



# Community Markets for Food Security and Alternative Livelihoods

## A Case Study

Social Protection

A CARE International in Zambia Learning Product

2009

### CARE Zambia's work in Social Protection

Since 2004, CARE Zambia has been working through a Program Partnership Agreement (PPA) with the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) to implement a number of Social Protection projects, aimed at increasing the capacity of institutions and the most vulnerable in society to better manage risk associated with food insecurity, destitution and HIV and AIDS.

The PPA programme reflects CARE International's vision which *"seeks a world of hope, tolerance and social justice where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security"*.

An estimated 64% of Zambians are poor, mostly living in rural areas (Central Statistics Office 2007) on less than US\$ 1 per day. The PPA programme has focused on addressing this through a Social Protection agenda that supports both the achievement of Millennium Development Goals one, two and six, and the Government of Zambia's Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP).

In this context, CARE Zambia regards Social Protection as a holistic approach to protecting and promoting the livelihoods and welfare of vulnerable groups through coordinated policies and transfer mechanisms such as cash, physical resources, training and in-kind contributions. The vulnerable groups targeted include:

- Low capacity households including widows, the disabled, the old, and other marginalized, low-income households, and informal sector operators;
- Incapacitated households with no self-help potential, including mainly households affected by HIV/AIDS;
- Child-headed households and street children

As part of the PPA, a series of learning products have been developed as a means of sharing knowledge and promoting greater understanding with a wide spectrum of stakeholders including policy makers, Government, donors, and civil society.

### COMACO and CARE – Background to a Partnership

The Wildlife Conservation Society of Zambia (WCS) has worked in the catchment areas of Lundazi and Chama districts in the Luangwa Valley, Eastern Province for over two years. This work resulted in the development of Community Markets for Conservation (COMACO), a unique approach to addressing rural poverty and environmental degradation.

In 2005, results from COMACO provided CARE/DFID with robust evidence that the problems of hunger, poverty and environmental conservation could be solved locally. The vulnerable and food insecure communities can be structured to own, lead and participate in fair market commercial opportunities, which are financially self-sustaining and environmentally beneficial. In addition, COMACO further enhanced food security through actively encouraging non-commercial food production and allied income-generating activities.

*COMLIVE provided CARE/DFID with a unique opportunity to strategically enhance a self-sustaining business model for rural development, linking private sector markets, organic agricultural production, alternative livelihoods and natural resource management in a way that could effectively address the core needs of poor, vulnerable and food insecure families.*

### Community Markets for Food Security and Alternative Livelihoods (COMLIVE)

One of the specific mechanisms under the PPA is the *Partnership Fund for Project Grants (PF)* whereby CARE identified and supported specific NGOs in the implementation of projects which 'seek to reduce poverty via increased local socio-economic security'. This CARE Case Study details the experiences of one such PF project, Community Markets for Food Security and Alternative Livelihoods (COMLIVE), offering a concise overview of its rationale, impact and best practices to date.

COMLIVE specifically contributed to the empowerment of Low Capacity Households (LCHs), strengthening their ability to meet their basic needs via enhancement of household food security and livelihood opportunities.

Given COMLIVE-COMACO's wider remit inter-linking commercial and environmental interest with those of addressing basic needs, the Project provides an

exemplary model for widening the basic concept of 'designing best-practice support mechanisms for LHCs'.

Funding through COMLIVE helped strengthen and develop the over-all viability of the COMACO development model in a number of inter-linked programmatic areas, all of which are key to its ongoing success and sustainability.

### COMACO-COMLIVE Project Goal

The goal for the project was to sustain community-wide liveable incomes and household food needs through trade incentives that drive land-use practices supportive of well-managed natural resources set within a large, geographically rural, landscape.

#### Activities:

- Increase numbers of Producer Groups
- Establish a Producer Group organisational structure and enhanced technical skills base
- Expand numbers of extension trainers and their training remit

#### Outcomes:

- COMACO's farming methods and allied conservation and environmental objectives promoted and supported Poor, food insecure families to achieve a sustainable production of diverse commodities that support food security and increased income.
- Health and well-being, HIV-AIDS and gender issues are promoted at community & household levels

### COMACO – The Key Principles

The project focused on the key principles of;

- Markets drive land use practices and shape the livelihood characteristics of rural communities
- Farmers unable to feed their families or meet basic family needs are more apt to contribute to natural resource degradation and become exploited by unfair trade practices
- Private sector contributes to improved rural livelihoods when local producers have a significant share in the market guided by land use plans that support natural resource management
- Poverty and hunger contribute to broken families, increased health risks and dysfunctional communities
- In general, rural communities have a poor understanding of the longer term relationships between markets and natural resource

management and their influence on rural livelihoods

The contextual focus for this work was primarily centred upon producer Groups (PGs), the community farming collectives which play a pivotal role in realising project objectives and outputs. Without active, committed and skilled PGs, COMACO's commercial, food security and livelihood components, as well as related health, environmental and conservation initiatives, could not be efficiently implemented, or sustained.

