DENISE MADIRO
nzatu
FOOD GROUP

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

Certainly. My life journey is deeply connected to Zambia's Southern Province. I was born on my father's then ranch, Ibamba, nestled near the majestic Kafue River. Growing up in Maala village provided a unique blend of simplicity and resilience. I'm grateful to my father for his strong emphasis on education; he ensured that we went to school even if it meant crossing the border to Zimbabwe underscoring the value he placed on learning and personal development.

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 ?

We wanted a less capital intensive activity for our families to earn on the farm as opposed to other farming methods. We sought a farming approach that wasn't just financially viable but also environmentally and socially conscious. As we discovered the intricate world of bees and their vital role in ecosystems ignited our passion. We soon recognized the gap between farmers and markets, realizing the importance of training for honey to meet global standards. Collaborating with a young entrepreneur, I received basic beekeeping training. Taking advantage of my ability to speak five Zambian languages sharing this knowledge with rural communities became natural and made it easier for me to pass on the knowledge. Growing up in the village gave me insight into community challenges, leading me to realize my purpose and fulfilment.

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

Regenerative methods offer both affordability and sustainability. For instance, our coffee farmers utilize cow, goat, and chicken dung along with compost to create organic fertilizer, reducing transport costs. Intercropping with leguminous plants not only enriches soil nutrients but also diversifies income streams. Moreover, adopting regenerative practices qualifies for organic certifications fetching premium prices in international markets. In essence these methods not only cut costs but also boost income levels.

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

Our transformative work in communities including empowering farmers, improving livelihoods, and addressing social challenges is exemplified in Butunduzi, Uganda. During our training sessions 425 youth learned to make candles from beeswax a by-product of honey. This initiative integrated into Wilma Fox School's extracurricular activities combines education, income generation, and environmental awareness showcasing the tangible impact of community-driven initiatives and sustainable practices.

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

Beekeeping has a long history evidenced by rock paintings with honey used traditionally for healing and spiritual purposes symbolizing truth and purity. In many parts of Africa traditional methods like basket weave or hollow drums persist passed down through generations. While effective, these methods can compromise yield and quality sometimes requiring hive destruction for honey harvesting. NZATU seeks to introduce modern beehives with trappers for harvesting valuable by-products.

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

Poverty often leads to harmful practices that impact our environment and wildlife. In Sub-Saharan Africa charcoal burning contributes significantly to deforestation. A bag of charcoal sells for around $7.50 and it takes just one tree to make two bags sold for a total of $15. In contrast placing a beehive in a tree can yield honey worth up to $60 in a year four times more than charcoal. This economic potential also applies to poachers; by promoting conservation and alternative income sources through partnerships like the Global Conservation Corps (GCC) we can educate youth on the value of regenerative agriculture conservation, and biodiversity.

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

We conduct most of our training in remote rural areas sometimes requiring up to 7 hours of travel per day. We also visit coffee processing plants to understand challenges first hand and address them proactively. Our training emphasizes quality control measures ensuring farmers meet international standards and certifications. Additionally, we offer training on avocado grafting to improve indigenous seedlings highlighting the synergy between agroforestry and beekeeping.

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

The major difficulties and concerns we face in the field and market development are the insufficient equipment to empower farmers and limited resources for expansion. Additionally, the lack of transportation infrastructure hampers the movement of products from rural areas to urban markets. Ideally, we aim to establish a model farm with a training centre to showcase our regenerative agriculture, conservation and biodiversity methods on a 2-hectare plot. However, the shortage of financial resources poses a challenge in improving packaging and shipping for market distribution.

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

Looking ahead, NZATU aims to diversify into products like seaweed, moringa trees, cow peas, sweet potatoes, and cassava, aligning with our ethos of sustainable agriculture and community empowerment. Dedicated rural farmers especially women and children work tirelessly to sell their agricultural produce by the roadside competing for travellers' attention. Unfortunately, much of this produce often goes to waste. By creating bridges for farmers to access markets and adopt our methodology we strive to create a resilient agricultural landscape that benefits both farmers and the environment.

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

I'd like to conclude with a quote from my late mother which reflects a powerful message: "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 marketeers holds equal value when it comes to fulfilling essential needs like paying for education, providing food and supporting our families. We all have similar fires to put out, let us not overlook our disadvantaged communities who sometimes make up 70% of the population but let's rather EQUIP and EMPOWER to overcome challenges and create lasting change through hard work resilience and sustainable practices. Thank you for your support and commitment to a brighter more sustainable future for Africa.

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