In Zambia, it is every smallholder farmer’s dream to supply their agricultural commodities to supermarkets and chain stores. Smallholder farmers, especially women and youth, dream of accessing stable and profitable markets for their produce! However, the reality on the ground is different. Studies commissioned by the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) and OXFAM Southern Africa (SAF) revealed that only 20 percent of smallholder farmers have access to formal and profitable markets, with the remaining majority selling their products at informal local markets.

Yunike Phiri is a smallholder farmer, one of the lucky few to have secured a standing order to supply green beans to a chain store in Zambia. However, her joy was not to last for many harvests as her order got cancelled because she could not deliver the required quality and quantity of green beans by the chain store. As a result, other smallholder farmers were contracted ahead of her.

Without adequate access to finance, Yunike lacked the capacity to fund and expand her agricultural production as well as improve the quality of her fresh beans. A lack of proper storage facilities was the main problem.

“In Zambia, the government has put in place facilities and banks that are able to give loans, but the interest rates are far beyond my reach as a smallholder farmer. Credit facilities do not take into consideration the time it takes for the crops to grow, before one can harvest and sell. There is no grace period. As soon as a loan is accessed, interest is due to be paid,” lamented Yunike during the launch of the ‘Markets for All’ campaign.
Targeting smallholder farmers, especially women and youth, the ‘Markets for All’ campaign is spearheaded by OXFAM SAF in partnership with FANRPAN and the Southern Africa People’s Solidarity Network (SAPSN). The campaign aims to bridge the gap between farmers and agriculture markets by promoting market access for smallholder farmers, especially women and youth in the region in general, and in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, in particular, where the studies were conducted.

While sharing her experience during the online launch, Yunike highlighted the challenges that hinder smallholder farmers’ participation in inclusive markets and value chains.

“For those of us dealing in fresh fruit and vegetables, the lack of cold storage facilities to improve the shelf life of our produce is a big problem. Without proper and adequate storage facilities, I may end up selling my vegetables or fruits at give-away prices, or even throwing them away, because of depleted quality. A lack of good quality packaging materials is also a challenge.”

Smallholder farmers are the backbone of the agricultural sector in Southern Africa. Their well-being, access to finance, credit and sustainable profitable markets cannot continue to be ignored.

Ms. Yunike Phiri – Zambian smallholder farmer.

The Market Access Campaign is calling for the empowerment and organization of women and youth smallholder farmers into farmers groups to amplify their voices and enhance their access to finance and credit services, storage facilities and formal, profitable markets.

The campaign promotes the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for agriculture to enable farmers to sell their commodities through online markets, as well as accessing market related information such as prices of commodities, and weather information. Further, the campaign seeks to create an enabling environment to link smallholder farmers to national, regional and global markets by leveraging provisions in related policy frameworks.

For more details and on how to participate in this campaign, please visit the FANRPAN website: https://fanrpan.org/oxfam/.