### Implementation Strategies – building a viable shareholder-owned cooperative

COMACO's strategies for implementing project activities respond to the above principles, operating largely around a community shareholder-owned company, the Conservation Farmer and Wildlife Produce Trading Centre (CTC).

The CTC draws its board members from different levels of society and professions, including the producers themselves, to help fulfil the CTC's mandate to build a better life for rural people around trade and conservation. Board members and other collaborating partners; District

Councils, Agriculture/Forestry/Health Departments, Community Resources Boards, Msekera Agricultural Research Station and others cooperate to develop commercially successful products from commodities produced by the participating communities. Some of the cooperating partners also have shares in the CTC, providing an extra incentive to ensure the success of the project. The CTC funnels profits into community shareholders and offers competitive prices for these commodities, providing producers adopt organic farming and land use practices that lead to more sustainable solutions for income, food security, and conservation.

Via a network of trading depots located in rural areas, producer group members market and receive direct payment for their produce.

*"Food security is commonly said to exist when people at all times have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." GRZ 5th National Development Plan, chapter 22, 2005*

### It's Wild!

COMACO processes the organic crops its members produce into higher-valued packaged products with its own branded trademark label, *It's Wild!*, and markets them to high-end urban markets to help leverage better producer prices. Currently demand for *It's Wild!* products outstrip existing supply.

Currently, COMACO produces and markets organically certified polished and brown rice, soya beans, honey, peanut butter, HEPS (High Energy Protein Supplement) and organic cotton.

### CTC Depots

CTC depots are not just delivery points, they also serve as Partner Group community centres which provide training in appropriate livelihood skills, health and well-being issues, whilst coordinating relevant information about market opportunities, prices, improved land use practices and production technologies

### Towards a sustainable and self-financing model for rural development

If the COMACO model of development is to be sustainable it must become self-financing, itself dependent upon a number of synergistic links being forged and successfully maintained - synergies between beneficiaries, agriculture, markets, prices and natural resource management, built-upon effective governance structures that focus on benefiting households lacking basic income and food requirements.

A basic and proven tenet of the model is that it is possible to forge such linkages via:

- *Economic incentives* that encourage families to produce the right ecological mix of farmed commodities for meeting both income and food needs
- *Business plans* that achieve profitability needed to sustain these incentives
- *Effective extension support* guided by land use plans to maintain increased yields of these commodities
- *An equitable power-sharing arrangement* that unites Producer Groups into local cooperatives for improved representation on a company board with their trading and developmental partners at the District level.

### COMLIVE and Producer Groups – Strengthening and Enhancing the COMACO Model

As already noted, a major aim of COMLIVE was to help strengthen the COMACO model of rural development by



COMACO economically benefits not only its primary members, but the wider community as well. Below, organic rice being cleaned and sorted prior to despatch at the main CTC depot in Lundazi by local women



enhancing the abilities of community level Producer Groups (PGs) to contribute effectively in the development, management and maintenance of the Project.

Without pro-active, committed and technically proficient PGs, there can be no meaningful, collective focus for farmers at the community level, nor the necessary business dialogue and land-use planning between producer, extension worker, trader and development partners the model requires. COMACO's commercial, food security and livelihood components, as well as related health, environmental and conservation outcomes, could not be fully realised, sustained, or further expanded, without this pivotal Project component fulfilling its mandate effectively.

## Expanding the Numbers

At COMLIVE's commencement in February 2006, the numbers of Pgs were insufficient to adequately fulfil their mandates. Similarly, the numbers of extension workers in the field were too few to effectively deliver the required levels of technical input and support over the geographical area of the Project. Since then there has been a consistent and notable growth in PG numbers, with COMACO now working with 951 PGs associated with Lundazi CTC, approximately 450 with Mambwe CTC, and 350 with the Feira CTC.

