5-DAY SOLWEZI TRIP BRIEF REPORT JANUARY 2016:

INTRODUCTION:

The trip came as a result of Mr. Joshua Lungu’s keen interest to collaborate with The Zambian Community Action on Poverty and Environment (COPE) Association. He was mainly fascinated by the two wheel tractor programme that COPE operates. He and the other family members work on a very good 150 hectares piece of land, but like most of Zambian folks based in the rural areas, lack basic farming implements such as cattle, let alone, a two wheel tractor.

After numerous correspondences between COPE-Zambia Director, Mr. George Sherman and Mr. Joshua Lungu through the Internet, another COPE-Zambia Director, Mr. Victor Phiri was sanctioned to undertake a fact-finding mission to Solwezi District.

OBJECTIVES OF THE TRIP:

The main objectives of the trip was basically anchored on the following;

1. To meet Mr. Joshua Lungu personally so as to understand exactly what his concerns and interests were.
2. To find out from him if he is willing to volunteer for COPE-Zambia projects in Solwezi District.
3. Find out how he can put the two wheel tractor into good use if he is given one.
4. Find out how he was going about organizing his cooperative society around his farm.
5. To acquaint and orient Mr. Joshua Lungu about about COPE-Zambia and its operations and programmes.
6. To visit Mr. Joshua Lungu’s family farm as well as meet with other two areas.
7. Find out about the Solwezi District itself, its economic and farming activities at the moment and 10 years from now.
8. Finally, to identify and plan other viable sustainable activities that can be undertaken in the District.

GEOPOLITICAL POSITION OF SOLWEZI DISTRICT IN ZAMBIA:

Solwezi District is situated in the North-Western province of Zambia. It is actually the first Town in the province as you are just coming from Lusaka through to the copper belt province of Zambia from Chingola Town. Solwezi is surrounded by other Towns as well such as Kasempa, Mwinilunga, Ekeleenge, and Mufunbwe, respectively.

Going further to the Western side Solwezi links the following Towns; Kabompo, Zambezi, and finally Chavuma District which basically share the border with The state of Angola.

Of all these Towns, Solwezi is strategically located because it is at the centre and links all of them and besides, Solwezi has some basic developed infrastructure in place such as Airport and road networks, although they are not in very good shape.
For the last five years or so, Solwezi District has become an economic power house not only in the North-Western province, but Zambia as a whole due to mushrooming of mining and other related companies. So far three mining giants are in full operational mode such as the Kalumbila, Kansanshi, and Lumwana Mines, respectively. Mineral exploration in Solwezi and the surrounding towns is ongoing. The population is also increasing at an alarming rate following mass emigrations there from other Towns seeking greener pastures, either for business or work.

The cost of living in Solwezi has gone high, pushing the cost of food and housing to sky-rocket even further. Many investors are busy buying off any piece of land they come across.

However, farming activities are still at their low par such that vegetables are imported from other Town and Cities like, Lusaka, Kapiri Mposhi and Copper-belt!

The market for fresh vegetables and other food will become even expensive for the coming 10 years or so in Solwezi. Therefore, farming offers a big hope for those who want to venture in to active agriculture.

Also, trading between Solwezi with other surrounding Towns will tend to increase enormously in 10 years as these Towns develop their economies too. Solwezi will tend to benefit more due to its central location.

Solwezi is the native land for the KAONDE speaking people of Zambia. But at the moment, many people from all walks of life in Zambia are emigrating there as a result it is becoming a multi-lingual Town.

The native people mainly grow cassava and beans, but also maize at small scale. They rarely do gardening although they have abundance of natural water from the streams. Their land is mostly endowed with natural forest as is the case in the entire North-Western province making it far superior for honey production and processing.

The rain cycle is still unaffected by the effect of industrial pollution. The rainy period is slightly longer than in other Zambian provinces like, Lusaka, Eastern, Southern, and central provinces, respectively.

In spite of these advantages, many farmers or locals are extremely poor because they lack any meaningful assistance, or even a deliberate governmental intervention, maybe apart from the fertilizer subsidies. But even this is not usually enough and many of them are sidelined.

Sanitation and clean water are almost non-existent in the most rural parts here. About 70% of the rural population in Solwezi do not construct toilets which makes them vulnerable to diarrhoeal diseases as their main source of drinking water supply are streams.

The local farmers have large chunks of natural good land compared to Chilupula, Zambezi, and Mansa villages, for all sorts of agricultural activities and other related ones such as honey production. This is the main reason why North-Western province is the also know as the hub of honey in Zambia. Many companies that deal in honey products tend to flock there.
Honey and its by-products is one of the main products sought after by many people, especially from the developed countries because of its food and medicinal purposes. Honey production also has the potential to transform many rural people’s lives here due to its low start-up cash requirements and its ability to make the land sustainable for the advantage of the coming future generations.

