

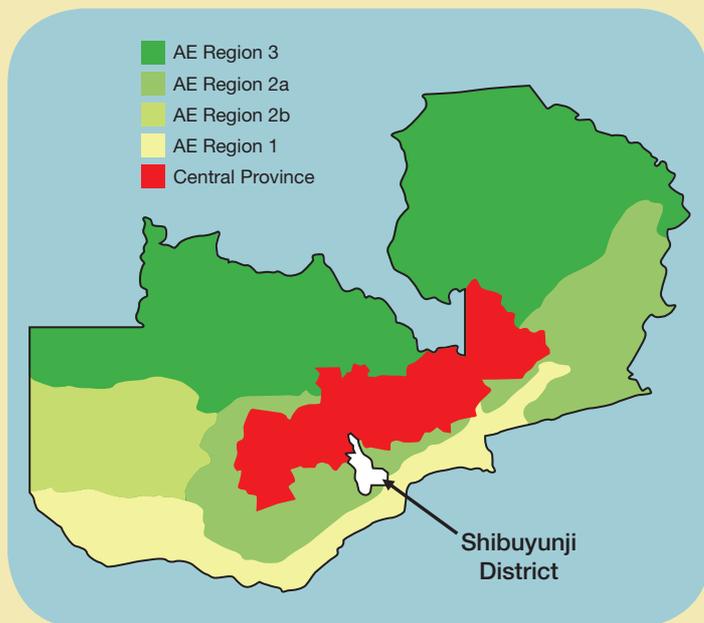
# Transforming the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) to diversified agroecology practices

## Shibuyunji District, Central Province, Zambia

BRIEFING PAPER JULY 2019

### Introduction

This briefing highlights key issues raised at a farmer exchange and learning event held in May 2019 in Shibuyunji District, Central Province. The district lies in Agroecological Region IIA, with an average annual rainfall of 800-1,000mm and some dry spells, and generally low nutrient reserves in the soil. The overall objective of the meeting was to share and exchange ideas on transitioning to a smallholder support system for diversified agroecological farming.



### Context

**Food and farming systems** are changing rapidly in Zambia. More farmers are using chemicals and poisonous inputs that must be purchased. The agriculture budget subsidises fertiliser and seed, through the Farm Input Support Programme (FISP), resulting in big profits for big companies. A few crops are taking over from diverse local traditional crops. Fertilisers are degrading the soils and we have to put in more fertilisers. Costs are going up and profits are going down. It is difficult for government too, because all the money is going to fertiliser and hybrid seeds and there is nothing left for extension officers, training or research.

*“Instead of giving all K2,000 in fertiliser, rather give goats. After one year the fertiliser is gone, but with goats they will still be there. We are not saying give everyone goats, but those who want to have goats, give goats.”*

*Theresa Mutaka, farmer and extension worker, Copperbelt*

*“The concentration [of FISP] is mainly on hybrid seed but we are not paying attention to locally produced seed. We are trying to give power to farmers to choose which types of inputs they want. In Shibuyunji we are under the [FISP] e-voucher cardless system. Once farmers make their deposit, they have the freedom to choose which inputs they want from the agro-dealers. But you discover that they are restricted to the inputs supplied by the agro-dealers.”*

*Victor Ndhlovo, Shibuyunji District Agricultural Coordinator (DACO)*

# Challenges facing agriculture in Zambia include naturally poor soils, rising population, climate change, biodiversity loss, multinational capture and land grabbing

## Environmentally friendly

-  The idea of soil fertility is to **feed the soil** and let the soil feed the crop.
-  **On-farm recycling of nutrients** – for example, animal manure, which returns to the soil most of the nutrients that the animal took when it was grazing.
-  Even for farmers without livestock, there are ways to return nutrients sustainably, for example the use of **legumes** either as green manures or cover crops and retain crop residues.
-  **Biodiversity in the field** and holistic soil fertility management are also good ways to manage pests and diseases.

