

# SURVIVING THE DROUGHT: STORIES FROM MEHEBA SETTLEMENT

16 OCTOBER 2024

In the heart of Meheba Settlement, Kalumbila District, the scorching sun beats down on Richard Kapalu (51) and Jacqueline Makiko (79), both former refugees from Angola. Their hopes for a bountiful harvest were crushed by a severe drought that is gripping Zambia and leaving farmers struggling to feed their families.



*Richard Kapalu in front of his dried-out maize fields. © UNHCR / Mio Shindo-Braaten / 2024.*

Richard, who arrived in Meheba in 2008, watched his once-thriving farm turn into a barren landscape. Last season, he harvested twenty bags of maize (50kg each); this year, he managed only five. “This farming season is incredibly devastating,” he says, frustration evident in his voice. “The drought and fall armyworms destroyed everything.”

Jacqueline, who began farming when she arrived in Meheba in 1985, is facing a similar struggle. Despite her efforts, this season yielded zero crops. “I believe the rain will return,” she shares, her spirit resilient even in hardship. “When it does, we will harvest again, and our community will eat.”

The drought is affecting not just farmers but entire communities, pushing the limits of resources for refugees and their Zambian hosts. In response, UNHCR is working tirelessly to

provide essential support. With funding from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund, and other partners, UNHCR is providing multi-purpose cash assistance to the most vulnerable households, and working through community-led networks to ensure that women and children are protected from exploitation and abuse and referred to support programs.



*Jacqueline Makiko inspecting her failed harvest. © UNHCR / Mio Shindo-Braaten / 2024.*

“Together, we will navigate this crisis,” says UNHCR Zambia Representative Preeta Law. “We are committed to supporting refugees and the hosting communities through this hardship, and we will continue to work together in preparing for the rainy season ahead in order to improve their productivity and help them recover.”

As we commemorate World Food Day on October 16, let’s think about the resilience of individuals like Richard and Jacqueline, who continue to hope for a better future despite overwhelming challenges. Their stories are a powerful reminder of the urgent need for sustainable food solutions for refugees and their host communities.