Transformed Livelihoods
AGRA’s impact in Africa
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Preface

Africa sits on 60% of the world's untouched areable land; more than 70% of its population is rural and engaged in smallholder farming. The constraints to raising agricultural productivity include inadequate access to and use of improved seed and the right blends of fertilizers; the need to enact favorable trade, seed, fertilizer and land ownership policies; and the need by farmers for adequate postharvest management solution and functional markets for their harvests.

AGRA is committed to working with all other stakeholders to address some of the obstacles to the achievement of an inclusive and sustainable agricultural transformation in Africa, with smallholder farmers at the center of all the initiatives.

AGRA’s investments spans the entire agricultural value chain: developing and deploying productivity enhancing seeds and soil technologies; creating functional farm inputs and produce markets; building the governance and business management capacity of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and farmer groups; leveraging microcredit for smallholder farmers and SMEs to professionalize and scale up operations; and advocating for improved seed, fertilizer, land ownership and trade policies to improve the agriculture landscape for smallholder farmers and other stakeholders.

This collection of stories from the field highlights some of the impact of AGRA's investments that are improving food self-sufficiency, creating local agri-millionaires, providing effective postharvest management options, changing retrogressive land ownership policies, creating new and profitable produce markets and engaging previously excluded women into productive value chains.

We invite you to join us in this virtual tour – from Burkina Faso to Rwanda, from Ghana to Malawi, and from Uganda to Mozambique – to learn more about the transformation experienced by some of the beneficiaries of our work, through their faces and stories.

We hope that we have contributed in our own way to improving the food security and agriculture-dependent livelihoods of Africa’s smallholder farmers and their families. We are committed to contributing to the reversal of Africa’s US$ 35 billion spent on food imports by raising rice productivity in Burkina Faso. However, we keenly realize that raising productivity at the farm or community level is not enough: leveraging additional investments from both public and private sector partners is key to growing and sustaining this transformation to reach a tipping point where Africa's smallholder farmers are active participants in profitable agricultural value chains. We will continue to build on our past achievements to scale up this transformation.

AGRA's dynamic and robust monitoring and evaluation unit will continue to track the inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact of interventions implemented by our collaborating partners on the ground.

We are grateful for the confidence and generous funding of our initiatives provided by all our donors which has made these transformations possible for millions of ordinary African farmers, entrepreneurs and their families.

David S. Ameyaw PhD
Director
Strategy, Monitoring and Evaluation
AGRA
Hardy plants and good farming practices revolutionize farming in semi-arid regions in Kenya

The introduction of drought-resistant crops and crop rotation to Emali farmers is improving not only the variety of food on their tables, but also increasing their sales to major companies not previously open to them.

“In 2013, I was able to sell sorghum to Kenya Breweries Limited (KBL) for the first time through their agents for contract farming,” says William Lati, a farmer in the Emali area, southeast of Nairobi. In addition, he was able to try out mixing cowpeas into his staple diet of only maize and beans.

KBL had invented beer that requires sorghum as the main ingredient with the objective of diversifying its market to include lower income earners. It was aimed at providing beer that had been prepared to the required public health standards, as opposed to the black market products that were leading to unnecessary deaths among low-income consumers.

Lati, who is also the secretary of the Kwakangulu Commercial Village project, attributes the changes that he and other farmers in the group are experiencing to the interventions of Ukamba Christian Community Services (UCSS), an AGRA grantee.

“We used to grow crops like cassava and fruit trees,” he says. “The cassava failed miserably as we had planted the wrong variety. But with the support of UCSS they challenged us to change our lifestyle by embracing new technologies, such as crop rotations, addition of soil fertility, and trying out new crop varieties that are drought resistant, such as cowpeas, finger millet and sorghum.”

The Kwakangulu Commercial Village project is set in the heart of Emali. This is an area where rainfall is not reliable and getting adequate water for farming is difficult. The project is made up of 55 farmers, with a large majority of them being women. The project was first established in 2008, with UCSS entering the picture in 2011. Prior to UCSS involvement in the project, group members had been in the process of trying out various water conservation methods, such as holding ponds and water terraces.

“From UCSS, I learned how to rotate crops. In one planting season I would grow cereals and in another legumes,” adds Lati, who attended training workshops together with group members.

The project members also benefitted from UCSS introducing them to new markets through contract farming. This method ensured that they would grow such crops as sorghum according to the specific quality standards needed for the Kenya Breweries market. This meant, among other things, that participating farmers would receive seed at the same time, thus giving each an equal opportunity to grow high quality sorghum crops. It was left to each farmer to grow the crops individually on their land, and when the produce was harvested they would then collectively sell to the KBL agents.

However, in 2013/2014, the group did not receive a contract farming deal because KBL had stopped buying produce from them, not because of poor performance, but rather because of new financial laws introduced by the Kenyan government that places a high excise duty on products made from sorghum, such as the low-income beer brands.

“We are so distressed. I used to utilize my own three hectares to grow sorghum while I would hire some land to plant pigeon peas. In the last harvest I managed to get 10 bags of sorghum. But this time I did not plant, as we did not have a contract with KBL. They stopped buying from us,” Lati laments – the result of a misguided policy decision.

*William Lati and his wife, tending to their sorghum plantation in Kwakangulu village in Makueni county of Eastern Kenya*
Sam Odeya was one of the earliest farmers to adopt the Yara 41 and Yara 42 seed varieties demonstrated by Victoria Seeds Limited in Uganda. The industrious father of four was barely making a living from his six-hectare farm, with gradual drops in his maize harvest season after season. He had been using an assortment of varieties which were not giving him satisfactory yield.
High yielding, disease-resistant varieties change farmers’ fortunes in Uganda

It never occurred to Odeya that the varieties planted affected the yield at harvest depending on such factors as whether they were well suited to grow in his area. He suffered devastating effects from maize streak virus almost on an annual basis. Maize streak virus affects plant leaves, stunts growth, and prevents the plant from reproducing. In severe cases as commonly happens in Kija village where Odeya grows his maize, affected farms harvest less than one percent of the crop.

This combination of challenges was very discouraging for Odeya, whose major aim was to work his way out of poverty. “I had stopped keeping records of my harvest, as I kept incurring massive losses,” he recalls.

Victoria Seeds Limited had received a grant from AGRA to develop a maize streak virus-resistant variety that could do well in high altitude areas of more than 1800 meters above sea level.

In November 2011, Odeya participated in several open field days offered by Victoria Seeds and selected the Yara 41 and 42 maize seed varieties that were being demonstrated.

Odeya then entered into a seed growing agreement with Victoria Seeds. The agreement meant that he would receive the newly improved Yara 41 and Yara 42 varieties, as well as technical support in the form of continuous training by the seed company agronomists throughout the maize-growing season. This marked the turning point in Odeya’s fortunes.

The first yield from the new varieties surpassed his expectations. Accustomed to getting less than half a ton per hectare, Odeya recorded yields of 1.5 t/ha, with Yara 42 doing particularly better than Yara 41. This was a 200% increase in the yield on his farm and four times the yield many farmers were still getting.

Selling maize grain at his local market, Odeya would get UGX 400/kg. However, when he sold his harvest to Victoria Seeds he received UGX 1,600/kg, which earned him UGX 14,000,000 (about US$ 5,000). This was a 400% increase in monetary income.

From the proceeds he expanded his farm and developed an additional ten additional hectares, bought a commercial plot at his local shopping center and sent his children to a better school.

With AGRA support, Victoria Seeds Company embarked on developing improved varieties that are disease-resistant, fast maturing and with improved yields. The program focused on maize, which is the most commonly grown crop across all regions of Uganda and East Africa.

The company is now dealing with more 3,000 other farmers like Odeya who grow crops under the supervision of the company’s agronomists and help produce enough seed for multiplication to meet farmers’ demands.

The initiative has worked well, making good quality seeds of high-yielding varieties more readily available to smallholder farmers. It has also helped to transform the livelihoods of more than 3,000 farmers now contracted by the seed company.

Standing in his maize field, with the plants changing from a healthy green to husky dry stalks as a sign of readiness for harvest, Odeya is guaranteed a bumper harvest and good returns as well. “I know this is not a gamble. I am very happy about this project,” he says with obvious joy.
New seed policy in Tanzania to benefit millions of smallholder farmers

Access to the seed of improved varieties is a major impediment to agricultural productivity in Tanzania. According to earlier reports from the Ministry of Agriculture for Food Security and Cooperative Development, farmer access to improved varieties was less than 12%.

According to Professor Susan Msolla, from the department of Crop Science and Production, Sokoine University in Morogoro, a recent study carried out by her department in collaboration with other researchers concluded that the major obstacle that keeps farmers from accessing seed of improved varieties is the country’s seed policy. The Tanzanian Seed Act and its associated regulations prevent private firms from producing basic and certified seed. Instead, the government’s Agricultural Seed Agency (ASA) is designated as the only recognized producer for basic and certified seed in Tanzania. According to the study, the problem is that ASA lacks the capacity to meet the rising demand for seed of improved varieties.

“Researchers are continually producing very good varieties, but they don’t reach farmers because ASA can’t produce the necessary quantities,” says Prof. Msolla. In view of this reality, she developed a proposal through her department to address the problem. Her work – aimed at designing and promoting policy changes that will make it possible for the private sector to enter the seed production market – was funded by AGRA.

Some of the changes are geared towards allowing the private sector to produce basic and pre-basic seed of new varieties released by the government. They include putting in place specific guidelines and procedures for the private sector to follow.

By the end of the 2014 Parliament proceedings, the proposed policy changes had reached the cabinet discussion level; they are meant to be tabled for a Parliamentary vote in 2015.

Policy change normally takes time to achieve, and the progress seen with Tanzania’s seed policy is the result of efforts by Sokoine University and other key partners, including AGRA’s policy node coordinators in Dar es Salaam and several public seed regulatory bodies.

Godfrey Godwin Bwana, the Tanzania Policy Hub coordinator for AGRA says that the main challenge in policy change is the complicated bureaucratic procedures involved, which can add years to the change process. Mr. Bwana points out, however, that the new seed policy has achieved some key milestones, such as the regulatory act being amended and taking effect in late November of 2014 to safeguard farmers against the distribution of fake seed. As for other suggested changes, he corroborates Prof. Msolla’s statement that they are in the final stages of getting to Parliament.

The Policy Node, in conjunction with Prof. Msolla, has also produced a general seed industry strategy and presented it to the government through the Ministry of Agriculture. The strategy is still being developed and is yet to be adopted.

