



DENISE MADIRO



1. Hello Denise, could you tell us about your life story ?

I am Zambian, I was born in the Southern Province of Zambia on our late father's ranch Ibamba which is within walking distance of the Kafue River. We grew up in a small village called Maala. We were privileged to have had a father who valued education and made sure that he sent us to good schools even when it meant chartering a plane across the border to Zimbabwe.

2. You have been very active for years in beekeeping. What moved you from a managerial position into farming and beekeeping, creating Nzatu with your sister Gwen ?

It started off with us looking for an easier way for our families to earn an income on the farm without there being too much management. The more we understood how amazing these little social insects were the more we were motivated and interested. We realised that there was much need to close the gap between the farmer and the market. We also recognised that for the honey to meet international standards we needed to offer training and support in this area and that is when I started working together with a young entrepreneur who trained me in basic beekeeping practices. Taking advantage of my linguistic abilities to speak five Zambian languages it was easy for me to pass on this knowledge to the communities in the rural areas. This is a comfortable space for me as my early childhood was in the village so I can understand the challenges and struggles the communities face. I realised that this was my calling and decided to dedicate my time completely to this field, it gives me purpose and fulfilment.

3. How do you think regenerative agriculture can bring tangible and sustainable advantages to local farmers, as opposed to industrial farming ?

Firstly, regenerative methods are more affordable and sustainable. We see this more especially with our coffee farmers who use cow, goat and chicken dung with compost to make organic fertilizer. The farmers do not need to worry about transport costs to move inputs. Promoting intercropping with leguminous plants enhances soil nutrients as well as creating diverse income streams. When farmers practice regenerative methods, they qualify for organic certifications that fetch a premium on the international markets. In summary, it is cheaper to produce, while providing the farmer with a higher margin.

4. Can you tell us few stories from the communities with whom you work ?

Through our training and creating the bridge to market we see rural livelihoods being changed. Farmers build better houses, send their children to schools and universities all of which supports our campaign to reduce early teen pregnancies and marriages. We are proud to report that from our training held in Butunduzi Uganda, we had 425 youth learn how to make candles from beeswax, this has now been incorporated into the extracurricular activities at Wilma Fox School. How amazing it is to create a candle, a source of light as well as an entrepreneurial opportunity to sell them at airports to support education expenses such as books and uniforms. All of this is done in a fun way, but most importantly, demonstrates the impact that protecting biodiversity can have on the local community.

5. Are there different methods of beekeeping ? What is Nzatu's strategy for the future ?

Beekeeping practices have been around for centuries. Evidence is found in fossils and in rock paintings. Our ancestors used honey for healing and spiritual well-being, symbolizing truth and purity. We have found that in most parts of Africa, the traditional methods of the basket weave or hollow drums are still being used, which has been passed down for generations. Although there is nothing wrong with this method, it compromises on yield as well as the quality, sometimes the entire hive has to be destroyed to harvest the honey. Nzatu would like to offer an alternative by providing modern beehives that will incorporate trappers to allow for harvest of other by-products such as propolis and pollen. The interesting fact is that propolis fetches a higher price than honey. Eventually with the right support, we would like to encourage our farmers to harvest all by-products.

6. How do you think that regenerative agriculture and local farmers can help in protecting Africa's precious wildlife ?

A lot of the wrongdoings are caused by poverty. If communities are empowered with tools to generate an income, they will turn away from the destructive practices that hurt our environment and wildlife. The large deforestation problem that we face in Sub Sub-Saharan Africa is caused by charcoal burning. A bag of charcoal is sold at an equivalent of \$7.50, each tree gives about two bags. A whole tree is lost for \$15 whereas if a hive is placed in a tree the honey produced can fetch up to \$60 a year, every year. This is 4 times more than charcoal. The same reasoning applies to poaching. By encouraging conservation through training sessions with our conservation partners such as the Global Conservation Corps (GCC), we can educate the youth on the importance of regenerative agriculture, conservation and biodiversity. This shows them how one can earn an alternative source of income.

7. Tell us more about the field work that you do as Nzatu, to train farmers and bridge them to markets

Most of the training that we conduct is done in deep rural areas. Sometimes the drives can be up to 7 hours a day. We also visit coffee processing plants to make sure that we understand the challenges at the finish line so that we are better able to fix issues from the beginning. Our basis covers quality control to ensure that our farmers produce a satisfying crop that meets international certifications. This way, we help the farmers meet the expected quality. We have an online brochure that carries each farmer's story, from various regions so the buyers can relate and connect with the product that they purchase. In some cases, we offer training on avocado grafting to improve the indigenous seedlings to a better hybrid such as Haas, which has higher demand internationally. Most importantly, we demonstrate the synergy between agroforestry and beekeeping.

8. What are the major challenges that you face on the field while developing the bridge to markets ?

Not having enough equipment to empower the farmers, and the resources to do more. Lack of transportation to move products from rural areas to town. Ideally, we would love to have a 2-hectare model farm that acts as a training centre as well as a demonstration of how our regenerative methodology may be implemented to ensure biodiversity protection and climate resilience. Lack of financial resources to improve on-field processing, packaging and shipping to market.

9. Which other agricultural products do you see in Nzatu's future?

We would like to venture into seaweed and Moringa trees that attract carbon credits, as well as products such as sweet potatoes and cassava. Our rural farmers are very hardworking, the women and children in particular stand by the side of the road competing for travellers to buy their agricultural produce. The unsold produce often goes to waste. We would like to create a bridge to markets for all farmers if they can practice the Nzatu methodology.

10. What message would you like our readers to take home?

I would like to close off by using my late mother's wise words " When putting out a fire, one doesn't ask if the water is clean or dirty". The 'dirty' bills that have been circulated from hand to hand by marketers have the same value and serve the same purpose as the bills earned by the working class. We all have similar fires to put out - school fees, food on the table, taking care of our families. Let us not overlook our disadvantaged communities who sometimes make up 70% of the population. Rather, let us EQUIP so we can change Africa by not giving handouts but by EMPOWERING families and giving them a fair chance to lift themselves up through their hard work.

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