What has proved more difficult to establish are ventures where a number of Pgs work together as a unified cooperative. As of June 2008, although 18 cooperatives had been formed, only 10 of these were legally registered and operational. Active cooperatives are being utilised as pilot and research programmes to help gauge whether the potential benefits of such a model, its running and its remit are all fully understood by PG members. There is also a need for cooperatives to meet regularly and establish links with local partners, especially Community Resource Boards, to develop incentives to help drive the scheme forward.

Based in and around the 37 hub CTC Depots now situated throughout the Project area, are currently 16 Extension Officers. Although this number is greater than initially envisaged in early 2006, further additions are still needed, particularly in light of the ever expanding area COMACO now covers. Extension Officers have, however, successfully trained up local volunteer community trainers, who together with lead farmers within the PGs, help to maintain the ongoing level of support and technical transfer inputs needed.

## The Right Balance

*"Remember, COMACO and the CTC depots operate in a competitive commercial environment, so to ensure 'brand loyalty' with our farmers, it is essential to offer them better market opportunities [income] than they would get from another bulk purchaser. So it is essential to link competitive price, and a guaranteed market, with the benefits gained through membership and in keeping to agreed outputs". COMACO Extension Officer, Lundazi.*

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## Improving Project Organisation and Planning

At project beginning the organisational and planning structures in place were insufficiently developed or cohesive enough to effectively manage the complex and multi-sectoral nature of COMACO's development model.

Although COMLIVE inputs have helped rectify this situation across-the-board, its particular focus on PGs has seen the establishment of cogent organisational structures, demarcating their roles and responsibilities, while clarifying their (inter-active) relationships to the wider COMACO organisation. Such structures, under-pinned by relevant training and ongoing workshops, have greatly contributed to the advancement of, and commitment to, COMACO's livelihoods and natural resource models at PG and community level, while enhancing grass-roots participation in its management and

## Setting Outputs and Targets

A key objective in the demarcation of roles and responsibilities was to agree on specific outputs and targets which help guarantee adherence to the COMACO model. These range from

- Setting a target of 75% of PGs committed to marketing their produce exclusively with COMACO via their local CTC depot
- Meeting seed bank collection requirements
- Working towards maintaining sufficient food surpluses and investing 10% of community funds (raised in conjunction with other local partners) in furthering livelihood initiatives in line with agreed local land use planning.



*This newly certified organically compliant field will be sown with soya seed, with a forecast yield of half a metric tonne*

### Maintaining the Balance of Commercial and non-commercial Crops

To further encourage non-commercial production, primary food crops, such as maize, sorghum and cassava, are not included as cash crops, the rationale being the continuing work toward prioritising community wide household food security and establishing sustainable community based food reserves. Only when these are met, then such crops may well be grown on a commercial basis.

### Ensuring Food Security and Diversity of Income Generating Livelihood Strategies

Other outputs and targets help ensure that food security and increased income is achieved through a sustainable mix of commercial farming and a diversity of 'not for market' crops, linked to a portfolio of alternative livelihood strategies. For example, 80% of selected group members should work towards achieving the sustainable production of an "ecological mix" of crops while 90% are expected to achieve food security with minimum reliance on pesticides and fertilizers. Attaining such an "mix" of household crops is an important factor if food security is to be achieved, not only in terms of nutrition, but to better cope with adverse weather conditions. The floods of 2007–08 provided a stark 'lesson learned' in this respect, for although there was a high level of crop failure, in households where there was a diversification in the

types of crops sown, overall food security continued to be maintained.

### What COMACO Provides

PGs expect ongoing commercial technical inputs and support, plus skill extensions and resource inputs to diversify and maximise other livelihood opportunities. COMACO also offer guaranteed competitive prices, a consistent market for produce and market pricing information and transport to local CTCs from their hub depots.

An important benefit to producers are COMACO Seed Support Banks. Farmers are encouraged to collect seeds which are stored (banked) in their nearest depot, to be 'borrowed' by other farmers and then paid back in kind plus interest. A Seed Bank thus provides for two

### Seed Banks

*"We now have seed that was difficult and expensive to find and usually this is early maturing seed. We are given seed that is paid back in form of seed itself with a 50% more of what you got. This is important, since we are assured that we have a seed bank and other old and new members are able to benefit." COMACO farmer, Lundazi.*



important inputs: 'free' access to seed and the stock-piling 'banking' of seed for both regular production needs and emergencies. The main crops grown utilising this seed banking system include rice, maize, cassava, groundnuts and vegetables, thereby supporting both commercial and non-commercial production needs.

As an example of the volume of seed loans, at Chitungula a total of 3,500 MT of rice seed has been distributed to 440 beneficiaries from 2005 to 2008, and at Zokwe 1160 MT of rice seed benefited 77 farmers in 2007/08.