The Crop Development Department and Seed Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture is the direct link between the government and the Policy Node. Twalib Njoghole, the current acting director of the Unit, says the policy changes suggested through stakeholder workshops hosted by Sokoine University and partners in the project indicate a positive shift in farmers’ fortunes.

“We know past reports have said that less than 12% farmers have access to better seeds, but recently that number has reached almost 30% and of course we are aiming for more,” says Mr. Njoghole.

The quality and availability of farming inputs directly affects the quantity and quality of farm produce. The proposed policy changes are expected to make it easier to access improved varieties for more than 13 million smallholder farmers in Tanzania. This anticipated achievement is closely aligned with AGRA’s goal of improving smallholder access to inputs to increase farm-level yields and incomes.

Harvested maize in store after harvest in Mbeya, Tanzania. The new seed policy is set to ensure farmers get seed of improved varieties for better crop yields.
Rice miller with innovative solutions to Ugandan farmers’ problems

Upland Rice Millers Company had been struggling to maintain a steady supply of rice from Ugandan farmers for processing and selling. The availability of grain from about 4,000 rice farmers supplying the miller tended to fluctuate significantly, a trend that was occasionally aggravated by delayed payments during seasons of good harvests. Such delays discouraged some farmers from selling to Upland Rice.

David Obiro has been with the company as an accountant for six years and knew the difficult times the enterprise had faced before. “We used to process only 5,000 metric tons per year,” says Obiro, “and our capacity and working capital were limited, and sometimes we couldn’t meet the needs of the farmers supplying us with grain (both rice and maize) in as timely a way as we wanted. We knew we had to grow our way out of this problem, but it was difficult to see a way forward.”

Upland Rice was one of the small- to medium-sized agricultural enterprises (SMEs) targeted by the Uganda Development Trust (UDET), which came in with an initiative funded by AGRA to boost the mill’s capacity, enabling them to service more smallholder farmers in rural Uganda. The outlook for the then struggling company changed dramatically.

Upland Rice Millers has expanded the number of farmers supplying it with rice grain to about 15,000, and the number of its maize suppliers grew to about 10,000. The company’s grain-handling capacity has also grown exponentially, from 5,000 MT annually to about 700,000 MT per year. The company now provides permanent employment to more than 500 people and about 1,000 others on a seasonal basis.

UDET’s objective in helping Upland Rice and other similar companies to grow into more viable businesses is to link smallholder farmers with reliable markets for their farm produce. Upland Rice Millers supports such SMEs in expanding their processing capacity in order to ensure farmers have a ready market for their produce.

Brenda Kwantampora of UDET says that the idea of investing in SMEs is working well, as opposed to investing directly with farmers. “After all, we could help a farmer to produce 100 bags of rice, but she could then have nowhere to sell it,” she says.

The funding from AGRA is used to support the SMEs in developing more effective business plans, providing a solid base of working capital, and better access to needed financial services. Today, Upland Rice Millers trains farmers in a range of practices, from improved land preparation to better post-harvest handling. They then provide them with the initial seed and other inputs. A professional agronomist then monitors the farmers’ efforts throughout the season. Upland Rice Millers is able to do this thanks to the support from UDET.

Interestingly, farmers with the smallest pieces of land have felt the biggest immediate effects. Kapyo Resty from Buseta Sub-County is one such beneficiary. She had her first training and received 2 kg of rice seed. Come harvest time, she was able to bag 200 kg from her tiny plot.

Some of the farmers who have been working with Upland Rice for a long while have graduated from farming and are now operating as traders. They buy grain in bulk and supply to the millers.

The success that Upland Rice Millers have had with smallholder farmers has attracted others to come in and support the mill’s expansion so that they can increasingly cater for producers of other crops, such as maize and legumes.

An Upland Rice Millers employee at the company’s processing plant in Jinja, Uganda, bagging processed rice for shipment to retail outlets further along the rice value chain.

| Increase in number of farmers attached to miller from 4,000 to 25,000 |
| Increase in annual plant processing capacity 5,000 tons to 700,000 tons |
| Farmer training led to 100% increase in yield for first time growers |
However, after her 2014 first-quarter harvest, she was already becoming used to the secure feeling of having a million Rwandan Francs in her pocket, thanks to her efforts to improve her small-scale farming enterprise. Nyiranikubwayo attributes her success to being a member of the CODPCUM Farmer Cooperative, along with 78 other smallholders (35 women and 43 men). This Cooperative is one of the farmer-based organizations that, with support from AGRA, are working to help improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers through the Rwanda Development Organization (RDO), in partnership with the Rwandan government.

Like many other smallholders from Nyacyonge village, Nyiranikubwayo practiced traditional modes of farming and hardly used any fertilizer or improved maize seeds. “I thought my land was too small to generate any income and it was hard to expect anything useful, I don’t know if you understand,” she smiles easily. Nyiranikubwayo explains that the seed she planted was usually saved from the previous season’s harvest. Poor soil and crop management produced paltry yields that could hardly satisfy the family’s subsistence needs. She harvested very little — so little that she could not quantify it. “It disappeared so fast, I don’t remember counting,” she explains with a sad recollection. Some of her meager yield was sold at very low prices to local vendors and brokers to pay other expenses, which drove the family further into poverty.

However, RDO field officers, facilitated by AGRA and the Rwandan government, trained Nyiranikubwayo and her colleagues in CODPCUM Cooperative in best agronomic practices, such as the use of improved maize seed, proper application of fertilizer and herbicides, correct plant spacing, and rotation of the maize crops with legumes to increase soil health and fertility. A demonstration plot was set up for practical training, and farmers would also meet there to exchange notes.

The 2014 maize harvest from her 2-hectare farm reached 4 tons for the first time ever. CODPCUM Cooperative sales were linked to the World Food Programme’s P4P initiative, and Nyiranikubwayo sold her grain at 280,000 Rwandan Francs per ton (about US$ 407) and took home 1.12 million francs (about US$ 1,628).

“A million!” she says, a smile brightening her face. “That is not something us poor housewives ever thought we could have!” The RDO project focused on equipping local cooperatives with the capacity needed to deal with post-harvest issues and collective marketing for smallholder farmers in the Eastern Province of Rwanda. The cooperative is one of more than 50 other similar groups in the region that have experienced dramatic improvements in their fortunes, as income for their members almost tripled through the course of the 3-year project.

The housewife cum farmer can today comfortably afford to pay for medical insurance for her family, school fees and other expenses. “I now have spare money to buy things for myself, like a television and better clothing,” says Nyiranikubwayo with a smile. She was also trained in managing her finances, which has helped her service a loan that she took to buy needed inputs. Nyiranikubwayo has been able to rehabilitate her house; something she had never thought would be possible in her 20 years of marriage. She has also added to her land holding with part of the income.

Nyiranikubwayo Illuminee working at her cooperative’s warehouse in Nyacyonge village, Nyatagare District in northeastern Rwanda

Rwandan village housewife becomes a millionaire

Nyiranikubwayo Illuminee is a 38-year-old mother of four (one daughter and three sons). She has a shy smile and a small singing voice. Three years ago she was a housewife with no reliable sources of income living in Nyacyonge village in the Mukama Sector of Nyagatare District (in northeast Rwanda). She struggled to meet almost every basic need—food, clothing, medical care, and her children’s school fees.

Beneficiaries reached by the RDO project
20,000 farmers within 100 farmer groups

5,170 tons Maize yield in 2013 57% increase from 2012

US$ 1,772,529 Income for 2013 47% increase from 2012

52% Average general growth
His one hectare piece of land gave him only 1 ton of maize, about 10 bags every year. This was very little produce. Beans could hardly survive past farm maturity; his family fed on them as soon as the pods changed color. If they didn’t, then the bean common mosaic disease would do the honors, destroying the bean crop.

From such dim yields, Aiocres could barely feed his family. Even so, sometimes he was forced to sell part of the small produce to meet the other needs. He usually sold to brokers and middlemen at very poor and fluctuating prices.

Aiocres used traditional farming methods, borrowing seed from neighbors and applying little or no fertilizer at all. His farm always seemed like an abandoned piece of earth.

After about five years of fruitless agriculture, he joined the CODPCUM farmers’ cooperative to learn from his fellow villagers who were doing well as members of the cooperative. CODPCUM was supported in part by a project funded by AGRA and implemented by the Rwanda Development Organization (RDO) to help farmer organizations improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

Field officers from RDO and professional agronomists trained members of the cooperative to apply good agronomic practices. Aiocres learned to how to use top dressing of fertilizer (and the right amounts of it), and to differentiate between several improved varieties and choose the most appropriate one.

He switched from the traditional farming and adopted the new system. “I used fertilizer, spaced my seeds accordingly, weeded on time and did everything as I had been taught,” he explains.

His harvest that season averaged 4.5 t/ha, more than a four-fold increase in yield. His former 1-ton of production in the previous years had put a ceiling on his income. Keeping some maize for food and selling only a small amount had ensured that his farm income never went past 50,000 Rwandan Francs (US$ 73).

His new cooperative organized for the sale of his maize at RWF 260,000 (US$ 379) per ton. This earned him an income he had never seen before. Aiocres was RWF 1.1 million (US$ 1,600) richer.

Aiocres has been able to expand his farm plot by 1.5 hectare from the income he is getting. He has also put up what he calls among his peers a ‘respectable house’. From his increasing extra income he has invested in a motorcycle taxi business, of which he is very proud.

By joining the cooperative, he was able to access the training as well as farm input loans leveraged by funds from AGRA. “For the first time I received a loan without collateral through the rotating credit offered to our cooperative.” Aiocres cannot believe his success.

The program has lifted many farmers from poverty by helping them access inputs and market their produce. Within Nyatagare district alone, more than 1,000 farmers have benefitted from the rotating loan for farm inputs.

Their produce is sold to the World Food Program’s P4P initiative, Rwanda’s Strategic Reserve Agency, and several other big grain buyers who guarantee farmers of a ready market at good prices.

Members in the cooperative have received training in managing their finances, especially the loans now within their reach. Aiocres appreciates this training immensely.

“Money can become a problem if you don’t know how to use it, but this AGRA project has taught us a lot of things,” he says smiling.
Aggregation and marketing support transforms Malawian widow’s livelihood

Meet Natalia Zimba, from Mpepa Farmers’ Association in Chisinga District of Malawi. The 51-year-old mother of one son and six daughters lost her husband in 1998. Raising her family of seven on her own saw her move from one menial job to another as a farm laborer in rural Malawi.

