



**COMACO**  
Community Markets for Conservation



## Replicating Success and Taking the First Step

Replicating a model like COMACO takes time. Mistakes have to be made to learn the right practices. You train and build up staff, put in infrastructure, engage farmers to learn new skills, scale their numbers, and grow the markets to drive the process. Then you assess. Is the model achieving its intended goal: reducing rural poverty in ways that keep forests and wildlife safe on a scale large enough to protect an ecosystem? If it is, then you might be ready to replicate.

After 18 years, we think we're there, and we're taking the model to an entirely new landscape around the Kafue National Park in Mumbwa and Itezhi-tezhi Districts. These districts were chosen because of their high level of rural poverty and food insecurity that threaten the second largest park in Africa with poaching and deforestation. With our market reach and growing value for the *It's Wild!* brand built around farmers and conservation, we have begun working with all 13 new chiefdoms in these districts to recruit another 20,000 small-scale farmers into the COMACO approach.

## Chief Mulendema Welcomes COMACO

For COMACO's replication to succeed, it is vital to have support of the local traditional leadership. His Royal Highness, Chief Mulendema, has extended friendship to COMACO warmly by offering land to build our new manufacturing hub. He explains, "We work closely with COMACO because there is a lot of deforestation here in Mumbwa, especially in my chiefdom. I have made a decree that there should be no charcoal-making in my chiefdom. This will be an uphill battle because it is a main source of income and many believe there is no alternative. I know that with the help of COMACO this will happen. We are excited about the new hub. It will create self-employment for many of our farmers. We struggle with markets and being able to sell our products. I can say that we are ready to learn and bring development to the area that will help in protecting the environment. We welcome COMACO."

## *In This Issue...*



Expanding our operational area



Support from traditional leaders



2 new Green Market Shops



New Community Conservation Areas



Radio program expansion



Income increase through beekeeping



Blog by the CEO

## Establishing a New Home for the Mumbwa Hub

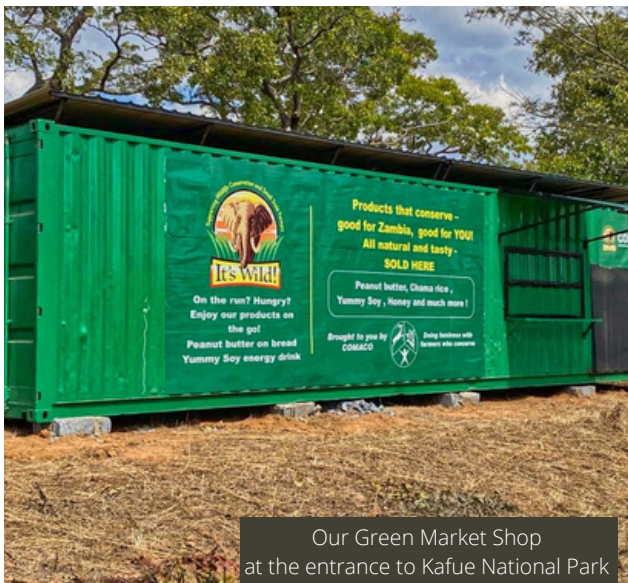
Chief Mulendema's offer to establish our hub in his communal area is a first for COMACO. We will be close to the farmers where we can work as one to combine solutions for livelihoods and the environment. We've started construction work and have taken measures to leave trees untouched, showing how commerce and conservation can go together. The surrounding villages have seen our commitment to make this happen.

The hub is located on the main road to Kafue National Park about 15km from Mumbwa town. It will have a 4000 ton-capacity warehouse, grading/deshelling/sorting line facility, facilities for other processing lines, staff offices, and a meeting room on a 2.1 hectare plot. It will not only be a location for our manufacturing, but a place where neighboring farmers and traditional leaders can come to visit and learn.



We are to roof level of construction at our new hub

## Expanding the Green Market Shops to Mumbwa



Our Green Market Shop at the entrance to Kafue National Park

Part of our replication process is to give residents of Mumbwa a taste of our *It's Wild!* products and their healthy, natural nutrition at an affordable price. It's our way of communicating the role COMACO plays in supporting local farmers to bring value to their efforts to conserve – both the soil for restoring nutrients and the land to restore forests and wildlife. Our answer was to introduce the Green Market Shops that have become so popular elsewhere in Zambia. With the help of Musika and Irish Aid, we have managed to introduce two in the area.

