

# Pack 118

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**Making money safely from agriculture during COVID-19**

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Notes to broadcaster

In Kenya, the first case of COVID-19 was announced in mid-March 2020. To contain the spread of the pandemic, lockdowns, curfews, and travel restrictions were put in place. Unfortunately, these restrictions came during the peak season for producing labour-intensive staples and vegetables. Restrictions in movement due to COVID-19 have resulted in shortages in farm labour and disruptions in transport of farm produce across borders and within the country, leading to delays in delivery of food.

With educational institutions closed, children were at home. This provided farm labour for households that depend on agriculture, but it also meant that educational institutions were not purchasing agricultural products to feed their students.

The closure of many informal markets in urban and peri-urban areas to avoid crowding disrupted food supply systems, especially for fresh produce. But it also opened new avenues for marketing farm produce. Door-to-door sales, online sales, and “boot sales” thrived in this new reality. The market came closer to the people.

In this fictional drama, Juma and Sarah are trying to cope with the loss or partial loss of their jobs because of COVID-19 restrictions. Juma wants to grow and sell vegetables from the village, but Sarah is not so sure. How can the couple make a living by safely during COVID-19?

This drama contains five scenes, varying in length from 4-7 minutes.

Duration of the entire drama, with intro and outro: 30 minutes.

**CHARACTERS:**

**JUMA:** Man in his early 30s. Is married to Sarah and they have a young daughter, Jacky. He works as a chef in a hotel in the city.

**SARAH:** Juma’s wife and a primary schoolteacher. She loves the city.

**KAMAU:** Vegetable supplier in the city and middleman between farmers and city buyers.

**ALI:** Juma’s colleague at the hotel.

**SETTING:** NAIROBI AND MURANGA, A VILLAGE IN CENTRAL KENYA

**SFX:** SIG TUNE UP THEN UNDER

**NARRATOR:** In East Africa, COVID-19 arrived at a critical time when most countries in the region were recovering from the impacts of recent droughts, severe flooding, and the worst desert locust invasion in 25 years. Country-wide lockdown measures, including reduced access to markets, resulted in job losses.

Juma is one of the people in Kenya whose life drastically changed due to COVID-19. His wife is a primary school teacher and is on a long unpaid leave. Juma, who works in a hotel in the city, is worried because hotels and other eateries are closing down.

**SFX:** SIG TUNEUP THEN OUT

**SCENE 1**

**SETTING:** CITY HOTEL WHERE JUMA WORKS AS A CHEF AND STOREKEEPER

**SFX:** SOUND OF TRUCK UP THEN OUT

**ALI:** Juma, Kamau’s truck is outside, he has come to deliver the vegetables.

**JUMA:** Thanks, Ali, please tell him to start offloading them. Let me finish what am doing here, I will be there in a few minutes.

**ALI:** (Shouting) Kamau, just start unpacking. Juma will be there in a few minutes.

**Kamau:** (shouting) I hope he will not be long, I have two other stops from here.

**SFX:** SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS UP THEN OUT

**JUMA:** Hi, Kamau, sorry to keep you waiting. I had to finish something first. Let’s see what you have.

**KAMAU:** No problem, my brother. I have offloaded your order. Please check to see if this is what you asked for.

**JUMA:**  Let me see … a crate of cabbages, 10 kilos of carrots, two crates of kales, two crates of onions, four crates of tomatoes and … You did not bring potatoes?

**KAMAU:** I did. They are right there under the kales. I have some radishes and cauliflower if you want?

**JUMA:** No. We have not been getting guests from western countries as much for the last few days. My boss said it is something to do with a new disease that has brought on travel restrictions. They are the ones who love those vegetables.

**KAMAU:** You are the third hotel to tell me that. I have also been hearing about a viral disease in the news. I will have to sell these vegetables at the market at a low price.

**JUMA:** By the way, Kamau, how is the vegetable-selling business? I planted some vegetables back in the village and in the next three months I will be harvesting, and I will need to sell them.