The pay was often poor and mostly came late after days of going hungry and not meeting the family’s basic needs. When Zimba joined the Kakuku Cluster in late 2012, she had almost reached the end of her rope. Kakuku Cluster is part of the Mpepa Farmers’ Association, one of the farmer groups receiving support from AGRA to access markets for their produce. The Catholic Development Commission in Malawi (CADECOM) is the AGRA project-implementing partner.

Although she has a small plot of land, Zimba could not afford to till, plant and tend crops on the whole plot. She was able to plant only a small portion of her land, from which she could get enough food to last between six and nine weeks in an annual cycle.

She first received training from the CADECOM field officer about obtaining and repaying small loans. The next planting season, she was able to obtain additional farming inputs thanks to a loan from Microloan Finance, a microfinance organization partnering with CADECOM. She was given an inputs loan worth MK 25,000 (about US$ 60), enough to plant her entire 2-hectare piece of land. She harvested four oxcarts of maize grain and 22 bags of soybeans. She kept all the maize for food and sold the soybeans. One bag of soybeans weighs 50 kg, and she got a price of MK 150/kg for a total of MK 165,000 (US$ 400).

“For the first time in my life I was holding money in my hands! Money that was quite substantial to me at the time.” She says laughing at the memory. She was able to pay back the loan, buy more farm inputs, and invest more in the farming season that followed.

Zimba received further training on using modern farming technologies, learning how to apply herbicides and chemical inoculants to control pests and diseases that affected crop yields.

The 2013 season was equally rewarding for Zimba. The use of inoculants and fertilizer saw her yields go up by 100% over the 2012 harvest. She harvested 56 bags of soybeans and almost 7 oxcarts of maize. This time she took home MK 420,000 (US$ 1,000) an amount beyond her wildest expectations. She has since stopped laboring on other people’s farms and relies on her own work to make sure her farm never fails. “I wish this project would have come earlier, as I have seen its value. I am so happy that AGRA is helping smallholder farmers like me to improve their livelihoods,” she concludes.

Natalia Zimba, widowed mother of seven, following a presentation by a field officer from CADECOM, made during a meeting of the Mpepa Farmers’ Association held in Chisinga, near Kasungu in Malawi.
Better produce marketing enables high school student to pay his own school fees and feed his family

**Emmanuel Nkhata is the first born in a family of four children. Raised solely by his mother, he grew up seeing her struggle to provide for him and his siblings by working on other people’s farms.**

“My mother would come back in the evening, very tired and with very little food, I felt like I needed to do something about it,” Nkhata explains. “I was young but it stuck to me.”

Nkhata’s mother owns a 2-hectare plot of land, which she hardly tilled as most of the time she was out working elsewhere. Nkhata promptly saw the opportunity to turn their unused land into a source of income.

He joined the Kachere Cluster of the Mpepa Farmers Association in 2011 after witnessing a farmer getting paid for the produce he had sold through the association. He was 17 years old then and had just joined secondary school in form one. Because of the tight school timetable, he missed most of the training that other farmers received, but he picked up a trick or two from those who had attended the meetings.

Mpepa Association members receive training on the application of modern agriculture technologies, managing their finances, and dealing with loans advanced to them. The training sessions are carried out by project officers from Catholic Development Commission (CADECOM), which receives funding from AGRA to help smallholder farmers access the market for their produce. They have helped set up farmer associations like Mpepa, through which farmers aggregate their produce and sell when prices are favorable.

Through the farmer association, Nkhata received needed farm inputs – seed of improved soybean and maize varieties, as well as fertilizer – on a loan basis. Although the family owns 7 hectares of land, his capacity limited him to farming only 1.5 hectares, and that was in the 2012 planting season (he could not afford to do much in 2011).

Nkhata earned MK 63,000 (about US$ 137) from a harvest of six 90 kg bags in 2012. He thinks he could have done better, but the income was more than welcome to his struggling family. The following year, 2013, was tough for all farmers in the village due to a prolonged drought. Still, Nkhata managed to get MK 81,000 (US$ 176) from the sale of maize and soybeans, after setting aside food for his mother and younger siblings.

If he gets the farming right he says, his mother will be able to stop laboring for others and his family will be better off. Motivated by his initial success, Nkhata’s next goal is to develop his capacity to cultivate all 7 hectares owned by the family.

“Nkhata sees himself as a major beneficiary of AGRA’s support to CADECOM, having sold his maize at the best available market prices, as compared to earlier times when unscrupulous vendors swindled his mother. He attends school for most of the day, but his early mornings and late evenings are strictly devoted to the farming business.

He has learned from schoolbooks some of the agricultural practices that he can apply on his farm. On weekends, he vends cattle and goats for extra income. The capital for his vending largely came from what was left over from the harvest income, after covering school fees and other family necessities.

“The support I have from the Mpepa group is a good stepping stone for me; it gives me hope for better things to come,” he smiles.

That is the new resolve that the 20-year-old student cum farmer is carrying forward, expecting to harvest more than twenty 90 kg bags of maize from his small farm in 2015.
For decades, Zulu and her husband had been growing tobacco as their main source of income. Their overall yields and annual income have, however, declined as time passed, stagnating between highs of 65,000 Malawi Kwacha (US$ 140) and lows of MK 46,000 (US$ 100). The situation was slowly relegating the Zulu family to poverty until she joined the Mwaiwathu Farmers Club.

The Clinton-Hunter Development Initiative, which has funding from the Clinton Foundation and AGRA, promotes best agricultural practices to farmer groups like Mwaiwathu in rural Malawi. The program uses government extension officers and experienced agronomists to train local farmers on modern farming techniques, including improved seed varieties from authorized agrodealers and the proper use of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. The members of the Mwaiwathu Farmers Club (and others like it) were encouraged to grow food crops, mostly soybeans, maize and beans.

In her first year, Zulu took home MK 150,000 (US$ 310), more than she had ever earned as a tobacco farmer. She used the money to buy a bull for her ox cart, and she also bought fertilizer for the following planting season.

“Growing soybeans has been of great benefit to us; I have no doubt that things would be bad if we had not joined this club,” Zulu recounts in a soft voice.

The season that followed was not as good as the first, due to the long droughts that ravaged Malawi between 2013 and 2014. However, Zulu and her family still made profits from their farming. She bought another bull to complete the ox cart pair, and still managed to save about MK 90,000 (US$ 200) through a village bank.

“I know when am talking about my income it seems little, but to me it is really big because we’ve had very bad situations before,” she explains.

Anamia and her husband have ventured into hiring out their oxen to till other farms at a small profit. She is planning to improve her soybean farming to generate more income so that she can purchase other things that seemed well beyond reach before joining the Farmers Club. This includes a solar panel and even a television – small luxuries that many people take for granted in today’s world.

For Anamia Zulu, a mother of five boys and two girls, the 2015 cropping season will be her third time growing soybean. The amount of produce and the income she earned from her first two seasons was, for her, revolutionary.

For decades, Zulu and her husband had been growing tobacco as their main source of income. Their overall yields and annual income have, however, declined as time passed, stagnating between highs of 65,000 Malawi Kwacha (US$ 140) and lows of MK 46,000 (US$ 100). The situation was slowly relegating the Zulu family to poverty until she joined the Mwaiwathu Farmers Club.

The Clinton-Hunter Development Initiative, which has funding from the Clinton Foundation and AGRA, promotes best agricultural practices to farmer groups like Mwaiwathu in rural Malawi. The program uses government extension officers and experienced agronomists to train local farmers on modern farming techniques, including improved seed varieties from authorized agrodealers and the proper use of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. The members of the Mwaiwathu Farmers Club (and others like it) were encouraged to grow food crops, mostly soybeans, maize and beans.

In her first year, Zulu took home MK 150,000 (US$ 310), more than she had ever earned as a tobacco farmer. She used the money to buy a bull for her ox cart, and she also bought fertilizer for the following planting season.

“Growing soybeans has been of great benefit to us; I have no doubt that things would be bad if we had not joined this club,” Zulu recounts in a soft voice.

The season that followed was not as good as the first, due to the long droughts that ravaged Malawi between 2013 and 2014. However, Zulu and her family still made profits from their farming. She bought another bull to complete the ox cart pair, and still managed to save about MK 90,000 (US$ 200) through a village bank.

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Collective market access inspires Mozambican farmer to take up processing and value addition activities

A few meters off the Beira-Chimoio highway at Nhamatanda shopping center is a roaring diesel-powered maize mill that can be heard from kilometers away. It is a combined maize sheller and flourmill, owned and operated by Joaquim Mateus Joaquim.

He was a farmer and smalltime maize trader until mid-2009. His usual harvest was about 36 (50 kg) bags of maize, which he sold at US$ 0.11/kg, which only earned him US$ 250 after 7 months of hard work.

Local maize traders manipulated prices, much to the disadvantage of farmers who sold their grain on their own. Joaquim was one of those victims. “I wanted to sell my grain alright, but the prices were very low, especially when they realized you are in great need,” Joaquim shares.

Joaquim, a husband to two wives and father to 5 children, joined the Mambo Ngualima Farmers’ Association in Nhamatanda District for aggregation and collective selling of their produce. The Association was one of the farmer groups being supported by Concern Universal to aggregate and sell their produce at better prices.

Mambo Ngualima and 11 other associations formed the Nhamatanda District Farmers Union. Through this grouping, he sold his grain at US$ 0.15/kg and earned US$ 100 more than what he earned previously.

With funding from AGRA, Concern Universal was helping smallholder farmers access markets for their produce. From his improved income and savings, Joaquim put together US$ 1,900 and received a further US$ 1,000 loan from the Nhamatanda group (thanks to an AGRA grant to Concern Universal) to purchase the miller.

“‘I am a businessman,” he says, “I saw milling as an opportunity to grow. I had some money but the loan was a big boost.” He speaks slowly and thoughtfully but he has a steady look in his eyes and works fast at his machine without pausing until the engines come to a lulling silence.

Joaquim’s milling plant is within an open wooden structure quickly put together, one can assume with the same impatience of his motions. He processes 500 kg of maize daily into flour. The processed flour is sold at US$ 0.26/kg, which adds up to about US$ 200/day if the whole stock is sold.

“Nhamatanda is a township, so I don’t know exactly how many people I serve around here, but I can say many, so many.” He smiles briefly at his comment.

