

## Getting Locals to Eat more Vegetables in Mozambique



The Veg Shop sells fresh agricultural produce.

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On some days, tomatoes can be scarce in the city of Chimoio, central Mozambique. Prices might go up, and then fall again the next day. The same is true for other staples: onions, green peppers and so on.

It's an erratic market, because all the small-scale vendors who make up this marketplace rely on supply trucks coming into the city from distant farms, and whatever they bring that day. Those trucks might not show up some days, which is why the local market for consumers can be volatile. The product variety can also be limited.

But one farmer, located just about 10 km outside the city, is now changing that. Kota Benade, originally from Zimbabwe, has a 12 hectare plot there along a river, where he grows not just tomatoes but also spinach, sweet potato, beetroot, pumpkins, and bananas. Only a few years ago, beetroot was virtually unknown here.

The real difference Benade is making, however, is through the introduction of a farm shop on the side of the main road into town, where he sells both wholesale and retail.

Thanks to that shop – which opened last week, after an existing structure was knocked down and rebuilt into a modern facility – Chimoio's small-scale vendors no longer have to rely on whatever comes into town. Instead, they can hop on one of the many shapas (minibuses) that ply this main stretch of road, pay their fare of 7 Meticals (US\$0.01), and visit this convenient, reliable wholesale supplier.

"It's five minutes away," says Benade. "They can come here, get 50 cabbages, and be back at their stall and selling by 7 am. Otherwise, they have to wait for the big trucks to bring produce into the central market."

The impact of this is not just about making life more convenient for vendors. Benade describes the local vegetable production market as "scattered and disorganized," and by providing a steady, varied supply close to town, end consumers will benefit from a wider range of vegetables at lower prices. This, in turn, improves their diet and nutrition.

"It will be a continuous supply of good quality produce, and because we're so near we can sell at a lower wholesale price, and vendors can buy at a lower price and pass that on."

**"It will be a continuous supply  
of good quality produce"**

The farm shop’s location happens to be a place where the shapas routinely stop anyway. Benade has therefore included a retail section in the shop too, so that not just the small-scale vendors but also other people travelling into and out of Chimoio can buy something to take home for dinner.

“Commuters can do a quick shop here,” he explains. “They’ll know it’s here, so they can stop and grab a bagful of fresh vegetables on the way home.”

GAIN has supported Benade in the building of the shop, as well as upgrading his own farm with electricity to power his irrigation, and a vehicle to move produce between the farm and shop. But ask him what his biggest headache is, and the answer is simple: bureaucracy.

More than half a year after installing electricity lines on his farm, Benade is still waiting for the local electricity supplier to connect him to the grid.

“It’s a two-hour job for them, and once I have electricity I’ll be able to pump water with ten times the efficiency,” he says.

Relying on diesel engines to power his irrigation system means the crops just don’t get as much water as they could. Each engine can only run for a few hours a day before it overheats, and they tend to break down regularly too.

“Just recently I had to spend another 35,000 Meticals (US\$775) on a new one. When I’ve got crops in the ground, I can’t afford not to water them.”

Tomatoes need plenty of water, and the cost of not having electricity is clear to see on the farm. Jordão, one of Benades’

farm workers, showed us a field where the crop hadn’t been watered enough. Next to it, some luckier tomatoes looked much healthier.

“The good ones sell for 800 Meticals (US\$17.50) a box,” Jordão told us. “The bad ones, 600 Meticals (US\$13.25).”

These problems will hopefully soon be a thing of the past. With electricity on the farm, Benade will be irrigating 24 hours a day and ensuring a consistent supply and quality of fresh fruits and vegetables. He expects to spend the next couple of years developing the farm shop in Chimoio, but has his sights set on other areas of Mozambique too.

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“The market has been undersupplied and disorganized for years,” he says. “But people really want good quality produce here. Demand is growing for the crops I’m selling, which were unknown before – like beetroot, and even spinach. With this model, the small vendors will do better business, I’ll do better business, and local families will have a better diet.”

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