**KAMAU:** Depends on which vegetables, but generally vegetables are always on demand. We shall talk more next time. I must run.

**JUMA:** Ok, thanks. Let me take these in. (shouting) Ali, come help me take these to the kitchen.

**SFX:**  SOUND OF TRUCK UP THEN OUT

**ALI:** Not much vegetables this time round?

**JUMA:** No, you know guests at the hotel have reduced.

**ALI:** Yeah, about that, I understand that there is this viral disease that has affected travel.

**JUMA:** Yes, apparently it is really a big thing. I am hoping we do not get it here.

**ALI:** Well let’s hope so, but with a reduction in guests, it will eventually affect us. (Whispering) The lady in accounts told me the numbers don’t look so good right now.

**JUMA:** Well, as I said, let’s hope that disease does not come to Kenya.

**SCENE 2**

**SETTING:** AT JUMA’S HOUSE

**NARRATOR:** In March 2020, the Kenyan government announced its first case of COVID-19. To contain the spread of the pandemic, lockdowns, curfews, and travel restrictions were put in place. As a result, there were many job losses, especially in the hospitality industry. It is now two months since the first case in Kenya was announced and Juma has to make some serious decisions.

**SFX:** KNOCK AT THE DOOR, DOOR OPENING

**SARAH:** Come in, Juma. How was your day?

**JUMA:** Hi, Sarah. (sighing) My day was not so good.

**SARAH:** I hope we are still not talking about the effects of COVID-19. I am tired of hearing about that disease and its effect in our lives.

**JUMA:** Let me sit down first. Where is Jacky?

**SARAH:** She is in the backyard playing by herself. She still does not understand why she cannot play with other children and why she is not in school. Let me get you a cup of porridge, and then you can tell me how your day went.

**SFX:**  SOUND OF CUTLERY

**SARAH:** Here you go. Milk is rare and expensive during this pandemic. We will have to take porridge in place of tea.

**JUMA:** Thank you. Let’s start with you, how was your day?

**SARAH:** The usual I have been doing every day for the past weeks. Tending to the kitchen garden, house chores, and keeping Jacky busy. I am avoiding watching too much TV, these COVID-19 updates are depressing.

**JUMA:** I know, Sarah. I have been thinking ...

**SARAH:** But you have not told me how your day went.

**JUMA:** Well, as I said, not so good. We are having few guests at the hotel. The only reason I am still there is because I have been working in the kitchen and assisting in the stores. All my other colleagues have lost their jobs or are working in shifts.

**SARAH:** Well, you still have your job, don’t you?

**JUMA:** Not for long, Sarah. The hotels around us have all closed. Today, we were told the hotel will have to close in the coming month if things don’t improve.

**SARAH:** What does that mean?

**JUMA:** It means we have to think about our next move. You have been home for two months and will probably not go to work until the government opens schools. With me losing my job, it means we must think of an alternative source of income.

**SARAH:** I have been selling some of the vegetables to our neighbours …

**JUMA:** That cannot pay rent and feed us. Sarah, the farm in the village …

**SARAH:** I am not going to the village, Juma!

**JUMA:** I have not even finished my …

**SARAH:** (INTERRUPTING) I know, we had this fight six months ago when you wanted to go and plant vegetables. You wanted us to stay in the village for two months. Two months in the village, Juma! What’s your suggestion now? We go live there?

**JUMA:** No, Sarah. Listen, If I lose my job and schools don’t re-open soon, we are looking at a long time without an income.

**SARAH:** Won’t they pay you some dues if they let you go before your contract ends?

**JUMA:** No one knows. COVID-19 was unprecedented, so employers are struggling just as much as employees. If there are any dues, it could take up to 60 days, and even then, who knows how long we can live on it? We need to cushion ourselves for the coming days.