Concern Universal has been working with farmer organizations in Manica, Gondola, Susundenga, Nhamatanda and Gorongosa Districts in central Mozambique. The project is focused on capacity building of the organizations for negotiating and marketing their member’s produce.

The farmer groups are also linked to agrodealers in order to help group members get better, more timely access to inputs, and share their knowledge about integrated soil fertility management. More than 13 aggregation sites have been set up within the five districts, and directly serve about 5,000 farmers.

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Shelling and milling value addition earns

US$ 340/ton and US$ 200 daily

5000 farmers benefitting directly from project
From losses to millions – Caroline’s change of fortunes from joining farmers’ group

Caroline Phiri is a 39-year-old mother of two living in Kamtuuale village in Kasungu, Malawi. She is a widow and supports both her family and her aged parents from farming.

For close to four years she worked on her two-hectare farm, harvesting less than 20 bags of maize and a collection of legumes whose value was very low. Within a short time of harvesting she would find it necessary to quickly sell her maize to the local vendors at very low prices, around MK 40/kg (about US$ 0.09/kg). “I used to suffer losses with everything I grew, even tobacco!” she says.

In 2010 she joined Bowe Farmers Association after a friend recommended it to her. The Catholic Development Commission (CADECOM) had just started working with Bowe Farmers under an AGRA grant to support smallholder farmer groups. Phiri joined in time to receive training from the CADECOM field officers and agronomist on land preparation, and choosing the best soybean and maize varieties to plant.

After the training, the Association’s leadership organized for farming inputs to be loaned to her and other members. That year she was able to plant using fertilizer, and to weed and top-dress her crops; she waited for the harvest with a little bit more hope.

She says the agronomist (whom she repeatedly calls AGRA) had told them the benefits of using herbicides and inoculants. All these had been made available through a negotiated loan from FDH bank, facilitated by AGRA and CADECOM. That year, Phiri harvested 86 (90 kg) bags of shelled maize, as well as 26 bags of soybeans – all this from the same farm that had produced almost nothing in previous years.

She dutifully took her produce to the BFA aggregation center in Mphomwwa, 20 km from Kasungu. The prices in 2010 were at the best ever recorded. Maize was sold at 200 Kwacha/kg. Her produce, together with other members’ grain, was later sold to CP Seeds Company, Malawi’s National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) and World Food Programme (WFP) among others. Caroline made MK 1.5 million (US$ 3,260) from the maize sale and MK 200,000 (US$ 435) from her soybeans.

Phiri’s income has been going up ever since. Her abundant harvests have grown such that her earnings have remained above a million Kwacha even when prices dip. She has been able to raise enough money to stop depending on loans for inputs.

Within three years, the many struggles she had grown accustomed to have gone away. Today she has enough food for her children and her aging parents, and is able to provide a more varied diet for them. She earns enough income to finance the education of her children, both of whom are in secondary school.

Hers is a story replicated by more than 12,000 farmers belonging to a collection of 15 farmer associations like Bowe. The transformative project has struck the right cord with women from rural villages, who are now being systematically being empowered.

“I have money in the bank,” she says proudly, “and one of these days I hopeto buy a car like the Marketing Manager’s.” All the women around laugh with her; money in the bank and buying cars is not the common banter between rural farmers, and more so women.
Kaherere Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi

Kaherere Smallholder Farmers Association (SFA) is the newest farmer-based organization under the AGRA-funded project that supports smallholder farmer groups. The Catholic Development Commission (CADECOM), a church organization that runs empowerment projects in western Malawi, implements the project.

Kaherere SFA was formed two years ago owing to the local villagers’ need to have a collective initiative to put together their small-scale farm produce and sell it in bulk at better prices. As is common among Malawi’s rural population, members of this group own small pieces of land, ranging between 0.25 and 5 hectares. The 276 SFA members, 139 of whom are women, suffered two plights in succession during every harvest season. They first got poor yields from their small plots, averaging about 5 bags of soybeans for a whole hectare and even less for maize. They then had to sell this limited produce to small-scale traders and vendors from nearby shopping centers around Mphomwwe (about 180 km northwest from Lilongwe).

In 2012, a group of 36 farmers came together and started a small association to deal with their common predicament. They came from four different villages (Kapiri, Mtendere, Takonda and Kanolo), and together they reached out to CADECOM for help. The Kaherere group wanted to know how to farm in more modern ways and then sell their produce at better prices.

“I had heard from some women in Mphomwwe that forming an association can help one to sell their produce at very good prices,” says Esther Chunga, from Takonda village, one of the founding members of SFA.

At the time, CADECOM had just received funding from AGRA to support farmer organizations in post-harvest crop handling, processing, and linking them to possible markets. CADECOM organized for systematic training for the new group to help them grow and match up similar associations involved in the project. CADECOM organized training for SFA members in business, cooperative management, and collective marketing.

The first harvest season for SFA was 2013. The small group had grown to about 70 people and some of them were just nominal members, not exactly engaged actively in the group. The harvest was just as poor as before, averaging 12 bags/ha of maize and soybeans. The group didn’t have an aggregation center, so they sold their produce as before, to local vendors at poor prices.

However, new market links had been created through support from CADECOM field officers. The farmers had also been taught to use fertilizer and inoculants, to plant improved varieties of the crops they grew, and to prepare their soil appropriately for better plant health.

The 2014 harvest season was a good year. Leonard Solomon from Kapiri village tills one hectare of land. In 2014 he harvested 36 bags of Soybean and 20 bags of unshelled groundnuts. He sold the soybeans for MK 520,000 (US$ 1,590). (His groundnuts were not ready for sale at the time of this writing.)

SFA’s aggregated soybean harvest was worth MK 6.2 million (about US$ 19,000), which was sold to the World Food Programme’s P4P initiative. With no warehouse to aggregate in, the group presently relies on using one of the classrooms at Lusito primary school during holidays. They have, however, bought land on which they plan to construct their aggregation center.

Catherine Banda, from Kanolo, the SFA treasurer, says they are currently looking to strike a deal for their members to grow maize seed. CADECOM has also arranged a system that will facilitate farmers to access inputs in the form of loans from FDH and Opportunity banks.

“We have new members who have just joined us, and it looks like we will have more coming, so we must make such an arrangement,” Banda explains. She says the farmers have discovered the benefits of hybrid seeds and are now keen to start growing producing high quality seed themselves for sale to local seed companies.

Price of maize before intervention sold maize
US$ 87.1/ton

Price of maize after intervention
US$ 400/ton

500% increase in income for
12,000 farmers in 15 similar associations

Some of the members of Kaherere Smallholder Farmers Association after a recent group meeting
Land rights drive helps a Zambian farmer recover her land

Milca Manda takes great pride in the fact that she now has rights to use land allocated to her by the ruling chief of the Mafuta Chiefdom.

She and her husband have 25 hectares allocated to them separately. Manda points out that she was allocated 12 ha in 2012 when she approached the chief for land. This is after attending several land rights sensitization meetings within Mafuta in Chipata District in Zambia, sponsored by the Chipata Land Alliance, a district chapter of the Zambia Land Alliance.

The jovial mother of four almost lost her newly acquired parcel of land when she moved to her maternal village in order for her children to go school.

“This village has no school, so I had to go away for some time. When I came back, my husband’s nephew was farming on my land,” Manda explains. She approached the paralegal working within Mafuta to help in what was quickly escalating into family feud.

The paralegal, Tangu Nyirenda, intervened telling Manda’s relatives that as the person allocated the land, Manda was the rightful owner of the parcel and that the law recognizes her as such. Nyirenda brought the differing family members to a mutual agreement to return Manda’s land and settle the matter.

A year later, in 2014, Manda is proud that she has a source of income from farming on the parcel of land. She grows an assortment of cash crops and food crops, including maize, sunflower and soybeans for direct consumption, while selling the surplus for income.

This is a step away from the local tradition in which all matters to do with land are the business of men, with women relegated to laboring on the farms. The existing land policy in Zambia is based on communal land ownership. Communities are organized in chieftdoms and ruled by traditional chiefs, who are the custodians of all customary lands within their chieftdoms.

Village members who need land for farming will approach the chief through an Induna, a member of the chief’s court. The chiefs will deliberate the issue with his Indunas and allocate the land he sees fit.

Manda is one of the earliest women to enjoy such an access to land. Chief Mafuta is leading a new wave of change, having allocated more land to women than any other chief around.

The Zambia Land Alliance (ZLA) has been funded by AGRA to promote better land policies that will allow easier access to land and land ownership rights for smallholder farmers. ZLA and its district chapters have been pushing for policy changes by engaging chiefs, political leadership, and government officials, and has been championing land rights awareness among poor rural farmers, especially the more vulnerable groups (women and youth). This work is aimed at expanding land use, food production and income generation at the household level for families living in poverty.

Manda lauds the ZLA initiative, saying empowering women to support their families and share responsibilities with their spouses begins with increased awareness of the issue.

“Women tend to be better managers, and when we earn income like this our children have a better life and live very happily,” she says. From her farm income, Manda is able to pay the costs of sending her children to school, and she has invested in keeping some goats, a traditional form of wealth in rural Zambia.
Mozambican lead farmer reaps 1,000% increase in cassava yield

Aberto Pinto is one of the 500 lead farmers selected by International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) and trained to grow a new improved cassava variety in Murupula, within Nampula, Mozambique.

Pinto receives cuttings for planting from IFDC for free. He plants the stems and then after harvesting, distributes 60% his seed stems to smallholders around him.

Before 2012, Pinto and his family of 12 toiled hard on his 5-hectare piece of land; they harvested an average of 7 tons of cassava every season.

His big household required 5 tons for a yearlong food supply. He would sell the remaining 2 tons for only about US$ 100 in total.

“It was clear to me that I was making losses. I was not making any progress, but there was nothing I could do,” Pinto laments of the past.

But that was until he heard about IFDC and the Instituto Investigação Agrária de Mozambique (IIAM) project for increasing cassava yields from an extension officer. A seasoned cassava farmer, Pinto grabbed the opportunity to multiply and distribute the new variety from his farm to neighbors in Muele village.

In return he was trained in land preparation, plant spacing, soil management, valuing his crop and preparing cuttings for the next planting. IFDC is working under the IIAM project, which is funded by AGRA, to multiply and distribute new improved cassava varieties to smallholder farmers in northern Mozambique, who heavily rely on cassava as their staple food. The initial objective was to help farmers in the region deal with cassava brown streak, a damaging disease, and improve food security.