 **TIP** Try not to disturb the soil except where you are growing your crops. Keep the soil covered at all times, with living and dead organic matter. This keeps water in the soil for longer and contributes nutrients to the soil over time. Use locally adapted seeds with a history of productive use in the area.

**Agroecology**  
is a good response to the urgent challenges facing food and farming systems in Zambia and Africa

## Socially just

We must take responsibility for how our farming is affecting the people around us.

-  Social justice is about selling others food products that you are proud to eat.
-  We also need to take care of resources for future generations.

## Provides income

-  The input costs for agroecology are much lower than in conventional systems that require the purchase of expensive synthetic inputs.
-  Farmers receive similar prices for the products, so a saving in input costs goes directly to the farming household.
-  Agroecology promotes diversification of on-farm incomes, gives farmers greater financial independence and increases resilience by multiplying sources of production and livelihood. This encourages independence from external inputs, and reduces crop failure.
-  Improvements in soil, water and biodiversity lead to increased yields and dietary diversity over time. This contributes to improved health and cost savings for households.



“We have a demo with nine plots and four crops – maize, cassava, groundnuts and sorghum. I was surprised with what I saw. I was traditionally trained towards commercial farming with fertiliser. I will give an example of maize as the staple. The cobs are very large. We went slightly beyond nine tons/ hectare produced by farmers from where we are coming from. Their language has changed, they are going organic now, they are seeing it has worked. We applied the principles KATC said. We have diversity in the farm and all the crops did well. Mixing of mulch and manure worked well. By that you will survive the effects of lower rainfall or drought.”  
**Chola Mulenga, Farm Manager, ZCHT-Chapula**

“There is much more nutrition in sorghum compared with hybrid maize. But instead we go for money, quick. Money, money – but you die. They will buy you a K4,000 coffin. That is not profitable!”  
**Theresa Mutaka**

### Farmer-managed seed systems

Farmer-managed seed systems account for 75% to 80% of total seed use in Zambia.

-  Farmers reuse, adapt and share this seed with one another.
-  It is very important because for generations this system provided food for our forefathers.
-  Farmers, mostly women, are the main stakeholders in this system.
-  Diversity on the land ensures diversity on the plate, removing the issue of malnutrition.

Farmers in the meeting spoke out in favour of their seed, saying it is locally found; it is easier to borrow seed from your neighbours rather than buying from the shops; farmer seed does not need fertiliser, and it has medicinal properties; some crops are available during the planting season; and farmers still get a harvest even when there is very little rain.

Participants visited the host farmer Mercy Shibelesi’s kitchen garden, and the farm of Noel Chalimbwa, a seed custodian working with CTD. The visits sparked discussion on the technical merits of various agroecological techniques, including production and use of manure, compost and organic liquid fertiliser, and dealing with pests.



**?** Why then do farmer seed systems and practices have no government support compared to the commercial seed system?

“In the natural forest, we don’t spray. How do things grow there then? Things look greener without your disturbance. How does nature work on its own without interference? The basis is diversity because plants are complementary.”  
**Daniel Kalala, KATC**

“These fertilisers have detrimental effects to the soil, which is why you find today that you open a field here and use a lot of fertiliser, then the field stops giving you what you want so you stop and cut trees somewhere else and you start there, again it stops, you move again. Now we are also talking about climate change. So it is connected.”

Victor Ndhlovo, Shibuyunji DACO

“Start just with a vision, start small, if you see there is something you have loved, then expand.”

Group discussion

Participants discussed activities and roles for farmers, government and other organisations, and ways to involve youth.