**SARAH:** And your suggestion is for us to live in the village with your parents?

**JUMA:** First of all, I would not even consider a two-hour drive from the city a village, and second, I am not saying we pack our lives and settle in Muranga.

What I am saying is we go and work on what I have in the farm, harvest and possibly sell it, prepare the land for the next crop, and plant. Then see what happens. Until our lives are back to normal, we try and do the best we can.

**SARAH:** Meanwhile, what happens to our house in the city?

**JUMA:** We keep it. Maybe we need to move to a smaller and affordable house if things do not improve, but we will need it when schools open for you and Jacky. I may then decide to get a job in Muranga and oversee the farm or just take up farming as I have always wanted.

**SARAH:** Juma, you know nothing about farming and selling farm produce. How will this work, especially with the restrictions on movement because of COVID-19?

**Juma:** Have a little faith in me, Sarah. First, I will do a lot of research. And I will have to learn as I go. Kamau, our vegetable supplier at the hotel, has promised to help me, but more importantly, I also need your support.

**SARAH:** Oh, I don’t know! What if this does not work? Let me think about it, but you know am not a village girl, so this is very hard for me.

**JUMA:** (laughing) You were practically brought up on a farm.

**Sarah:** I grew up in afarm in the city. There is a difference!

**JUMA:** Okay, Sarah, lets re-visit our discussion in a few days. But I will go ahead and start on my research.

**SCENE 3**

**SETTING:** AT HOTEL WHERE JUMA WORKS

**KAMAU:** I think that will be all, Juma. Your orders are becoming less and less.

**JUMA:** You understand the situation, Kamau. In fact, you are lucky we are still open. But not for long. We just had an emergency meeting this morning. The hotel will have to close now, or we shall be making losses.

**KAMAU:** Ok. One less hotel to supply to for me. (sighing) COVID-19 is disrupting our lives.

**JUMA:** Tell me about it. My wife is at home because of school closures, we don’t know when they will resume. I will now be joining her. Two jobless adults with a child to feed and bills to pay. I need a plan for my life.

**KAMAU:** Don’t worry, my brother. Things will work out.

**JUMA:** Yes, in fact my new plan kind of involves you.

**KAMAU:** Me? How?

**JUMA:** As I told you some time back, I have a farm or rather my parents’ farm some two hours from Nairobi. My parents are no longer able to farm and so I took it up. During the last school holidays, I went and planted some cabbages, carrots, and potatoes. They are not very far from harvest.

**KAMAU:** That’s great, Juma!

**JUMA:** My only problem is a market for my produce. The open-air markets where I thought I would sell my produce are now closed indefinitely because of COVID-19.

**KAMAU:** It’s true. Open-air markets are not an option right now. There are other avenues, but they need you to have transport. Which is quite a challenge right now, too. The other thing is that hotels and eateries are closed, so you have to think of other places to sell your produce.

**JUMA:** I was hoping to get some pointers from you since you have been doing this for years.

**KAMAU:** I am sure we can work something out. What you need to do for now is find out how much you can sell in the neighbourhood. This means giving something that other sellers are not giving—whether it is offering free delivery, proper packaging, branding, pricing … Since you will be selling your produce for the first time, think about all these things. I am always available to help you learn this business.

**JUMA:** Thank you, Kamau, let me think through all these. I am also trying to convince my wife to get on board. I will get in touch with you.

**KAMAU:** Ok. I will wait for your call.

**SCENE 4**

**SETTING:** AT JUMA’S FARM IN MURANGA VILLAGE

**NARRATOR:** Juma’s hotel closed and he left for the village with his reluctant wife and child. They started harvesting some crops and are now looking at options to market their produce.

**SFX:** PHONE RINGING

**KAMAU:** Hi Juma, how are you? I hope you are calling to place a big order. (LAUGHING)

**JUMA:** Hi, Kamau. Oh no, Kamau, I left the hotel. I am calling about a personal request.

**KAMAU:** Great, if you are in the village, it means that your wife agreed to your proposition. (LAUGHING)

**JUMA:** Well, you know my wife, she agreed but with conditions. First, that she has to see good progress with my current harvest and sales and second, she will only be involved in the post-harvest process, no farm work for her (laughing).

