

CONCEPT NOTE ON THE 2024 TRADITIONAL SEED AND FOOD FESTIVAL

Background

Zambia and the region are currently facing a hunger situation exacerbated by the drought that characterized the 2023/24 farming season. The drought which hit most parts of the country was evident in all sectors of agriculture in the form of crop failures, livestock losses and environmental degradation. This is evidence that climate change impacts continue to distort the food production system and how the food is distributed. This eventually affects the living conditions and livelihoods of communities especially the small-scale food producers that rely mainly on rain-fed agriculture.

The 2023/24 farming season has come with several other challenges that also have a policy inclination such as the ongoing discussions around the repealing and replacing of the Plant Breeder's Rights Act of 2007 which seeks to outlaw unregistered varieties, such as traditional seeds, from being planted in Zambia. This will have a huge impact on the food system in Zambia and the small-scale farmers will be impacted more. The recently held Agroecology conference also ushered in a new dimension to the policy discourse in the country by strengthening the need to develop the National Agroecology Strategy which if put in place will create more space for deliberations on issues that focus on traditional seeds and foods.

Other constraints on Zambia's agricultural development are more technical. There are problems with Zambia's extension delivery system. If the farmers are not receiving adequate and effective extension service, no matter the number of inputs that they may have at their disposal they will not improve their productivity. There are no adequate extension service providers and those providing extension are doing so in silos and do not have the tools. There is a need for retraining to improve this aspect.

Despite the challenges small-scale farmers and food producers continue to face several achievements have been recorded in some parts of the country such as the maintenance of food production especially among those that are producing for household consumption as well as extra for sale. Farmers are working hard even if they are facing several challenges brought about by climate change impacts, inadequate financial resources and continuous land and environmental degradation.

Zambian small-scale farmers produce more than 80% of the actual food consumed in the country and this is the same in other countries within the region. By default, most of the small-scale farmers are producing with minimal external inputs. Those that are using much of the external inputs are mainly using inputs

they would have gotten from the farmer input support programme being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Zambian Traditional Seed and Food Festival is an annual event that is held alongside World Food Day which is usually celebrated in October to promote awareness of hunger and action for the future of food, people, and the planet. The Zambian Traditional Seed and Food Festival seeks to promote Zambian Culture and heritage in the form of seeds, food and traditions. It is an event that celebrates the richness of Zambian Cuisine and the diversity of seeds that are available but under-utilized.

Of late several eating places have mushroomed in Lusaka and other major towns that are promoting the consumption of traditional foods and this provides an opportunity for the establishment and growing of the consumer base for traditional food. However, there is a need for policy support so that an enabling environment is created even from the policymakers. It is also true to state that traditional small grains and foods play an important role in the food and nutrition security of families in Zambia. Currently, farmer seed varieties are not so popular among the farming communities due to several reasons some being inadequate access to appropriate seed varieties and adept quantities, unavailability of markets for the traditional small grains, inadequate policy support and low levels of production. This is also compounded by inadequate knowledge and skills among the food producers on the production of traditional seed varieties. Because of the inadequacies of the environment, the traditional seeds and foods are being appreciated less thereby eroding farmer's rights to own, share and sell the seeds within their communities as well as in other markets.

The 7 edition of the Zambia Traditional Food and Festival will be held on October 11th and 12th, 2024, at Munda Wanga Botanical Gardens in Chilanga District under the theme: "*Building a Healthy, Resilient Food and Seed System.*" The festival brings together civil society organizations, farmers, small-scale producers, private sector representatives, the government, and the general public to recognize the critical role that sustainable seed and food systems play at both national and regional levels. The festival presents an opportunity for food producers to share knowledge, skills and information about Agroecology as a sustainable food production option. The festival also brings together policymakers at all levels who see and share insights at the policy level on how policies can be made to provide the space for population of the traditional seed and food.

This year several private sector players will be invited to participate and show some of the processing and value addition that can be done to the traditional seed and food. This way participants in the festival will be able to get first hand information and exposure.

Objectives of the ZTSFF

1. Provide space for engaging different stakeholders and farmers involved in the sustainable food production chain in Zambia and the region.
2. Showcase Agroecology as a sustainable food production system that can help sharpen the future of food production for Zambia and the region.
3. Giving a platform for new ideas around the politics of seed and food in Zambia to be discussed with various scholars, activists and policymakers.
4. Facilitate the sharing, exchange and selling of traditional seeds, food and other products among participating stakeholders and farmers.

Outcomes

1. Well-informed stakeholders on the need for a more resilient and sustainable food production system to be put in place.
2. Policy influenced a paradigm shift for the future.
3. Exchange of diverse seed and food creating a wide spread of Agroecology.

Events

Day 1; 09 October 2024; Roadshow

Day 2; 10 October 2024: - Visit a Chilanga wellness center

Day 2:11 October 2024 - Farmer's dialogue

Day 3: 12 October 2024- Exhibitions, selling, exchange and sharing

Proposed Guest of Honor: - His Royal Highness Chief Nkambo from Masaiti District, the Chairperson of the House of Chiefs.

Other guests: Ministers of line Ministries, Office of the President, DC Chilanga, ZARI, SCCI, Department of Wildlife, National Food and Nutrition Commission, FAO, GIZ, Private sector players, UNZA, MU, CBU, NRDC, Agriculture Institute of Zambia.

It is expected that at least over 500 participants will be able to visit the festival.