



## 11 IT WILL TAKE TIME BEFORE ELETINA WATCHES HER VIDEO

Tamanda Chabvuta

Eletina Cosmas, a smallholder farmer, lives in Chamama village, 42 kilometres from the small market town of Kasungu in Malawi.

She lives in one of the most remote rural areas of Malawi, where water is a borehole away and electricity is something never heard of. On a 2.5-acre farm, she grows pigeon peas, soya and maize. These food crops sustain Eletina and her children throughout the year.

On a hot, sunny Tuesday morning we meet Eletina as she walks from her pigeon pea garden. In this garden she has mixed pigeon peas with maize, one way of growing different crops on the same land whilst replenishing the fertility of the soil, a practice that many farmers in the area follow. Agronomists call this “intercropping pigeon peas with maize.”

We are meeting Eletina for one reason: to film her working with her pigeon peas and maize. We hope that by the end of the day we will have a farmer-training video to pass on to other farmers.

Eletina seems exhausted as she approaches us. With brief introductions, she leads us to her home a short distance away, where she starts getting ready to be filmed for the interview on the video. As she gets prepared, I ask her about how work on the farm is going.



*Access to digital communication devices is exploding in rural Africa, but some people are better connected than others.*

“It’s all going alright. I am just so tired after the planting today. Hopefully I will finish planting tomorrow,” she explains, as she quietly put away her mobile phone. This explains why we had trouble getting in touch with Eletina a few days ago. The phone seems to be worn out and to have had better days.

As she continues to get ready, she explains to us how she had not charged her phone in 3 days as she needs to pay for the charging and did not have enough money to pay for a charging session.



*You can watch a video on an ordinary cell phone, if you have one.*

After we complete the briefing of the video project and right before we set the camera rolling Eletina seems to be confused. She asks “How do I get to watch this video after you are finished doing it?”

My colleague and I assure her that as soon as we finish editing we will make her a copy on a DVD so she can watch it with her friends. We continue setting up the camera and get ready to roll, but Eletina looks even more confused. She still shows that face of confusion.

---

### “How do I get to watch this video after you are finished doing it?”

---

“But then, how though? I do not have any television in my home,” she says. “Even if I were to go ask that they play the video at the video-showing centre near the market, I can’t be seen anywhere near that place. There’s a bottle store right next to it. There are always drunkards there and I don’t want to have people getting suspicious and speaking ill of me,” she further explains.

“What about watching it with some of your club members?” I ask, because Eletina is a member of an organised farmers’ club in her village. Through this club, she is able to access extension and share ideas on good agricultural practices with fellow farmers.

Eletina explains that none of the members of her club has a television set. There is no electricity in the area, and few farmers have enough money to buy a solar panel. Even if any of the villagers can afford

---

“I can’t be seen anywhere near the video screening centre. There’s a bottle store right next to it. There are always drunkards there and I don’t want to have people getting suspicious and speaking ill of me”.

---

an expensive power generator, it will still be costly to keep it running because of the high costs of fuel.

Eletina still agrees to let us film her for the video. And after the filming, we say good-bye and ask about coming back for another filming session in a week’s time after the crop in her garden germinates.

As we drive away, I keep thinking about Eletina. She is the first farmer we have filmed, because we are still at the beginning of our videos for the Videos for Farmers project. Eletina is like many of the other smallholder farmers of Malawi, where one extension officer may have to reach 3,000 farmers. So using videos as a tool for extension may be the best option for farmers like her to access information.

I still ponder the possibility of having farmers like Eletina watch these videos. What if there was a way in which they can generate power within their communities? What if we had a battery operated mobile projector that we moved around with?

Or better yet, what if she had a simple smart phone that could be loaded with many training videos for her to watch at any time? Maybe she and her fellow farmers from her club will finally get to watch these videos.

We drive away quietly. But one thing still sticks in my mind: it will take time before Eletina gets to watch her videos.

**TAMANDA CHABVUTA**  
NASFAM, Malawi  
TChabvuta@nasfam.org