**KAMAU:** Don’t worry, Juma, they will eventually come around. Just make sure this works or else you will be broke and single!

**JUMA:** That is why am calling you, my friend!

**KAMAU;** What can I do for you?

**JUMA:** I have been here for three weeks now. My crops are almost ready for harvest. I made contacts within the village and learned that I can sell some of my produce in neighbourhood homes and small neighbourhood kiosks. There is quite a huge competition so I have to price my vegetables a little lower. I am also offering to deliver the produce to the homes since they are close to my home and I don’t want a lot of people coming to my compounds with this COVID-19 situation.

**KAMAU:** Sounds good. I assume that you are also doing your farm work observing all COVID-19 rules.

**JUMA:** Yes, yes! Since my farm is small, I don’t have many workers. I only have three plus myself. I purchased a thermometer which I use to check their temperature when they come in every morning and I check for common COVID-19 symptoms. I have a hand-washing station which I made from a 20-litre jerry can that provides liquid soap where anyone who comes into the compound can wash their hands regularly. And I encourage my workers not to come to work if they have any symptoms.

**KAMAU:** That’s important because buyers need to be confident that you are observing hygienic conditions. So where do I come in?

**JUMA:** After selling my produce around the neighbourhood, I still have a huge harvest to deal with. I need to sell it.

**KAMAU:** And you have cabbages, carrots, and potatoes?

**JUMA:** I also have onions. In fact, I have harvested the onions and they are almost dry.

**KAMAU:** That’s great, onions are really on demand. I used to get them from Tanzania before COVID-19 struck, but now the borders are closed so they are not available.

**JUMA**: That means I could get a market for my onions?

**KAMAU:** Well, if they are good, yes.

**JUMA:** Who would you sell them to?

**KAMAU:** The market has changed with COVID-19 restrictions. With hotels, eateries, and educational institutions closed, I supply to supermarkets and groceries, and essential service institutions like hospitals, children’s homes, and individual households.

I have also been selling at the organic farmers’ markets in the city which observe very strict COVID-19 rules. With what remains, I do boot sales. These are now allowed within housing estates because people are limited in their movements.

**JUMA:** Great. So how do we do this?

**KAMAU:** I will be in your area next week and can pass by to see how your produce looks. Then I will let you know how much of it we will be able to sell. Ok?

**JUMA:** Sounds good.

**KAMAU:** Ok, see you when I come.

**JUMA**: Thank you, Kamau. Bye.

**SFX:** KITCHEN SOUNDS

**SARAH:** With that wide smile on your face, I assume you have good news?

**JUMA:** Maybe!

**SARAH:** Someone offered to buy all your produce?

**JUMA:** Not really, but some progress in terms of selling the produce beyond our locality.

**SARAH:** How?

**JUMA:** That was Kamau I was talking to.

**SARAH:** Kamau ...?

**JUMA:** Yes, the one who used to supply the hotel with vegetables.

**SARAH:** And what has he told you?

**JUMA:** First, that he will be here in a week to check on the produce, and second that onions, which are a large part of my produce, are on demand—something to do with the closure of the borders.

**SARAH:** So we might be able to sell our onions?

**JUMA:** (laughing) OUR onions?

**SARAH:** Yes, OUR onions. I am invested in this too. I want it to work, we need the money. I also have some ideas on how to improve this farming business.

**JUMA:** Oh, what ideas?

**SARAH:** We have to brand our products well. We can provide low-cost branded bags for purchases above two kilos. We could also take advantage of digital selling. Most people are now on WhatsApp in the village. We can post our produce and people can make orders and we deliver to their doorstep.