**MR. JOSHUA LUNGU’s PROFILE:**

This was top on the agenda of the COPE-Zambia Director, Mr. Victor Phiri. Among other things, he wanted to know how or where exactly to fit Mr. Lungu in the COPE-Zambia’s core programme areas as he has expressed keen interest in collaborating with COPE-Zambia.

The end result was that, Mr. Lungu is a starter-up farmer, but also a local business person. He has taken advantage of the honey business taking place in North-West. Sometimes, he buys honey from his fellow farmers and sells it to business people who goes to Solwezi, but also commutes to Lusaka to sell if the need arises.

He also has a big advantage staying in Solwezi because the natives regard him as one of them since his late biological mother was a Kaonde by tribe who came from the same village although his father was a Nsenga from the Eastern province.

Again his keen interest in farming makes him well placed to coordinate COPE-Zambia programmes in that area for the time being.

Mr. Lungu is a married man, so he told me, and that makes him even more responsible to volunteer with COPE-Zambia.

And just to catch his words when I asked him that COPE-Zambia does not pay volunteers a monthly salary, he was quick to accept it and said that he would also want to start from the scratch. When he was asked how much of the free time he has to work volunteer for COPE-Zambia, he again said he had all the time in the world. So, that means that he would want to dedicate his life to COPE-Zambia now and in the foreseeable future.

Apart from this, Joshua has experience working with NGO’s. At one time he had an opportunity to volunteer with COMACO, an NGO operating mainly in the Eastern provinces of Zambia such as Luangwa District, Chama District, and Lundazi District, respectively. He volunteered with COMACO for a period of Six(6) months.

During this period, Joshua learnt many thing about farming in general, conservation farming and a bit of bee keeping as well. Thereafter, he decided to venture into farming in Solwezi.

**ABOUT HIS FARMING ACTIVITIES:**

The farm in question is a family farm first bought by Joshua’s Uncle who retired four years ago but still awaiting his retirement package from the Government. In the meantime, his uncle has found another teaching job with the Teachers’ Training College within Solwezi. The COPE-Zambia Director, Victor Phiri had an opportunity of talking with him in Solwezi Town with the help of Joshua.
The total land hectares is about 150, of which 10 hectares was apportioned to Joshua. The farm is surrounded by water(stream) in almost all directions. The farm is in Kanda Kanda village.

It is about 45 Kilometres from Solwezi Town(where he stays), and at the moment commutes every week for his farming activities there. In his absence, Agripa Mulundumina (Joshua’s helper) takes care of everything at the farm where he stays.

At the moment Joshua and the rest of his family have not yet constructed permanent houses at the farm, but are planning to mould bricks after the rainy season and put up permanent structures before the end of this year. He has also demarcated an area where COPE-Zambia will be holding the training within the farm.

Many of the rural folks in Solwezi do not live on their respectively farms but away and just travel there during farming season. But Joshua wants to break this syndrome by constructing permanent houses at the farm.

**CROPS PLANTED AT HIS FARM:**

This farming season, Joshua has planted the following crops
- Maize x 2 Lima
- Cucumbers 25 x 25
- Sweet potatoes ,Lima
- Okra, 1 Lima
- Tomatoes 25 x 25

Joshua’s aunt and uncle have their portions, too, were they have grown maize and other crops like sweet potatoes.

According Joshua, once they complete constructing permanent houses at the farm, he hopes to be staying at the farm much longer and conduct his farming activities. He is also planning to influence his relatives to live at the farm permanently.

Right now Joshua and his relatives have just constructed some make shifts houses where he lives when he goes there.

At the farm, Joshua also make traditional beehives using the tree bark in order to harvest honey. During our tour of duty at his farm, the COPE-Zambia Director could see about three discarded locally made beehives.
THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY:

Kanda Kanda village (Where Joshua’s farm is located) is surrounded by other villages as well, such as Mufumpo, Kalulu, and Mutanda villages, respectively.

There is a community school in Kanda Kanda village, but adopted by the Government of the Republic of Zambia. The school was initially started in 1994 by the villagers as a community school. A 1 x 2 classroom block was erected at the time, but due to poor funding, the school did not expand.

Now that the Government decided to adopt it, there are plans to expand the school and increase enrolment of pupils. The school is called Kanda Kanda Community school. The other school is very far for children which is located at the Baptist Mission in Mutanda area.

Although Kanda Kanda community school has been in existence since 1994, there are no teachers houses, no playing pitch for the kids. They need about three teachers houses. The headmaster of the school just commutes there from another village where he is accommodated by the community.

