



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

## FOCUS Caterpillars

Insects are eaten by many people around the world including Zambia.

Insects consumed in Zambia include inswa (adult winged termites), inshonkonono (grasshoppers) and ifishimu (caterpillars). These insects are a good source of nutritional value.

While many insects are consumed in Zambia, the insect with the highest commercial value is the edible caterpillar commonly known as ifishimu (Bemba) and vinkhubala (Nyanja).

In Mpika district, edible caterpillars are harvested from October to the first week of December. These have a great potential to contribute to food security and enhance sustainable rural incomes.

However, contribution to incomes is hindered by the seasonality of production. There is need to improve storage, invest in packaging and increase revenue generation for local communities by bringing them as close to consumers in the supply chain as possible.

# 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
- How caterpillars can help with forest conservation
- 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

## Benefits of Caterpillars in Forest Conservation

From a conservation perspective, the potential of edible caterpillars and other insects to contribute to environmental sustainability efforts remains largely untapped. The availability of high-quality edible insects is closely tied to healthy, intact forests.

Without trees and leaves to eat, insect populations decrease, so triggering interest in preserving insects as food sources might be one way to protect forests and the wildlife living within them.

Whereas, most people would be hard-pressed to explain climate change and the REDD+ mechanism, the majority of households in Mpika can explain the full life-cycle of a caterpillar from the egg to the moth stage. There are also more taboos about the harvest and use of caterpillars than over any other resource.

REDD+, by the way, is a United Nation's initiative – reducing emissions from deforestation and

and forest degradation.

This indicates the importance already attached to caterpillars by local communities. As a result, this creates possibilities for enhancing environmental sustainability by building on existing traditional ecological knowledge.

Further, research led by Professor Mbata of the University of Zambia indicates that caterpillars are the single most important source of nutrients during the “hunger months,” (November to February) for many communities in Mpika. Further, consumption of insects has without a doubt played an important role in reducing kwashiorkor in young children.

Kwashiorkor is a form of malnutrition that occurs when there is not enough protein in the diet.

There is need to promote further conservation of trees so that further benefits are felt by the communities in which forests are not cut down.

## Activities for Journalists

Many species become locally extinct, due to over-harvesting and destruction of their natural habitat and host plants by deforestation, forest fires and overgrazing. The decline of caterpillar populations has made them less available for a large part of the population, in particular for rural communities in regions where caterpillars have disappeared, and in urban areas where they are not affordable for most citizens.

Harvesting and marketing of caterpillars is a viable enterprise for poor rural communities, and small traders and sellers. For small rural communities, income from caterpillars can be higher than income from the sale of agricultural crops. Small-scale dealers make weekly trips of up to 1,000 km to buy caterpillars in the regions of harvesting.

Zambia is one of the countries where caterpillars are the most commonly and widely consumed. More than ten species are found at market places. Nearly 80% of people eat and like caterpillars, both in rural and urban areas, and in all social classes. There is a huge demand for more, and cheaper, caterpillars in urban and rural areas, as well as for their sustainable utilisation in the woodlands.

Edible caterpillars can be used as a focus in the conservation of forests as it is a benefit that the community will be getting from it.

Caterpillars have been around in the country for a long time and their nutritional value has been acknowledged by most of the rural communities visited by the Zambia Climate Change Network (ZCCN) with its member organisation.

For people to understand the benefits of afforestation there is a need to inform them about the benefits of forests.

The challenges now faced by most of the rural communities that harvest caterpillars are that due to deforestation many of these species are now becoming

extinct.

As a community how much is known about the caterpillars that are harvested or sold on the market?

Has there been any decline of the numbers of species of caterpillars that are sold on the market and how has the price of these insects impacted on your livelihood?

Talk to a local extension agent or specialist about what can be done to increase the market for edible caterpillars. Discuss with them the link between deforestation and the loss of caterpillars.

As a station, help caterpillar harvesters get higher prices for their insects by setting up market price reports on a daily or weekly basis.

What can be done to bring back caterpillar populations?

Talk to successful harvesters and find out how their business is going? If there are more caterpillars, it would bring down prices and allow the very poor to be able to purchase them.

Your station might even have a community activity that focuses on the issue of the caterpillar population and what can be done to bring greater attention to the issue – and help reduce deforestation.

### Useful Link

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