Pinto received his first batch of cassava seed stems in 2012. They were 12 bags each consisting of 510 cuttings. The standard planting density for one hectare is 10,140 cuttings, so Pinto planted only 0.6 hectares.

“I thought it was too little; I even complained,” he says and laughs. “But the results were very shocking.”

The small portion of his farm he planted gave him 10 tons of cassava tubers. The hardy new variety had withstood all prevalent diseases and gave more than a 1,000% increase in yield. Previously, 0.6 hectares would have yielded only about 0.84 tons.

Pinto has been trained by IFDC as a lead farmer to provide technical assistance to five farmers with whom he is working. He visits the farmers’ plots and reports the challenges they have to the IFDC field officers and extension personnel. He also collaborates with the team of IFDC technicians during their field demonstration.

As his tradition, he saved 5 tons of the harvest for food and sold the rest. He received US$ 250 from the Dutch Agricultural Development and Trading Company (DADTCO), a company that processes cassava to make cassava cake, which is then used in brewing beer. DADTCO is part of an IIAM-coordinated value chain under the auspices of AGRA to provide market and value addition for farmers’ produce.

The money enabled him to hire farm labor for the first time. With organized farm labor, his land was better prepared during the late 2013 planting of the whole 5-hectare farm. “The crops are doing well now,” Pinto says with obvious delight. “I have seen what half a hectare can give me, so imagine what 5 hectares will produce!”

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New cassava varieties are a double fortune for smallholder farmers

For the first time, Jose Manuel from Namialo in Nampula Province of Mozambique will be receiving 30,000 Mozambican Meticais (about US$ 1,000) for the 20 tons of cassava he sold from his farm. This is a remarkable achievement for the seasoned cassava farmer.

“I have farmed in the same place for many years, and have never received this much money; this is very surprising,” Manuel says. Used to growing local varieties, his yields averaged 1 ton/ha and produced no monetary returns. He simply grew enough to eat, and this lasted only three months into the new season.

However, in 2012, he tried out a new improved cassava variety. His first harvest came in at 22 tons of cassava tubers, from just one hectare.

For many years, thousands of smallholder cassava farmers in Mozambique have labored to cultivate their staple crop, which was constantly attacked by the cassava brown streak virus, resulting in poor yields.

However, their fortunes are changing for the better after the Instituto Investigação Agrária de Mozambique (IIAM) developed 14 improved seed varieties that are made to withstand the deadly virus and yield more high quality tubers.

Of the 14 varieties that are adapted to specific climatic and soil conditions in northern Mozambique, two (Eyope and Mokhalana) are improvements of the local varieties popular with farmers. According to Constantine Cuambe, who has been heading the cassava breeding in Mozambique since 2009, the new varieties can yield up to 30 tons/ha. The yield for farmers who grow only local varieties is as low as 0.8 tons/ha.

“The new varieties can guarantee sustainability for the smallholder farmer, as they do well with very minimal input,” says Cuambe.

AGRA has been supporting IIAM since 2011 with a grant to produce and multiply improved cassava seed varieties for smallholder farmers in northern Mozambique. IIAM has produced and licensed the 14 varieties to Orouware Seeds Company for commercial production. Close to 8,000 farmers have been using the improved varieties and recording average yields of 20 tons/ha.

In an unprecedented development, Cervejas de Mozambique (CDM), a beer brewing company that makes a specific brand of beer from cassava, approached IIAM with a proposal to create a cassava value chain. CDM buys cassava cake from the Dutch Agricultural Development and Trading Company (DADTCO) to make the beer. IIAM has enlisted several other organizations and companies to facilitate the value chain. AGRA has provided additional funding to IIAM to scale up production of the improved varieties. IIAM, in conjunction with Orouware Seeds, produces the cassava stem cuttings. The cuttings are supplied to another company Corredor Agro Limited (CAL), a commercial grower. CAL multiplies the varieties and supplies seed cuttings to the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC).

IFDC works with farmers to improve soil management, pest control and the use of modern farming technologies, including chemical fertilizer and pesticides. IFDC distributes the seed cuttings to its network of lead farmers, who are trained to assist their fellow villagers in plant spacing, giving appropriate amounts of fertilizer and the right time to administer herbicides, among other key steps in ensuring profitable yield.

By 2014, IFDC was supplying seed cuttings to 7,000 smallholder cassava farmers spread across 17 Districts in Nampula Province of Mozambique. When harvested, the high yielding cassava is readily sold to DADTCO, for onward sale to CDM breweries.

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Mozambique. With the distribution network in place, the initial goal is to help alleviate food shortages experienced as a result of perennial attacks from cassava brown streak virus; the aim is to involve more than 40,000 cassava farmers by 2016.

The success of the project has encouraged a similar initiative in the south of Mozambique. IIAM, with funding from AGRA and support from the government, plans to widen the scope of the project. A successful initiative will see an organized value chain system reaching 150,000 farmers in Mozambique to sustain food security and create income from farming cassava.
Revolutionary farmers’ group beating poverty in strides

Before 2010, Bowe Farmers’ Association was a loosely formed collection of five farmer groups within Kasungu District of western Malawi. Now with a membership just shy of 1,000, the Association started small, with only a few producers coming together to aggregate their grain and sell it when prices were at their best.

The Association members would harvest their soybeans and maize and store them in a makeshift warehouse. However, yields were poor, reaching a collective total of less than 800 tons between 2006 and 2010. This sad situation spilled over to the selling of the grain. Local vendors paid as little as 50 Kwacha/kg (about US$ 0.09/kg).

Zaina Kapachika has been at the leadership of the Association since its founding. She says most members do not have fond memories of how things were in the early years. “We used to keep our produce in a warehouse, but nobody came to buy. It was discouraging to most of our members,” she says. “Back then, we just plowed and planted any available variety and waited for the harvest season.”

However, in 2010, the Catholic Development Commission (CADECOM), a church organization set up to help empower smallholder farmers, identified Bowe Farmers’ Association as one of the farmer organizations it wanted to support. This was part of a farmer organization development project that AGRA was funding via a grant to CADECOM. The main idea was to help farmers reduce post-harvest losses and link them to markets. CADECOM trained farmers on land preparation, crop spacing, and use of chemical fertilizer, herbicides and other best-practice agricultural technologies.

During the 2011-2012 seasons, in which the training was done, soybean harvests doubled. The Association aggregated 2,028 tons of soybeans from all its members, compared to the previous 800 tons. The Association’s leaders participated in an AGRA-organized conference on aggregation, where they received additional training and were linked directly to grain buyers, such as Demeter, Monsanto, ACE, and Auction Holdings Commodity Exchange in Lilongwe.

Dextra Chipilingu, Bowe Farmers Association marketing manager, was one of the farmer group officials taken to meet the grain buyers. They learned about the grain quality requirements of the buyers. “We received conditional orders from the World Food Programme’s P4P initiative and several other millers in Lilongwe,” Chipilingu explains. “Our challenge was to achieve and maintain the needed grain quality.”

CADECOM brought weighing scales and moisture meters for the Association. The moisture meters, coupled with post-harvest grain handling training that the farmers received, ensured that grain quality was maintained and post-harvest losses were minimized.

Supplying an average of 2,000 tons per season for three years, the Association has been making more than 40 million Kwacha (US$ 100,000) for its members. The systematic growth of the association and the transformation in the member’s livelihoods has influenced the start of several similar groups.

In 2013, the Malawi government, through its Ministry of Agriculture, joined AGRA and supported Bowe Farmers’ Association in constructing two medium-capacity warehouses that can hold up to 1,500 tons of grain each. The two structures are complete and already in use.

The farmers belonging to this group get farm inputs in a negotiated loan plan. FDH Bank in Lilongwe provides the funds to facilitate the input purchases for farmers. In 2013, the group borrowed MK 16,000,000 (US$ 40,000) to complete their projects and finance the planting season for its members.

The Association has also embarked on a venture to process oil from soybeans. Mrs. Kapachika, also referred to as madam president, says they wanted to add value to their produce locally. She says income has been motivating enough for them to start new initiatives that will generate income during off-season dry spells and help increase the demand for their produce.

Through a bank loan and a reserve fund, the group purchased a milling plant for soybean oil processing at a price of MK 8,000,000 (US$ 20,000). The plant is expected to be operational by early 2015.

120% growth in average soybean yield in 2014 from 1.6 tons/ha to 4 tons/ha

Project covers 50 farmer associations in 4 districts with 40,000 farmers

Members of the Bowe Farmers Association during a group meeting in Mphomwwa, in Kasungu Malawi
Shifting from tobacco to maize farming in Malawi

More than 40,000 smallholder farmers who joined farmers’ clubs under the Clinton-Hunter Development Initiative (CHDI) in Malawi’s rural areas have seen their livelihoods improve due to the income earned from their farm produce.

CHDI (as it is popularly known) is jointly funded by the Clinton-Hunter Foundation and AGRA. CHDI is mandated to promote the use of integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) technologies among smallholder farmers to improve their crop production and better their incomes. ISFM refers to the adoption of multiple farming practices to improve soil fertility. Some of these practices include use of fertilizer, nitrogen-fixing plants, and proper soil conservation among others.

Through this project, CHDI field coordinators and agronomists hold farmer trainings at club levels. Trained farmers are then helped to access financing to acquire farm inputs from partner agrodealers during the planting season.

Lustia Nkhoma, a field coordinator with CHDI, plays a key role in the training and linking of farmers with input retailers and crop buyers. “We tell farmers we have free knowledge for them that will help them earn money from their farms, and then we facilitate input access through linkages, and it is working,” says Nkhoma.

When Nkhoma was first tasked to reach out to 50 clubs and an estimated 1,000 farmers she was a food monitor. She beat the target, reaching 67 clubs and 1,047 farmers. She is part of a team that is working with over 40,000 farmers participating in the CHDI that are spread throughout the Mchinji, Kasungu, Dowa and Nchisi Districts of rural Malawi.

Austin Ngwira is the CDHI director for community impact, and his job is to ensure that participating farmers get the best inputs and other services from partners. Through negotiated arrangements, Ngwira says that farmers are provided with a productivity package comprising fertilizer, seed of improved varieties for maize and soybeans, herbicides, inoculants used to coat seed before planting for pest and disease protection, and fungicides for crop health.

“CHDI then connects the farmers to buyers for their harvest and ensure they are getting good market prices,” says Ngwira. This arrangement has proven successful, with farmers getting competitive prices for their produce.