**JUMA:** Good ideas, especially the WhatsApp one. But do we have the budget to brand?

**SARAH:** You forget you married an art and craft teacher? I can add some colour to the cheap bags which are sold in bulk. Then maybe later as we grow, we can think of printing after we make money from our sales.

**JUMA:** OK. What else?

**SARAH:** Well, the other idea was for the next planting season. I have been talking to people around. Most people plant the usual potatoes, carrots, and cabbage. Very few people grow the indigenous vegetables which are now on demand. Perhaps Kamau can help by telling us what high-value crops are on demand so we know what we grow the next planting season.

**JUMA:** I see you are getting excited about this village life.

**SARAH:** Don’t get carried away! Let’s revisit this discussion after our first harvest, ok?

**SCENE 5**

**SETTING:** JUMA’S FARM IN MURANGA VILLAGE

**NARRATOR:** It has been six months since Juma and Sarah moved to the farm in Muranga. The COVID-19 situation still persists in the country. Schools and other institutions are still not operating. The restrictions to contain the spread of the pandemic are still in place.

Juma managed to sell most of his produce in his neighbourhood and in the city, with the help of his friend Kamau. For a small fee, Kamau transported some of Juma’s produce to the city where they sold at organic farmers’ markets, supermarkets, and from Kamau’s boot. With what he has made, Juma invested in another farming season, paid some of his bills, and took care of his elderly parents.

**JUMA:** Sarah, it has been six months in the village. You saw how our harvest performed. What are your thoughts?

**SARAH:** Honestly Juma, I am impressed. With the COVID-19 restrictions and for a first-time farmer, I was not expecting this kind of success. It is not 100 per cent but it is above my expectations.

**JUMA:** Soo ...!

**SARAH:** So I am here to prepare for the next season until schools open. I have more ideas to make it even better.

**JUMA:** Working with Kamau has also opened my eyes. I have ideas of what I want to plant. I will still focus on vegetables, but high-value crops for local consumption now that we are not exporting as much.

**SARAH:** Which ones are you thinking about?

**JUMA:** Indigenous vegetables are on high demand in the city. Also, kales, spinach, sweet peppers, beans, and peas. And online selling has become very popular, especially in this COVID-19 season.

**SARAH:** Are you planning to go back to the city at all?

**JUMA:** I go to the city with Kamau all the time (laughing).

**SARAH:** You know what I mean.

**JUMA:** I am really getting comfortable here and enjoying farming, but I am still new at it and I cannot totally depend on it. There are hotels here where I can work if I need to.

**SARAH:** Where does that leave Jacky and I?

**JUMA:** We still have our house in the city. Schools might be opening in a few weeks so you will go to the city and we see how it goes.

**SARAH:** I have also appreciated living here. Life is simple and satisfying and I can always get a teaching job here and find a school for Jacky. But not now.

We will report to school in the city once schools open and give it some time before making a decision. Since it is a two-hour drive, am sure we will still be spending most of our weekends here. I cannot believe am saying this, but life in the village is not so bad.

**NARRATOR:** Thank you for listening to our drama. To summarize, COVID-19 strongly affected the hospitality industry in Kenya. So Juma, who has worked in a city hotel for many years, lost his job due to the pandemic. Two months into the pandemic and with little agricultural experience, Juma moved with his family to his village to begin serious farming on his parents’ small farm. His strategy was to harvest and sell what he had planted before COVID-19 and prepare for the next planting season. He learnt a lot about how he could sell his produce during the COVID-19 pandemic—and that paid off. His strategy got his family through the pandemic. He was able to pay his bills, and have some money for the next planting season. Armed with more knowledge and experience from the last crop, Juma is determined to do even better. He plans to grow indigenous vegetables, kales, spinach, sweet peppers, beans, and peas for the first time.

Thanks to his hard work and smart strategy, Juma has managed to make money safely from agriculture during COVID-19 and has even convinced his wife to support him in farming.

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**Sources of information**

Interviews:

Mr. Joseph Mutua, interview conducted on March 26, 2021

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