## COMACO-COMLIVE: Conservation Farming, Food Security, Livelihoods, and the Environment

**Creating a Beneficial Rural Synergy:** As organic farming methods – known as Conservation Farming – are used both commercially and non-commercially, a synergy of inter-linked beneficial outcomes is created. Not only is food security enhanced via income generated by commercial crops, especially important during the seasonal 'hunger gap' in early Summer, but the methods used also deliver benefits across the board in terms of crop yields and their nutritional value. In addition, the 'dry-farming' techniques utilised demand less water and are thus more able to cope with periods of drought while also being environmentally beneficial.

*'dry-farming' techniques utilised demand less water and are thus more able to cope with periods of drought*

**Organic Compliance – a long-term commitment:** Given the socio-economic insecurity and vulnerability which has largely governed the lives of local communities, their acceptance and support of organic farming, given, the four year period involved before crops can be certified as being 'Organically Compliant', says much about the veracity of the COMACO model and the benefits its members derive from membership

**Poacher Transformation – Increased Conservation:** Destructive dependence on natural resources, such as wildlife, forestry and fisheries, may involve a relatively small portion of the households in a community but the continued rate of extraction can, if it remains unchecked, deplete resources for future generations or needs.

Integral to the conservation aspects of the Project is the "Poacher Transformation" project, known poachers are invited to abandon illegal hunting in exchange for training in varied livelihood skills and input support to adopt alternative, better paying livelihoods. The Project has, over the years, successfully demonstrated that most illegal hunters engage in this livelihood because they lack viable alternative means to support their families and that transforming them to adopt legal means of income generation is a more cost-effective way of

reducing poaching than reliance on law enforcement. Here again, inputs from COMLIVE have helped to strengthen commitment and adherence to the programme by ex-poachers via increased skills transference and technical support. While some transformed poachers have benefited from the trade and training benefits more than others, it has been estimated that only some 6% have left the programme to return to poaching, while the majority have seen a steady increase in income levels to levels exceeding K3 million.

*Inputs from COMLIVE have helped to strengthen commitment and adherence to the programme by ex-poachers via increased skills transference and technical support*

## Income, Food Security and Livelihood Diversification – Meeting Output Targets

Although at the time of writing (December 2008) the results from an in-depth M&E survey of COMACO-COMLIVE held in November 2008 were still being analysed and collated, mid-year 2008 and allied reports suggest that, overall, outputs and targets were then being met. Such conclusions will, of course, need to be set against the findings of the November survey before a detailed quantitative picture can be drawn. However, allied qualitative inputs from both COMACO, CTC and Extension Officers, PGs and individual farmers tend to correlate and support the figures that are, at present, available.

As the following charts indicate, the COMACO Project, assisted by COMLIVE, over its 2 year life span, has continued to fulfil its mandates while delivering concomitant quantitative outputs. Further, its commitment to gender equality, health and well-being, especially with regard to HIV and AIDS, continues to be situated at the contextual heart of the Project.

**Combo Strategies:** The various combos presented below show possible mixes of produce and incomes derived from them.

Break-down of annual averaged yields per household, production amounts, income and required inputs Note under 'Comments' the strategic mix of seed collection and food reserved				
COMACO-supported market benefits	Annual production	Annual Kwacha income	Input needs	Comments
Typical yields per household				
rice	1125 kg	787,500	initial seeds on recovery basis	1/3 used for next year's seed and food, 1.5 lima

shelled ground-nuts	240 kgs	720,000	initial seeds on recovery basis	40 kgs reserved for food and next year's seed, 1 lima
soybeans	500 kgs	425,000	initial seeds on recovery basis	all seeds sold except for 20 kg next year planting, 2 limas
organic cotton	250 kgs	300,000	cotton seeds required each year	various secondary crops that attract insects, may require commercial organic pesticide
honey	40 kgs	160,000	nil	assumes two active log hives
poultry	15 birds	180,000	vaccines	birds are vaccinated against Newcastle's disease at K750/bird

Combo strategies (examples)	Kwacha
rice + groundnuts + honey	1,667,500
soybeans + org cotton + honey + poultry	1,065,000
groundnuts + honey + poultry	1,060,000

**Alternative Livelihoods Diversification and Increased Female Agency:** The acquisition of new skills and the resultant diversification of livelihood opportunities has enabled households to benefit both commercially and domestically, as the following chart, which plots both commercial and non-commercial activities, aptly demonstrates. It should also be noted that women form the large percentage of participants, excepting carpentry and banana cultivation.