Thanks to the CHDI training and access to quality farm inputs, smallholders participating in the initiative have seen their yields and incomes almost triple over the three years that the project has been in operation.

By early 2014, an average farmers club member involved with CHDI was harvesting 4 tons of soybeans from one hectare of land – a 120% increase from the 1.6 tons of soybeans recorded as the highest yield before the project. Maize production enjoyed a similar upward trend. Kaviya Mase, in Kasungu District, recorded a 5.2 ton/ha maize yield from his 3-hectare farm.

Use of fertilizer and better land preparation, in addition to good crop health, resulted in the harvest of high quality seed. The soybeans and maize produced by farmers under the guidance of joint government and CHDI extension officers attracted prices up to Malawi Kwacha (MK) 120/kg (about US$ 0.26/kg). This reflected a remarkable rise from the MK 40/kg price that prevailed before the CHDI/AGRA project.

The rewards generated by the project have motivated farmers to start switching from the long-held practice of growing tobacco to copy their peers who are doing much better with maize and soybeans. The success of the initiative has also attracted strong interest from farmers who live outside the project’s geographic areas.

Members of the Mpepa Farmers Association, which is one of many now working with the Clinton-Hunter Development Initiative in Malawi.
Dr. Amande Mutia is the only groundnut breeder in Mozambique. His project is focused on producing a fast-maturing groundnut hybrid that produces a larger grain and is more resistant to groundnut rosette virus.

Mutia developed a new variety that is set to revolutionize groundnut farming in the country. The new variety matures in about 90 days, which compares very favorably with the 120-130 days-to-maturity of the widely grown traditional varieties. This is grown in Mozambique, along with other factors, leads me to believe that the new variety will produce an average of up to 1,000 kg/ha in farmers’ fields. This is still more than double the current average level of farm production,” Mutia affirms.

This should open the door for groundnuts to become more than a subsistence crop consumed directly by households, with production surpluses from smallholders increasingly available for marketing, providing a way to increase household incomes.

Improved productivity comes not just from the variety’s higher yield potential, but also from its genetic resistance to the groundnut rosette virus, a devastating disease that has been responsible for the worst losses in groundnut farming recorded in sub-Saharan Africa. The virus prevents the plant from synthesizing nutrients, greatly retarding healthy plant growth and yields. The new variety’s ability to withstand the virus is a key milestone achieved by Mutia.

The Oruware Seed Company has been licensed to multiply and market the new variety (which has yet to be named). “Groundnut seed multiplication takes more time than for other crops, and that is something we also need to look at more keenly,” Mutia explains, noting that within three years, the seed should be in the hands of at least 8,000 Mozambican farmers.

Mozambique produces about 110,000 tons of groundnuts every year. This works out to an average yield of less than 400 kg/ha, an unacceptably low level of productivity given today’s technologies.

“Groundnut is a very important crop in Mozambique, yet it receives almost no attention in relevant agricultural circles,” says Mutia. Groundnuts are the most widely grown nitrogen-fixing legume in the country, accounting for about 42% of all legumes produced. Consistently strong global demand for groundnuts makes this legume a potentially reliable source of income for Mozambican smallholder farmers.

However, lack of proper research and the development of well-adapted improved varieties have left farmers growing local varieties – usually distributed informally between neighbors and planted repeatedly in the same locations. These traditional varieties are genetically weak and incapable of withstanding prevalent diseases.

AGRA awarded a grant to Mutia to continue the research he began as part of his PhD studies, which was focused on addressing varietal development and distribution issues affecting Mozambique’s groundnut sub-sector.

Working for three years, and with but one assistant, Mutia developed a new variety that is set to revolutionize groundnut farming in the country. The new variety matures in about 90 days, which compares very favorably with the 120-130 days-to-maturity of the widely grown traditional varieties.

In addition to shortening the time-to-harvest by 25-30%, the yield potential of the new variety is also significantly higher. “During trials we reached 1,600 kg/ha, which is the global standard. But the diversity of farm conditions under which the crop is grown in Mozambique, along with other factors, leads me to believe that the new variety will produce an average of up to 1,000 kg/ha in farmers’ fields. This is still more than double the current average level of farm production,” Mutia affirms.

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90 days to maturity for the improved variety, compared to 120 days previously

400% increase in yields from improved seed varieties. 0.4 tons/ha of ordinary variety to 1.6 tons/ha of improved variety

8,000 Number of smallholder farmers initially targeted
Soybean farming triples young Malawian mother’s income

When other farmers’ yields dipped during the 2013 harvest season, Jophta Zulu, a young mother of five, saw her soybean yields increase, just as she expected. In 2012 she had harvested 16 bags of soybeans from her 0.25-hectare plot of land, earning her close to MK 150,000 (about US$ 400). While her 2012 yield was not terrible, she says it should have been better, and attributed the shortfall to being a “newbie”.

But having witnessed the potential for deriving a serious and reliable income from farming, Zulu set her sights high and tried again, this time following instructions to the letter.

In 2013, she harvested 20 bags of soybeans, about a 25% increase over the year before. Zulu thinks it would have been more had it not been for the drought that ravaged the area during that season. Even so, her MK 187,500 (US$ 600) income from producing soybeans was still more than welcome.

“I was finally able to do some needed rehabilitations and repairs to my house, and this has been a true blessing,” she says with a smile.

Zulu is a member of Mwaiwathu Farmers’ Club in Mlonyeni village, Mchinji District of Malawi. She received best practice agricultural training from an extension officer commissioned by the Clinton – Hunter Development Initiatives (CHDI). CHDI is one of AGRA’s implementing partners that is working to help smallholder farmers improve their productivity through the use of improved agronomic practices.

CHDI provides smallholder farmers in Malawi – those that are organized into farmers’ clubs and associations – with training in the use of fertilizers, chemical herbicides, and other practices geared towards increasing farm productivity. Farmers are also enabled to access farm inputs through a credit arrangement negotiated between CHDI and local agrodealers; support for access to inputs comes from CHDI and AGRA.

“If in two years I have been able to achieve this much, then continued support from AGRA and CHDI will make things better, not just for me but other Club members as well,” Zulu says with obvious hope.

With her changing fortunes, Zulu has been able to put her children back in school. Her family’s diet has improved, and they have better clothing to wear. She is now able to contemplate a better future and plan for the things she wants to achieve.

CHDI and AGRA investments are bringing benefits to Mwaiwathu Farmers’ Club and about 80 other such groups. The combined membership of these groups is close to 40,000 farmers, the majority of which are women. These farmers are spread across four districts in Malawi (Ntchisi, Mchinji, Kasungu and Dowa Districts) and are being empowered to dramatically change their lives by the increased income now coming from farming.
Sustaining smallholder farmers in Mozambique by supporting local agrodealers

Emilia Abibo Savaio started her small agrodealer business in 2005 in the backyard of her home in Sussundenga, near the city of Chimoio, Mozambique.

Savaio found herself closing the business periodically, due to the ebb and flow of the agricultural cycle. Her busiest time came during the planting season, when farmers were looking for inputs.

“I was serving just a handful of farmers, not even close to a hundred,” she says. “I can’t be exact, but it was a small venture with dim prospects.”

Back then, an inventory valued at US$ 1,000 would last her into the new season, before having to restock. Her profit never reached US$ 200, and occasionally she would incur losses as some chemical inputs expired on her shelves. Being a resourceful woman, however, when the shop was not active she turned to producing crops of her own.

In 2010, Concern Universal, an international organization working with smallholder farmers in Chimoio, approached Savaio with a training invitation. Concern Universal had been funded by AGRA to help improve smallholder access to agricultural inputs.

The training was aimed at equipping agrodealers with knowledge about modern farming technologies that they could share with farmers who came to their shops. Savaio was one of 58 agrodealers that participated in the training program. They learned about improved soil fertility management, the use of chemical fertilizers at the right times and in the correct amounts, how to select appropriate seeds, and how to properly apply herbicides and pesticides. The agrodealers were also taught how to establish demonstration plots, and learned how to better manage the finances of their businesses.

After completing the training, Savaio received a US$ 10,000 loan from Opportunity Bank to expand her business. She put up a proper shop and increased her stock to about US$ 5,000.

“I thought I should do something else to cushion my business during lower income periods, so I decided on seed multiplication.” She explains proudly.

Left with about US$ 2,000 from the loan, Savaio sought a government license to cultivate maize seed, sesame and cowpea seed on a 25-hectare plot.

Concern Universal had also negotiated with larger suppliers of agricultural inputs to assist small agrodealers like Savaio by transporting inputs to their shops, as well as supplying inputs on credit, with payments collected after stock was sold out.

With supplementary income from her seed multiplication efforts and relaxed business terms from input suppliers, Savaio’s overall business has been growing steadily. Using US$ 15,000 from her seed multiplication work, she built a warehouse for storing agro-inputs that are supplied to her in bulk.

Increased stock has also enabled her to serve a wider clientele with a more diverse range of agricultural products, and her shop is now active throughout the year. The business has grown from earning an annual profit of less than US$ 200 to producing an average monthly turnover of US$ 1,000.

Savaio also plays a key role in the local farming community. She shares cultivation and crop management knowledge with farmers around Sussundenge, guiding them on proper practices to help increase the yields obtained from their land.

During the harvest season, these farmers sell their produce to her at the best market prices that can be obtained with the help of Concern Universal. Her much improved income has enabled Savaio to continue diversifying and expanding her business by purchasing a small oil processing plant, which is now opening new opportunities for adding value to the produce she buys from her neighbors.
AGRA's involvement has been to provide funding to the Zambia Land Alliance, which in turn supported and trained Nyirenda to assist in the Alliance's grassroots outreach activities.

Besides working to sensitize her fellow Zambians to land use issues, Nyirenda also helps to resolve land-related conflicts, advising communal courts and arbitrating out-of-court settlements. She takes her job seriously.

She serves as an expert witness to the official courts on the customary nature of rural land administration. In a training program funded by AGRA, she learned the basics of how to handle small-scale land litigation issues and work in collaboration with the Chief's court to resolve them.

Paralegals are used to help poor farmers and marginalized groups – especially women – who cannot afford the prohibitive legal fees imposed by official courts. In two years, Nyirenda has handled 139 cases, 25 of which have been fully resolved while the others are pending at the palace court.

“Most of the time, we handle cases of male relatives grabbing land from widowed women. I come in and we mediate, and if that does not work, I forward the case to the Chief's court,” she explains. Nyirenda has been provided with a bicycle so she can visit her clients, and a desk from which she is able to do her work. She is concerned that, in rural Zambia only a fraction of women have access to productive land as compared to men, who all too often do very little with their land.