We wanted the shops to be located where consumers could easily access them to learn about COMACO and taste our products. To do this, we decided to convert old shipping containers into attractive shops that could be easily and quickly placed. One is located in town and the other near the entrance to the Kafue National Park where buses stop in route from western parts of the country to Lusaka. Slowly but surely, through our *It's Wild!* products, we're getting the message across that conservation needs everyone's help, and buying a product is one way to tell the farmer to keep conserving.

COMACO can be your call to action. Help us reach more farmers who can make conservation happen. Support our radio broadcasting that reaches over 250,000 farmers. Turn poachers into farmers. Replace chemical fertilizers with trees. Create products for better nutrition. Reward communities that keep forests and wildlife safe. There is so much we can do together but it takes support

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## 13 Chieftoms Sign Up for Carbon Markets

We know we're working against time. Much of Mumbwa's and Itezhi-tezhi's forests are already gone - lost to charcoal and illegal timber. We are in the last hour to help turn this crisis around. This is why COMACO came to these two districts.

We presented our approach to all 13 traditional leaders representing both districts. We explained our approach and sought their views over the destruction of Nature taking place in their chieftoms.

If these traditional rulers could help unify their communities to abandon practices that have caused so much destruction, our market could reinforce their efforts and make this change happen. We discussed such ideas with these leaders to gauge how we could work together. One such market is the [carbon market](#), made available through the new Forestry Act.

COMACO works closely with the Forestry Department to bridge the technical and market needs for communities to make these markets possible. This will need every local farmer's commitment to follow practices that reduce dependencies on charcoal or the need to clear land for more farmland - a big order but we've seen it work when the right skills and incentives are applied.

After a three week tour by two COMACO teams of carbon experts visiting each traditional leader, all 13 signed pledges to do everything possible to lead their communities to a better future with conservation and the markets that come with it. The meetings represented a potential turning point. Though only the first step, it is a critically important one that allows COMACO to move forward with the formal documentation for putting these pledges and agreements into a plan of action. We have now started this process that requires various technical information on the carbon stocks and historical rates of deforestation to set the bar for what must be achieved in the coming three years. More to report soon!



Chieftainess Kabulwebule dedicating land to be demarcated as a CCA



Bags of charcoal found along the road in Mumbwa

## Traditional Leaders Speak for Themselves



Chief Kaindu declaring his whole chieftom as a Community Conservation Area and charcoal free zone

**Chieftainess Muwezwa:** "I know COMACO is a local organization and some chiefs have spoken of the good works it is doing in their chieftoms during house of chiefs meetings. So, I am glad to welcome you into my chieftom. I hope you are here to stay."

Traditional leaders of Mumbwa and Itezhi-Tezhi are ready to fight for their natural resources and join together with government and COMACO to make conservation happen.

**Chief Musungwa:** "I am glad that finally, COMACO has come to my chieftom. I have heard of how you work in Eastern Province from fellow chiefs and the benefits they are getting from the carbon program. I was wondering why you were taking so long to reach us since you are already in the district. I am looking forward to my chieftom benefiting too."

**Chief Shezongo:** "We are tired of seeing people come here to cut down trees for timber with licenses from Lusaka. I am glad that with community forests we shall have control to prevent anyone from coming here. We shall place the entire Game Management Area where our chieftom resides under community forest."

**Chief Kaindu** also pledged his entire chieftom to be designated as a Community Conservation Area and declared it a charcoal free zone.



## Spreading Knowledge, Changing Lives - the Radio Way

Across the radio airwaves we broadcast COMACO Farm Talk from independent radio stations, bringing education and inspiration right into the homes of hundreds of thousands of small-scale farmers where we currently operate. They learn about the many skills we teach – how to become food sufficient, income secure and enjoy healthier lives with better nutrition and hygiene. They listen to their peers tell their stories. For many, this is how COMACO begins. With our expansion into Mumbwa and Itezhi-tezhi Districts, we intend to bring COMACO Farm Talk there too.

We've had very positive discussions with the District Commissioner of Mumbwa, Pamela Chipongwe, to develop a new radio station that will reach far and wide across the district.

Zambian government has provided the radio broadcasting equipment. Once installed, we hope the COMACO Farm Talk will soon begin. In Itezhi-tezhi a radio station exists, ready to broadcast. Meanwhile, we're raising funds to employ the staff to get the programs off the ground. This is one of the important steps we face as we replicate COMACO.



