

AGRA

impact series



Farmer Majara in his maize hybrid field

Improved seed systems transform farmers' lives across Africa

By **GEORGE BIGIRWA**
Deputy Vice President - Program Innovation & Delivery

Tom Majara, a 51-year old farmer in Kigulya Village of Masindi, Uganda, epitomizes the transformation of the farmer that as embraced improved methods of farming with great results.

Before 2015, he and most farmers in the area, used to plant seeds picked from the previous harvest. The results were predictable. He had been growing maize since late 1990s and his average yield never exceeded 0.8 t/ha, barely enough to feed his family of six.

In 2015, he attended a field day organized by an AGRA supported seed company called Pearl and was impressed with the performance a good crop of maize in a demonstration plot. The demonstration plot had 4 hybrids but one variety, Longe 9H, stood out for him. He asked

where he could buy the seed and how best to go about the required management practices, including fertilizer application.

The following season he harvested 4.6 t/ha and with this he had 3.6 tons surplus for sale. Since then he has never looked back and currently on average he plants 3 hectares every year where he gets 6.2 t/ha. With two plantings per year he is able to have enough for home consumption and surplus for sale where he gets USD 2,080. This has enabled him take care of education requirements for his 4 children, constructed a semi- permanent house and also bought two cows that earn him USD 230 every month from milk sale.

Today there are about 6 local private seed companies in any given AGRA country who are playing an important role to multiply and make improved seed available to farmers. AGRA has helped establish close to 120 local private seed companies since 2007. One such seed company is Meru Agro owned by a young entrepreneurial man called Chacha Goryo. The company started in 2008 in Arusha Tanzania and now has branches in Mbeya (Southern Tanzania) and Kigoma (north west of Tanzania).

Using its own resources it produced 70 metric tons in 2009 enough to benefit 2,800 smallholder farmers. When it received a three year grant of USD 223,900 it was able to produce 1,488 MT of seed that benefitted 60,000 farmers. The grant was a springboard for it to expand and currently it is at about 4,000 MT benefiting 160,000 farmers.



CEO of Meru Agro Mr. Chacha Goryo, standing extreme left and below photo shows part of his farm machinery

A lot of progress has been registered by the company and currently it has its own production farm, modern farm machinery including 10 tractors, seed processing facilities, warehouses, maize hybrids and a team of technical staff including breeders who handle production of all seed categories (early generation and certified seed). The company has a robust seed network distribution system all over the country and hopes to achieve a total production of 10,000 MT in a few years' time. Given that counterfeit seed was becoming a challenge in Tanzania, the company piloted an electronic tag system which worked well and has now been embraced by the government seed regulatory body.

Between 2007-2020, the cumulative amount of seed produced by AGRA supported seed companies stands at over 800,000 MT which has benefited 32 million smallholder farmers. The number of indirect beneficiaries is far more than 32 million farmers. This is through investments like working with governments to improve seed policies, enact seed laws, liberalize production of foundation seed, establishment of distribution networks through agro-dealers, authorization of private seed inspection, refurbishing and equipping seed laboratories.



All these have also attracted both regional and multinational seed companies to come and do business in countries they hitherto considered too risky and uneconomically viable. In most countries, these regional and multinational seed companies are just getting into the AGRA countries and are taking advantage of the infrastructure in place like agro-dealerships and Village Based Advisors (VBAs) to sell and test their varieties respectively.