“Out of about 500 farms in the area where I work, only 97 are operated by women. That needs to change,” Nyirenda says firmly. She goes on to note that she has witnessed inter-chiefdom disputes, family feuds and irregular land allocations, and that paralegals like her play a big role in sensitization, counseling and arbitration.

With great strides being achieved in her area of jurisdiction, word is spreading quickly about needed changes in land policy. She adds her voice to the focus on official certification that ensures land tenure security for poor farmers who could easily be displaced without such documentation.

Nyirenda's pet subject is the land rights of women. Her main challenge, however, is a physical one, in that the Chiefdom comprises a large geographical area with a dispersed population, and shuttling from one end to the other on her bicycle is not easy. Despite the distances involved, she has managed to put together a total of 12 mass sensitization meetings in Mafuta Chiefdom in the last two years, in collaboration with the Chief's palace and with support from Chipata District Land Alliance, and interest in the topic (and the services she can provide) continues to grow rapidly.

97 out of 500 farms are owned by women within 2 years of the project

139 cases handled by Nyirenda

25 to full settlement and resolution

12 sensitization drives held within 2 years
Women empowered by supportive land policy in Zambia

For Tangu Mwale, a mother of eight children, when the payment for her 75 bags of maize comes from the Food Reserve Agency of Zambia, it will be a dream come true. This will be in addition to the income generated by selling tobacco and groundnuts. This relative abundance is enabling this single mother to pay for school fees, buy farm inputs, and make plans for the coming planting season.

Mwale tends an eight-hectare farm allocated to her by the Chief of the Mafuta Chiefdom in Chipata District of Zambia. She got access to the land after a successful sensitization drive by the Zambia Land Alliance, which encouraged women like her to seek certified land access rights from their leaders. She promptly took the initiative and approached the Chief for land allocation.

“This initiative has made a big difference, not just in my life, but for other women in this village too. Now we have things that we can call our own,” she says in Chichewa.

She first learned about the land rights awareness meetings through a friend. She was skeptical about the whole idea but decided to attend anyway. It turned out to be the best decision she has ever made.

Besides the produce already sold, Mwale has a wooden granary that is full to overflowing with maize. That which cannot be stored in the granary has been shelled and stored inside her house.

Mwale belongs to a local Community Land Advocacy Committee (or CLAC) that is guided by a trained paralegal. The group has witnessed a shift in the fortunes of poor households as more and more people get access to land and start farming.

The Zambia Land Alliance (ZLA), with funding from AGRA, is running a project to address the issues of land tenure security for poor rural households, as well as land rights for women. The two-year project is designed to promote food farming and income generation for smallholder Zambian farmers.

In Mafuta Chiefdom, a record 38 women have been allocated land; others are waiting for their allocation. ZLA officials are working with the local Chief to generate official land allocation certificates that ensure access and land tenure rights.

Mwale is keen that the certificates be issued as a form of protection for her and other people recently allocated land to avoid relentless squabbles over boundaries and plot claims. “We were all ignorant about whether we had land rights or not. Now we no longer complain from the kitchen, and you can see for yourself,” she says with a confident finality.
A rice-powered green revolution in Burkina Faso

In a country with an annual rice consumption of 52,000 tons, it is no wonder that rice is prized as both a food and cash crop, and is grown by more than 100,000 smallholders in Burkina Faso. The government has prioritized rice production with the ambitious goal of quadrupling production by 2018. By collaborating with various partners, including the government, seed producers, national research agencies, and smallholder seed growers, AGRA is contributing to achieving this goal, and sowing the seeds of a rice-powered green revolution in the country.

Six years ago, farmers struggled with access to enough good quality seed of key crops at affordable prices. The formal seed sector was able to meet less than 6% of the national demand for seed. When available, high quality seed was very expensive and often found in shops that were far from farmers’ villages. This left farmers with no option but to continuously use self-saved seed, which led to low yields since the health and quality of the seed were not assured. Naturally, this meant that neither the farmers nor the country as a whole produced enough rice and other important crops.

Bobo Dioulasso is a key agricultural region located southwest of the capital Ouagadougou. Today, 1,300 rice farmers in Bama District of Bobo Dioulasso are all smiles as they witness the power of using certified seed of improved varieties, coupled with good agronomic practices. Their yields have nearly doubled – from an initial 3.5 t/ha to the current 5.5 t/ha, and they are making a good return from selling the seed rice.

“There has been a real improvement in my livelihood,” says Ouattara Kalifa, a rice seed farmer in Bama District. “I’ve acquired three bicycles, a motorbike and much needed cellphones because of my participation in the NAFASO network.”

Neema Agricole Du Faso (NAFASO) is a local seed company and one of AGRA’s key partners in the country. NAFASO and its network of farmers produced 3,116 tons of seed rice from 1,371 hectares in 2013. This notably increased the incomes of farmers in the network, and in turn, NAFASO made US$ 1.8 million that year selling the seed it purchased from participating farmers.

AGRA’s partnership with NAFASO involved promoting the production and marketing of improved certified seed of maize, rice and cowpea. Slowly but steadily, NAFASO has changed the face of rice production in the country, beginning with the Bobo Dioulasso region.

Through collaboration with the national research institute (INERA), NAFASO accessed seed of high-yielding rice varieties adapted to the region’s conditions, which it then multiplied. In addition, the firm worked with the national seed service (Service National des Semences) to get the seed certified. Extension service officials assisted with organizing farmers into viable rice seed production groups and promoting the importance of the use of certified seed and good agronomy. NAFASO also engaged the association of agrodealers in Burkina Faso (AGRODIA) and AGRIFARE, a large private agrodealer, to create a sizeable network of agrodealer shops to increase farmers’ access to quality seed and other inputs.

Lastly, farmers were trained in basic financial management, to be able to operate their farms as the businesses they should be. Farmers were empowered to train other farmers in all these aspects, and together these interventions contributed to making rice farming profitable for the region’s smallholders.

Life in the community is changing too. By creating employment opportunities and empowering farmers to profit more from their rice farming, NAFASO has had a positive impact on the
Abdoulaye Sawadogo in his rice farm in Bobo Dioulaso village in Burkina Faso.

As a result of bountiful local harvests, residents were able to purchase a communal ambulance, and food is being provided to schools and less privileged homes.

Says Abdoulaye Sawadogo, the head of NAFASO, “My partnership with AGRA has made me the business person I am today. I have benefited a lot from the training and technical support AGRA has provided, and it has enabled me to more efficiently operate this large and growing seed company.”

Through aggressive sensitization campaigns on radio, television and print media, complemented by farmer field days organized with the relevant partners, NAFASO created awareness among farmers of the new varieties available and where to obtain them. This has effectively strengthened demand for the high quality certified seed produced by its network of trained seed growers.

Farmers growing seed rice for NAFASO have made an average of US$ 1800/ha. Buoyed by this success, they have increased the planted area to 1,200 hectares, and stand to earn as much as US$ 11.9 million in 2015. A green revolution is underway in Burkina Faso, and in Bobo Dioulaso, it is being powered by rice.
Better farming practices lighting up rural villages in Ghana

In Tankey village, a rural farming community in Jasikan District in Ghana’s Volta Region, the residents are a happy lot. Ardent football fans, they now have good reasons for going home early in the evenings – they can watch live soccer matches from the comfort of their living rooms. They are enjoying the fruits of their hard farm labor.

By adopting better farming practices, such as abolishing the destructive land clearing practice of ‘slash-and-burn’ and using soil health-improving techniques like crop rotations, application of fertilizer, and minimum tillage, farmers have increased their average maize yields by more than 400% – from 1.3 tons/ha in 2011 to 5 tons/ha in 2014.

Says Agbesi Frank, a farmer, “Before 2011, I got only 2-3 (180 kg) bags of maize per acre through the slash-and-burn method of farming, but after participating in the Africare Ghana project my yield has increased to 10-12 bags of maize per acre.”

Frank’s success has been replicated by nearly 10,000 smallholder farmers in the Jasikan District. However, it has not always been this way.

Before 2011, farmers in the region obtained consistently low maize yields. Almost without exception, farmers cleared their land before each planting season using the traditional slash-and-burn technique, whereby they set fire to all crop residues from previous seasons and any plant material to raze it to the ground. The practice was extremely harmful to the soil’s health as it kills live organisms and reduces the soil’s ability to hold nutrients. It is no wonder that farmers’ maize yields had leveled off at 1.3 tons/ha for years. From whatever little maize they harvested, the farmers also frequently lost between 30-50% of it during storage. Farmers were trapped in a vortex of poverty but saw no alternatives to growing maize since it is their main staple food.

Seeking to reverse this trend, in 2011 Africare Ghana, with a grant from AGRA, implemented a project aimed at increasing smallholder farmer productivity and livelihoods through improved agronomy in the Hohoe, Jasikan, and Kedjebi Districts of the Volta Region. The project was to reach over 30,000 smallholder farmers.

To do so, Ghana’s Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) technical staff were first trained in soil sampling, soil fertility, and soil fertility management, as well as post-harvest management of cereals. The MoFA staff subsequently trained farmers using demonstration plots in the targeted districts to serve as farmer learning centers. Here farmers were trained in use of improved seeds and fertilizers, crop rotation of maize with legumes, good post-harvest management, as well as farming as a business.

Participating farmers were quickly able to see the benefits of these technologies and went on to implement them on their own farms, managing to triple their average yields by 2014. Incomes from their farm businesses also increased as they incorporated other crops, such as cowpeas, into their rotation systems. Their efforts did not go unnoticed. One of the participating Farmer-Based Organizations (FBOs) – Akaa Tankey Unity Cooperative Farmers and Marketing Society – won the District’s Best FBO Award, and Agbesi Frank, a member of the Cooperative, received the Best District Maize Farmer Award.

So what does all this have to do with football? Wanting to improve other aspects of their lives, community members raised funds for connecting electricity from the main gridline at Abotuasi – about 6 km from Tankey. Others bought their own television sets and satellite dishes. Today, the farmers who once relied on television sets in neighboring villages to keep updated on local and international soccer can relax in their own homes to watch these matches live, thanks to the benefits of adopting good agronomic practices and treating their farms as the businesses.