Summary of COMACO producer groups as of June 2008 showing range of livelihood mix, active and non-active producer PGs, overall membership numbers and gender disaggregation					
Group Type groups	# of groups	# of active members	# of group	Total Male	Total Female
CF	436	314	5,968	2,732	3,236
Cassava	34	32	171	104	93
Bee keeping	249	181	2,382	1,492	890
Vegetable production	53	23	619	327	292
Carpentry	66	53	319	319	0
Goat production	33	33	212	139	73
Banana production	3	3	27	21	6
Fish farming	74	68	1,062	541	523
Poultry	57	49	519	248	271

## Health, Well Being, HIV and AIDS

Whether increased incomes and livelihood diversity have increased health in more than 50% of target households as specified, is an outcome which has, as yet, not been fully quantitatively measured. Indications from ongoing findings do however, suggest that this target figure has been surpassed. Certainly the majority of participating households claim that incidence of ill-health have declined markedly, which they attribute to better diet, more cash income, but also to health and hygiene information and workshops provided by outreach workers via the local CTCs.

**HIV and AIDS:** Similarly, better information networks and workshops have improved coping with HIV-AIDS, both in terms of a better appreciation of linkages to food insecurity and vulnerability, and in providing forums whereby PLHAs can be now be better helped and supported by their communities. In terms of farming, earlier studies by WCS suggested PLHAs would be better able to grow soybean than other more labour intensive crops, and this has proved the case. Soybean is now a much preferred alternative that is easy to grow and offers potential benefits for home producer, as a low-cost, high protein food source.

*PLHAs would be better able to grow soybean than other more labour intensive crops*

## Food Relief – Decreasing its need, Increasing its effectiveness

In spite of successes, some farmers still experience a 'hunger gap' period and seek assistance from WFP. The need for such assistance is, however, according to beneficiaries, in decline amongst their members, as is the 'dependency culture' associated with such assistance. Through a proactive approach of combining support of local markets, capacity building, food aid and social transfers, the need and expense of food aid can be significantly decreased through the development of local market mechanisms. In this regard, COMACO sells its High Energy Protein Supplement to the World Food Programme (WFP), who has partnered with COMACO to help distribute food in times of emergency, such as the floods in 2007 and to help combat food insecurity through its Food-for-Assets programme. This has proven to be a successful relationship because COMACO has been able to leverage its extensive infrastructure in Luangwa Valley to quickly deliver food. However, the cost of providing food aid to the region as a whole remains substantial, with an estimated overall economic cost 2001-2008 in the Luangwa Valley of US\$13 million. But against this should be set by the fact that a projected 250,000 people in the Project area, directly or indirectly, draw benefit from COMACO's US\$2 million annual turnover.

## Towards New Paradigms for Development

By providing proper incentives, COMLIVE/COMACO has shown that a competitive environment can be nurtured and leveraged to facilitate the delivery of critical needs in rural regions of Zambia, by creating a business model delivering high quality products which provides benefits and increased services to the most vulnerable without causing detrimental effects to their environment. Moreover, developing basic infrastructure and necessary capacity to assist communities to achieve food and income security, without jeopardizing their natural resources, is a public good that

governments are best served in fostering through appropriate policies and legislation. The Zambian Government's work in this and other regards via its 5th National Development Plan, is a most definite step in the right direction. If it is to properly fulfil its developmental function, however, such a programme needs to knit into and enhance the overall objective of reducing food insecurity. Given COMACO'S unique achievements in this field, perhaps it is here that such an assistance programme might well flourish, playing its part in generating a widespread and lasting positive impact on Low Income Households in the Luangwa Valley and then elsewhere in Zambia.

*End Note:* Functional local markets revitalize rural livelihoods as they provide an opportunity for exchange of goods and services. Through the Community Markets for Alternative Livelihoods (COMLIVE) project, two intervention districts were engaged in the promotion of local markets and natural resource management for sustainable livelihoods. By developing basic infrastructure and necessary capacity to assist communities to achieve food and income security, without jeopardizing their natural resources, interventions under COMLIVE form a public good which help rural communities to mitigate the impact of poverty. In order to have sustainable impact under social protection, these types of interventions require government support through appropriate policies and legislation to effectively scale up. The project therefore demonstrated that support to viable local markets and natural resource management contributes to strengthening a community's resistance to vulnerability. Success at this stage on the vulnerability scale helps build a barrier to stop communities from falling back into more vulnerable situations.