



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

# The Weekly 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

## Drought

Drought can be devastating to crops and often leads to food shortages.

As temperatures around the world increase and rainfall patterns change there is now a move to develop food crops that are drought-resistant and able to produce high yields.

In Zambia, particularly in the southern province, there are periods when there are long dry spells. This can mainly be attributed to farmers not receiving updated weather forecast information. In other words, the weather forecast info is not well disseminated to the public and hence poor crop planning.

In order for farmers to prepare for droughts information must be disseminated quickly so as to enable farmers to plant the right kind of seed – particularly if drought conditions are forecasted.

## Drought-resistant Crops

With the changing weather patterns comes the need to invest in technology. This technology can be used to produce crops that have high yields and increase a farmer's income.

Foods such as cassava need to be promoted around the country. The growing of cassava occurs mostly in the northern province of Zambia. Yet, it can be promoted in the other provinces by introducing other cassava varieties that grow in just few a months, but with high yields and able to withstand long dry

periods.

Cassava, just like maize, can be used to produce mealie meal which is the staple food for the country. Cassava has leaves which can be used for relish and they are also medicinal. The roots of cassava can be used as a breakfast food.

The other advantage of having cassava, especially in this changing environment, is that this plant is easy and cheap to grow. All that a farmer has to do is to plant the pruned stem and water it until it gets firm.

## Activities for Journalists

The growing population of Zambia now brings with it a demand for increased food security. With the increase in climate variability there is a need to invest in technologies that bring about seeds with high yields.

For instance, the Cotton Development Trust has developed a cotton seed that produces high yields for cotton growers, but it has yet to be tried to determine how effective it will best suit the Zambian environment.

Cassava is one crop that has been promoted extensively in Zambia due to its drought-resistant characteristics. But this crop still faces some challenges in its distribution for instance; there is still a problem in the distribution of cassava planting material in drought mitigation programmes. The cuttings often reach the farmers in a deteriorated state; either dried or fermented. In fact, only a few of the cassava plants sourced from the Northern Province reach the farms in a good state.

Clearly, there is need to establish a more efficient and cost-effective distribution system for root and tuber crops in order to effectively address periodic food deficiencies in the drought prone areas.

There is a challenge in introducing cassava to certain areas. It should be done in a way that doesn't make the farmer feel as though the crop is being imposed on him/her by outsiders.

Interview a farmer who grows cassava. Is the farmer pleased with his/her crop yields? Why did the farmer start growing cassava? How does his/her cassava do in drought conditions?

Talk to an extension agent in your area about drought-resistant crops like cassava. Can cassava grow well in your community? If so, and it's not grown, why is that?

Are farmers growing other drought-resistant crops in your community? If so, how are the crops doing?

Are there government programs to help farmers purchase drought-resistant seeds?

### Useful Link

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