“A section of Akaa Tankey village showing the electricity connection and a TV satellite dish on a farmer’s house.
Farmers aggregating their way out of poverty in Ghana

In Gaa, a major grain-growing center in Ghana’s Northern Region, stands an imposing 200-ton capacity grain warehouse that is transforming the lives of smallholder farmers. Three years ago, the once-dilapidated structure was renovated with funds from AGRA provided to the Ghana Grains Council to implement the “Ghana Warehouse Receipt Promotion Project”. This was part of a broader initiative to improve farmers’ productivity and to set up functional warehouse receipting systems in the nation. One of the beneficiaries is the Gaa Farmers Association, comprising 60 smallholder growers of rice, maize and soybeans.

Before the project, Gaa farmers did not believe in the power of collective marketing. They also experienced extensive grain losses to weevils and rodents. “We would lose two out of every ten bags of maize that we stored in our homes”, says the Association’s warehouse manager, Alhassan Musah. “It was terrible!” Given that each bag weighs 180 kilos, this was a considerable loss that was replicated across more than 1,000 farming units, comprising a collective loss of more than 360 tons of maize each season.

Gaa farmers are now taking food security into their own hands as they staunch previous grain losses using the improved storage provided by the community warehouse. They are also commanding better prices for their grain and changing their fortunes. In 2013 alone, using the community warehouse system the Gaa Farmers Organization marketed a total of 125.6 tons of high quality grains, valued at US$ 27,493, on behalf of about 50 Association members.

AGRA’s partner, the Ghana Grain Council, approached the Gaa Farmers Association to participate in the initiative. For the grain warehouse to be filled to capacity, the farmers needed to be given better access to agricultural inputs, and to be taught the basics of good agronomy. Through linkages with Tizaa Rural Bank, farmers received credit for seed and fertilizer purchases. With AGRA funding, the Ghana Grain Council purchased basic grain handling and quality grading equipment, such as moisture meters, weighing scales, tarpaulins, and sample spears, and trained the Association’s members on how to use the equipment. Other training aspects included proper grain handling practices in order to maintain grain quality, effective record keeping, and price negotiation skills to take advantage of interest from bulk grain buyers, such as the Savanna Farmers Company and Gundaa Produce Limited.

To maintain the warehouse operations, the Association charges farmers nominal storage fees.

The Gaa Farmers Association members have each planted maize, rice and soybean on acreages ranging from two to 30 acres, and they collectively producing about 200 tons of maize, with each farmer storing an average of 50 bags of maize in the warehouse.

Women farmers, previously excluded from profitable farming, are being empowered in new ways through this project. Traditionally, women do not have rights over farming decisions and mainly provide labor on family farms, deferring all production decisions to their husbands. However, through membership in the Association, two women – Adamu Alhassan and Mahamadu Ayi – are flipping this tradition on its head. By leasing land from the Association’s chairman, and implementing the good agronomic techniques learned, Alhassan has quadrupled her maize harvest, and Ayi has tripled hers. They are now managing to store 200 and 150 (180 kg) bags, respectively, in the community warehouse.

Their joy in this achievement is clearly evident: “I have never before in my life seen this amount of money!” said Amadou Alhassan, a Ghanaian rice and maize farmer, who increased his maize yields by 400% by growing high quality certified seed and using better agronomic practices.

Members of Gaa Farmers Association (Ghana) delivering fresh grain for safe storage in the community warehouse.
Homegrown grain handling solutions improve the profitability of Ghanaian farmers

In 2001, Kwame Boateng, set up Sahel Grains Ltd to support maize farmers across the entire value chain – from plowing the field to shelling and drying the harvested grain. With 20 staff, Boateng supported more than 1,000 farmers. Despite their best efforts, the firm struggled to meet the heavy demand for their services. For one, they lacked adequate seed cleaning equipment that would enable them to market better quality produce by removing all broken grains and foreign material.

In recognition of their service to farmers, Sahel Grains received a grant from Concern Universal, an AGRA grantee, to purchase a new seed cleaner. The new cleaner enabled the provision of services to more than 12,000 smallholder farmers in four districts in Ghana’s Brong Ahafo Region.

Concern Universal is implementing an AGRA-funded project focused on the development of market and post-harvest services. Through this project, farmers are trained in good agricultural practices, group formation, record keeping, and are also linked to financial services providers to access microcredit.

Drying presents a considerable challenge to growers, especially in the main season in which harvesting coincides with minor seasonal rains. Lack of adequate storage and drying facilities means that attack by molds and aflatoxin infestation are real threats.

Fuseini Iddrisu, a farmer from the Kintampo South District explains, “Before the Concern Universal project I got around four (180 kg) bags and was not able to pay my children’s school fees. Shelling and drying of the harvested maize was a problem for me. Life was difficult.”

However, by providing homegrown solutions to these problems, Boateng and his firm are adding value to farmers’ grain harvests. The firm brings portable shellers right to the farmer’s doorstep to ensure that harvested maize is shelled as quickly as possible. The firm then buys, cleans, dries and stores the shelled maize at its premises, ready for market.

“After Concern Universal introduced their project to me, I managed to increase my production and now I am getting 10-15 bags/acre. I no longer think about shelling and drying as aggregators [Sahel Grains] have taken that burden from me. I make more money and I’m now able to pay for my children’s school fees,” adds an obviously pleased Iddrisu. His experience is replicated across the Brong Ahafo Region, with more than 12,000 farmers benefitting from the project. Their combined yield increase is 9,100 tons, with an approximate value of nearly US$ 2.0 million.

By improving post-harvest handling, farmers have been able to improve grain quality and fetch better prices from high-end buyers. Sahel Grain’s buyers include Flour Mills Ghana Ltd in Tema, which processes chicken feed from the high quality maize.

Says Boateng, “Our innovation [portable shelling services] led other buyers to do the same. Farmers now have a choice of service providers.” The firm’s balance sheet confirms its improved business, thanks to the project. “Our sales volume as of June 30, 2013 was less than 1,000 tons, valued at GHC 316,000 (US$ 98,750). A year later our sales reached 4,000 tons, valued at GHC 763,000 (US$ 238, 437) – about a 150% increase.”

“After Concern Universal introduced their project to me, I managed to increase my production and now I am getting 10-15 bags/acre. I no longer think about shelling and drying as aggregators have taken that burden from me. I make more money and I’m now able to pay for my children’s school fees.”
MacAdams was approached by AGRA’s partner, the Ghana Grain Council, through its “Ghana Warehouse Receipt Promotion” project, to establish a functionally effective warehouse receipt system in Ghana. Before that, through the Ghana Nucleus Farmer program, MacAdams had been connected to the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) to access funds to facilitate his farming operations.

Beginning with only 50 farmers, and cultivating only a total of 75 hectares of soybeans, MacAdams experienced a number of initial challenges. He lacked enough tractors to Plow each of the 1.5-hectare plots cultivated by the farmers; the farmers were not trained in good agronomy; he had to rely on a leased warehouse to store his and the group’s harvested grain; and he had no secured contracts from bulk grain buyers. However, MacAdams quickly set about changing this.

Through contacts at the Savanna Agricultural Research Institute (SARI) in Tamale, Northern Ghana, MacAdams learned of a Catholic Relief Services (CRS) soybean program that required seed for their activities in assisting smallholder farmers. He travelled by bicycle for two days to meet them. MacAdams managed to sell some of his soybeans to CRS for use as seed for their farmers and was also connected to a bulk buyer – Castrade Caspo Group in Kumasi – to negotiate purchases for his out-growers.

In that initial sale, MacAdams sold 72 tons of seed. Quick on the heels of this success, he was recruited to participate in the AGRA-supported Arzakinmu Project in 2011 as a Nucleus Farmer, through which a larger pool of smallholder farmers could be engaged. Some of the benefits of this partnership were training for his out-growers on grain value chains, especially post-harvest handling and storage, and the installation of a fully equipped 80-ton capacity community warehouse for use by Maclog’s out-growers.

As of July 2014, more than 500 tons of grain, valued at about US$ 156,250, had been traded through the warehouse. MacAdams supplies grain to Premium Foods and the Ghana School Feeding Program in three districts: Wa, Sako and Baleyeri. The grain demanded by various buyers nearly tripled over three years: from 360 tons in 2010 to 900 tons in 2013.

His parting thought on the partnership with AGRA? “The AGRA project is the best! Because of the project, farmers’ confidence in Maclog Enterprises has grown, and the our warehouse has made Loggu, in Wa District, a preferred maize and soybean business center.”
Seeding the Malian countryside

Madam Coulibaly already had good business skills and experience building farmer organizations when she created Faso Kaba, a private seed company in Mali that is supported by AGRA. In establishing Faso Kaba, her goal was to help fill the large unmet demand among farmers for good varieties of local crops like sorghum, maize, cowpea, rice and vegetables.

Mme. Coulibaly does something that many seed dealers in Mali and other parts of Africa usually do not do – she keeps her seed prices low enough so that smallholder farmers, who are normally short on cash, can afford to buy it. And instead of packaging seed in large volumes, Mme. Coulibaly provides seed of sorghum, rice, millet, maize, groundnuts, cowpeas, and beans in various size packages, making them easier for farmers to buy, transport and use.

In addition to “being able to take care of me and my family,” from starting the seed dealership, says Coulibaly, she has also been able to expand the business, hire a number of full-time employees, and use part-time staff to help package seed. “Unfortunately”, she says, “it hasn’t been easy to find or hire women agrodealers to reach more women farmers because it’s harder for them to travel”.

To produce and market its seed, Faso Kaba uses contract seed growers – the majority of whom are women – and sells the seed through company shops and more than 40 village-based seed merchants. The company works closely with Mali’s national agricultural research institute, its seed certification laboratory, the extension service, local seed and fertilizer merchants, and several farmers’ organizations.

Eighteen months after receiving its first bit of assistance from AGRA, Faso Kaba had already produced and sold more than 300 MT of certified seed. Finally, poor farmers in Mali are able to purchase high quality seed of local food crops through a responsive, independent seed company.

AGRA’s support for Mali’s fledgling private seed sector is part of its comprehensive approach to catalyzing change. In Mali, this includes supporting the national agricultural research organization, l’Institut d’Economie Rurale (IER), to develop improved varieties of Guinea-race sorghum hybrids, rice adapted to various ecosystems, drought- and disease-tolerant maize, disease-resistant millet hybrids, and Striga-resistant cowpea varieties. It is also working to improve farmers’ and farm business access to affordable credit, and is supporting a growing network of agrodealers. AGRA is also partnering with the Millennium Challenge Account-Mali to build market infrastructure, post-harvest systems and value-added processing.

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