However, the school plans to extend the classroom blocks by constructing 3 x 1 classroom block. They are also planning to construct an ablation block for both teachers and pupils. The school is also planning to upgrade it from up to grade 7 from the current grade 5. They also want solar panels and a generator to bring power at the school. They are also planning to procure furniture and desks, books and other requirements such as equipment. There are many kids in the area who did not go to school due to lack of classroom space. At the moment the school can only accommodate about 300 pupils, and the teacher to pupil ratio is about 60 pupils to 1 Teacher. The Head Teacher asked COPE-Zambia Director to find a partner in USA.

MEETING WITH SOME COMMUNITY LEADERS:

After going round in the community, Joshua and Victor Phiri finally had a meeting with some community leaders. The said meeting took place at the only shop in Kanda Kanda Village belonging to Mr. Dawson Likashi. The main aim of the meeting was to meet the following objectives;

- To orient the community on COPE-Zambia’s core programmes and how the community could participate.
- To enable the COPE-Zambia Director understand the main problems in the area, and what solutions the community can put in place.

The following community leaders participated:

1. Mr. Julius Muyoya (Village Headman and also Chairperson of the Kanda Kanda community school).
2. Mr. Brian Sakulenge (Headmaster of community school)
3. Mr. Amon Gilowa (PTA representative)
4. Mr. Dawson Likashi
5. Mr. Josua Lungu
6. Mr. Victor Phiri
**COOPERATIVE’s SOCIETY FORMATION:**

On the formation of his farmers cooperative society, Joshua highlighted that it was still in the offing at the moment. He said so far, he has managed to organize about **Eight (8) members** of which about Seven are all relatives. After being told that a standard cooperative needed to have at least Ten (10) members to be eligible for registration to Government, Joshua said he will include others even outside the family members before the end of February, 2016.

Mr. Victor Phiri also promised him to check for the cooperative constitution and other related document templates in Lusaka in a soft copy and send it to him to fill in and then send it back to him.

However, the cooperative has already been given a name, which is **The New Generation Agribusiness Multi-Purpose Cooperative Limited.**

**CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN FARMING IN THE AREA:**

The following are the main challenges faced by the farmers;

1. Lack of basic farming tools or implements such as 2 wheel tractors and/or cattle.
2. Lack of a steady income among the majority of the farmers.
3. Many people are widows and widowers who take care of orphans.
4. Lack of a farmer-friendly marketing mechanism in place.
5. High levels of illiteracy among the villagers.

**TRAINING NEEDS OF THE COOPERATIVE AND AMONG THE SURROUNDING AREAS:**

The following training needs were considered as the most needed in order of importance in the area after discussions with the the community leaders and Joshua:

1. Training in cooperative, credit and savings (village banking) formation and management.
2. Sustainable gardening training.
3. Conservation farming
4. Bee keeping management training
5. Water and sanitation training.
6. Solar or energy saving stoves.
RECOMMENDED PROJECTS FOR SOLWEZI:

After many rounds of discussions with Joshua, other community leaders and coupled with the COPE-Zambia Director own knowledge about Solwezi Town and North-Western province as a whole, the following projects where unanimously picked as a priority in this area:

TWO WHEEL TRACTOR:

Since most of the villagers in Solwezi town and around Kanda Kanda village lack basic farming equipment, the two wheel tractor is considered by many as a priority project in the area. Once they acquire the tractor, it will be much easier for many farmers to grow more crops, and other cash crops as well, like vegetables. At the moment, not many farmers here grow vegetables because of lacking tools.

According to Joshua, once his cooperative acquires the two wheel tractor, it will ensure that it works for a period of three years before it can produce another tractor that could then be given to another farmer group or cooperative in the area.

In the surrounding area, there are other farmers group namely, Kamalalo multi-purpose cooperative society (formed in 1996), Women Club, and Pavidia. All these are farmer groups who could benefit from the tractor services and its use.

BEE KEEPING:

Bee keeping and production is another project suitable not only in Kanda Kanda village, but the entire North-Western province. The villagers picked on bee keeping because of its low start-up capital and the ability to uplift many vulnerable rural people’s lives through provision of a steady source of income in a more sustainable way.

It was agreed to start with about 250 beehives in the area. And about 80% of the beneficiaries would be women. Why women?

Women are more dedicated and honest than men. And women are capable of working hard and are more likely to put their earnings into good uses like, sending their children to school, and buying the essential commodities at homes.

If the project is entrusted to men, instead of working, they would be sending their spouses and children to work while they stay away. But when the time comes for payments, men would get the earnings and keep it for themselves and spend it on unimportant things like, beer drinking and looking for other women.

Honey production in essence does not require much work, except to clear the grass around the land where there is a beehive hanging to prevent wild fire from destroying the bees. And not only that, honey is normally harvested twice in a year.