COMACO team meeting with District Commissioner of Mumbwa

## Beekeepers, Protectors of the Forests

Bees and beekeepers have a special relationship and a common interest, produce more honey. Beekeepers protect the forests so bees can make more honey. Why? Because we buy the wild, natural honey that beekeepers harvest at a premium price. This incentivizes them to put out fires and stops illegal tree cutting. Bees thrive, forests are safe and honey goes to the market.

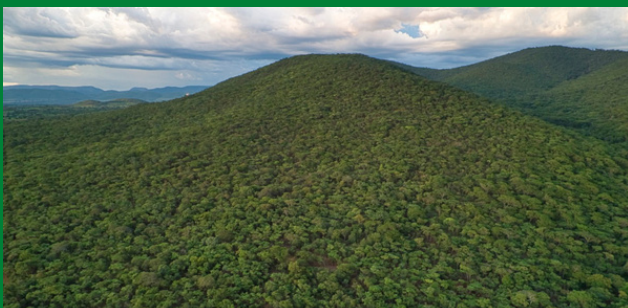
All across the landscapes where COMACO works, we offer poor farmers five free beehives to be part of this strategy. It's happening now in Mumbwa and Itezhi-tezhi where we recently installed 5000 hives with support from a UNDP GEF project and another 3000 soon to go up with help from Rotary International.

While helpful and a good start, this number of hives will not save these forests. We need many, many more. How we wish funds could be found to add another 10,000. We make this point as an earnest appeal so bees and beekeepers can keep their special relationship growing and protecting forests that are under so much threat.



Beekeepers harvesting honey from one of their many hives

## UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration



Our partner, Evergreen Global Alliance, recently launched a video featuring partners around the globe, talking about their restoration of nature efforts. Our CEO, Dale Lewis, was invited to be a guest and speak about the work COMACO is doing to restore landscapes and regenerate farmland here in Zambia. To see what Dale had to say follow the [link here](#).

## CEO Blog; Counting the Costs, Delivering the Benefits, Restoring the Land



Like most people, small-scale farmers respond to markets that offer the best price and typically follow the practices that markets promote. When COMACO began its relationship with farmers, we found wide-scale dependence on markets and practices that used chemical inputs, conventional tillage that disturbed soil structure, and a monoculture farming system that often promoted non-food crops. Short-term gains were realized, but costs to both the farmer and the land began to add up over time. Soils could not sustain higher yields without expensive inputs, families suffered increased risks of food and income insecurity as their soils became depleted, and in some cases, households were forced to clear unsettled land in search of healthier soils. The trend was a declining forest cover and an emerging “silent” economy based on charcoal and wildlife poaching to meet household needs.

Short-term commercial interests may have been satisfied for some, but for the small-scale farmer, change was needed to head-off the environmental costs that were making life hard. COMACO stepped in to fill this need. If small-scale farmers could learn the biology of soils as the basis for understanding and applying more sustainable agriculture, then farmers could be the solution to the growing problem of land degradation that was unfolding in Zambia. We took on this challenge by developing market incentives for farmers who made the change and the *It's Wild!* brand was born to help drive farmers commitment to farm with nature, not against it

Over 230,000 small-scale farmers are seeing the benefits of this approach today. It combines crop residue protection from fire and livestock grazing, minimum tillage, maize rotation with legumes, and inter-cropping with special trees that help pump up water and minerals to keep crops healthy. Underneath the soil surface a real transformation is taking place as living microbes are reestablishing the nutrient cycles so critical for feeding crops. We know this as we analyze and compare soil nutrients and nutrient content in crops for fields farmed in this way versus fields farmed with chemicals. Above the ground, farmers are transforming as well, organizing themselves into cooperatives to help farmers learn together to encourage the adoption of these new practices for higher yields and income.

[To continue reading this blog please click here](#)

## Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!

If you have been following along with us for the past several months you are aware that we have been working hard to raise funds for the purchasing of new machinery to help with our soy piece production. We are excited to announce that we have reached 100% of our goal! Thank you to every single person who donated, every dollar amount helped. The purchase of this machinery will bring additional income benefits to the 250,000 small farmers under COMACO and helps incentivize farming practices that lead to healthier soils, less need to cut trees in forests, and less wildlife poaching.