### Roles for farmers

- Start practicing agroecological techniques such as mulching, intercropping, crop rotation, no burning, no use of synthetic fertiliser, use of diverse local crops and seeds, agroforestry (e.g. use of *Musangu*) and green manure crops
- Learn how to test soil needs, including acidity
- Seed sharing, seed fairs and seed banks to multiply and exchange seed, document farmer varieties
- Experiment and share experiences with others
- Use existing and new demo plots to showcase effective sustainable organic agriculture techniques and seed varieties
- Meet in groups and host field days to share knowledge and information
- Document and keep records at farm level
- Push local leaders to start taking these issues up, invite government officials to farmer meetings and activities, use media to spread the message

“I am a farmer and also a FISP member. FISP is only supposed to be for three years and then exit. So when we leave this place let us start practicing organic production, because you will only be three years in FISP. You must hold onto organic fertiliser.”

Woman farmer, Shibuyunji

### Roles for government and NGOs

- Government policies and finance to programmes on sustainable agriculture
- Training, exchanges and pilots with farmers and extension officers on sustainable organic agriculture, local seeds, crop diversity, soil organic matter, soil fertility, making bokashi, value addition
- Sustainable organic agriculture curricula from primary school to tertiary education
- Participatory and evidence-based research and documentation, with farmer-to-farmer seed and agroecological practices

### A multi-stakeholder dialogue

Bingo Farmer Field School (FFS) in Shibuyunji District hosted the field visit and dialogue together with Community Technology Development Trust (CTDT), Kasisi Agricultural Training Centre (KATC), Zambia Alliance for Agroecology and Biodiversity (ZAAB) and African Centre for Biodiversity (ACB).

Sixty five participants included farmers from field schools and cooperatives in the district, CTDT, KATC, ZAAB, Rural Women’s Assembly (RWA), East and Southern Africa Farmer’s Forum (ESAFF) Zambia, Schools and Colleges Permaculture Programme (Scope), Caritas Kabwe, ACB, the Local Authority Area Councilor, local traditional authorities, Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) Shibuyunji District Agricultural Coordinator (DACO) and Senior Agricultural Officer (SAO), extension services and agronomists, Zambia Centre for Horticultural Training (ZCHT) Chapula, and agro-dealers.

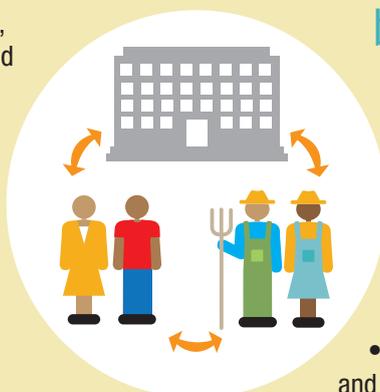
“We do have camp extension officers. NGOs must take advantage of this resource. Targets should be set, so we aim for a number of farmers to be trained.”

Ministry of Agriculture, Shibuyunji District

- Government to recognise local seed – buy from farmers and place them in shops for farmers to get through FISP
- Diversification of FISP to include animals (especially goats and chickens), local seed, biofertiliser and biopesticides
- Diversification of agricultural budgets beyond FISP to also fund colleges and extension officers to facilitate farmer training and exchanges
- Explain the implications of policies, for example on seed, so farmers understand their rights and know what to do
- Assist farmers to identify and engage in markets for diverse crops

“Real sustainability is from government, which has a budget every year. So how do we embed this in government so it can be sustainable and cover the whole country?”

Daniel Kalala, KATC



### Involving the youth

- Include SOA/ agroecology in school curricula
- Involve headmasters and teachers in these discussions
- Give responsibility to youth/ children on the farm, with incentives for good work
- Involve youth at household level on agroecology and include them in exchange visits
- Involve youth in leadership positions, and have youth reps in farmer groups, formation of youth agriculture clubs
- Use existing youth spaces, especially around sport, to bring information about agroecology and sustainable agriculture

“We don’t bring the youth because we think these meetings are only for the older people. I have seen everyone saying the youth are not coming, but have we told them? We should not accuse them and leave it there.”

Woman farmer, Shibuyunji



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