** I’m happy for you, Mabel. (PAUSE) Wonders shall never end. Just look at who is with Musah!

**NII:** I thought it was a crime to even mention Fusiena’s name in his presence.

**TAKYI:** Without their help, I would never have known that I shouldn’t dry my maize on the ground. This practice was what was destroying all my maize.

**NII:** Hoh … as for me, I never knew that I had been bagging my maize at the wrong time. They were never dry enough. But because I didn’t have a meter to check for dryness, I would bag them anyway. By the time I realized, it grew mould and got contaminated. Musah taught me how to check for dryness with *Ada nkyene* (*Editor’s note: a local name for non-iodized salt*), and it has been my life saver.

**MABEL:** Yes, Fuseina insisted that I space out my farm by practicing recommended spacing.

**NII:** What is the recommended spacing? I want to know if I have been doing mine the right way.

**MABEL:** Well, she said to plant 80 cm between rows and 40 cm between plants in a row, and plant two seeds per hill. And we simply calculated this by using my arm. So the 80 cm is just about my outstretched arm from my nose to my palm since I am not so tall. And the length of my forearm works for the 40 cm. But since you are as tall as Musah, then you may have to reduce it a bit to get the measurement.

**NII:** Good, I will try this next season.

**MABEL:** You must! I used to crowd the plants together and this reduced my yield. But learning to space the plants well helped me to maintain my farm because it’s easy to weed the farm and apply fertilizer. My yields have also increased dramatically.

**NII:** Fuseina and Musah are just something else …

**TAKYI:** ... I watched them work together in awe. They have succeeded in turning our lives around.

**NII:** Haha … he used to call her the woman with the loud mouth!

**SFX:** MUSAH AND FUSEINA LAUGHING.

**MUSAH:** I heard that! (NII AND TAKYI CLEAR THEIR THROATS AS MUSAH DROPS HIS BAG OF MAIZE WITH A THUD).

**SFX:** GIGGLING

**MUSAH:** These are three bags from Fuseina’s harvest. She insists on keeping the rest at the warehouse for processing and selling.

**NADIA:** Oh, Fuseina, are you starting your baby food business again?

**FUSEINA:** Yes, I am. I only stopped because of the hunger crisis that hit our town. Now that we have crossed that hurdle, I am back in business!

**TAKYI:** Good to hear this. And thank you so much for not giving up on us. You have helped us manage our harvest this year. Just look at the bags we have gathered here. These are forty bags and we are still counting. Together, we will make a fortune this year.

**MUSAH:** I haven’t brought mine yet. I made 10 bags this year!

**TAKYI:** Wow. (CLAPS). You must marry this woman!

**MUSAH:** I have been seriously considering it—an intelligent, hardworking, and determined woman like Fuseina mustn’t be taken for granted.

**NII:** Hah, did that come from Musah’s own mouth?

**TAKYI:** Well, life is not just about getting married.

**NADIA:** I agree, but just look at the way Fuseina is blushing. Six months ago, they would have been clawing at each other’s throats.

**TAKYI, NII:** Wonders shall never end! (ALL LAUGH HEARTILY. FADE OUT LAUGHTER.)

## Acknowledgements

Contributed by: Abena Dansoa Danso, script writing and research consultant, Eagles Roar Creatives.

Reviewed by: Akpalu Besa Michael, District Director of Food and Agriculture, Kadjebi, Volta Region, Ghana

**Sources of information**

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Justin Tingan, farmer, October 2018

Bundin Bossman, farmer and MOFA officer, October 2018

Andrews Frimpong, aggregator, October 2018

Joseph Derry, aggregator and lead farmer, October 2018.

Willberforce Akoto, aggregator, October 2018.

Rosemond Ohene, Programs Coordinator at FRI Ghana, December 2018.