



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Focus: Seed selection

Good quality seeds are essential to grow a strong and healthy crop.

There are several diseases that are transmitted via seeds. Selection should thus start by obtaining seeds from healthy plants.

Small, shrivelled and broken seeds contain less nutrition for the developing seedlings.

Seeds well selected and suitable to particular agro-ecological zones will increase the chances of a good harvest.

Agro-ecological zones are areas identified by the amount of annual rainfall in Zambia by the Ministry of Agriculture and other government sectors.

Some plants may have characteristics that are more suitable in particular areas more than others – and this needs to be considered when buying seeds.

The Weekly for Zambia Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

The Problem: Poor seed selection

Most farmers in Zambia use seed from the previous crop harvest. These recycled seeds include legumes such as beans, cowpeas and groundnuts which are very important for providing some vegetable protein and fat needed for a balanced diet. Some other crops common for recycled seed also include cuttings such as cassava and sweet potatoes which are promoted for food security in drought-prone areas for adaptation to climate change by small-scale farmers.

Maize which is grown as a main food crop is also recycled by most poor small-scale farmers who cannot afford the hybrid seed varieties. They use open pollinated varieties that can be

used for up to three seasons and are usually shared or kept for seed crops.

However, during the moment of selecting seed crops, most farmers do not pay particular attention to the quality of seed.

Yet, the quality of seed affects the yield significantly. Some seeds come with seed-borne diseases and reduce the potential yield. This is made worse with poor climate conditions due to changes in the weather. The 2015/16 Agriculture season started with a delay in the rains. The meteorology department has also predicated some poor performance due to the effects El Nino – a phenomena that can affect weather world-wide.

Solutions: Activities for Journalists

Ask listeners to share their sources of seed?
Ask listeners what they think are the characteristics of good seed.

Ask listeners if they can identify disease in seeds?

Good quality seed is identified by good physical features and are disease free.

Those using recycled leguminous seed need to note the color of the skin cover. The color can indicate disease on the seed. This can either be treated with chemicals or can be physically treated by removing the disease with water before planting.

Some seed materials are cuttings like cassava. Ask farmers if they check the quality of these seed materials?

Most farmers don't check the quality if the seeds before they plant them -- this can affect production levels.

Cuttings are usually selected from the features we see of the parent plant. Some cuttings can also transmit diseases from one area to another and this should be checked.

Ask farmers if they know of the seed Control and Certification Institute (SCCI) of the Zambia Agriculture Research centers. It is a great resource for farmers.

Good seed provides good opportunities for a good harvest even during difficult times caused by poor weather conditions.

Seed suitable to agro-ecological regions are also important to know.

In areas where floods can easily occur like agro-ecological zone three in the Northern part of Zambia, long maturing varieties are encouraged.

Root crops also are encouraged in these areas such as cassava and sweet potatoes as they can withstand flooding and poor soils.

Some farmers have used ash to treat certain leguminous seed crops. There is not much science to prove this works, but if no chemicals are available it can be tried as a traditional means of controlling seed-borne diseases of leguminous crops.

Farmers also need to be sensitized to the fact that bad seed is sold as hybrids and yet they are just colored with chalk.

Hybrid seeds usually have brand name labels and are stocked in shops certified by SCCI to sell seed.

Bad seed selection can also mean wasting time in cultivating a crop that may not do well.

Ministry of Agriculture extension officers can be requested to come on your radio station and share with the farmers what agro-ecological zones they are in and which seed varieties are suitable for such areas.

Useful Links

Information about farming and the environment:
Meteorology Department, Zambia Ranet project
liaison person Reidner Mumbi, Email:
rfemumba@yahoo.co.uk

Good source of information: Vincent Ziba, FAO
Zambia, Zambia; Email: vinceziba@yahoo.com.
Phone: 0966-246-924

Mwape Sichilongo, WWF Conservation Manager.
Email: mwapesichilongo@wwfzam.org. Phone:
+260 966442540

Conservation Farming Unity, Mr Sinya Mbale ,
Phone: +260 965 238 008