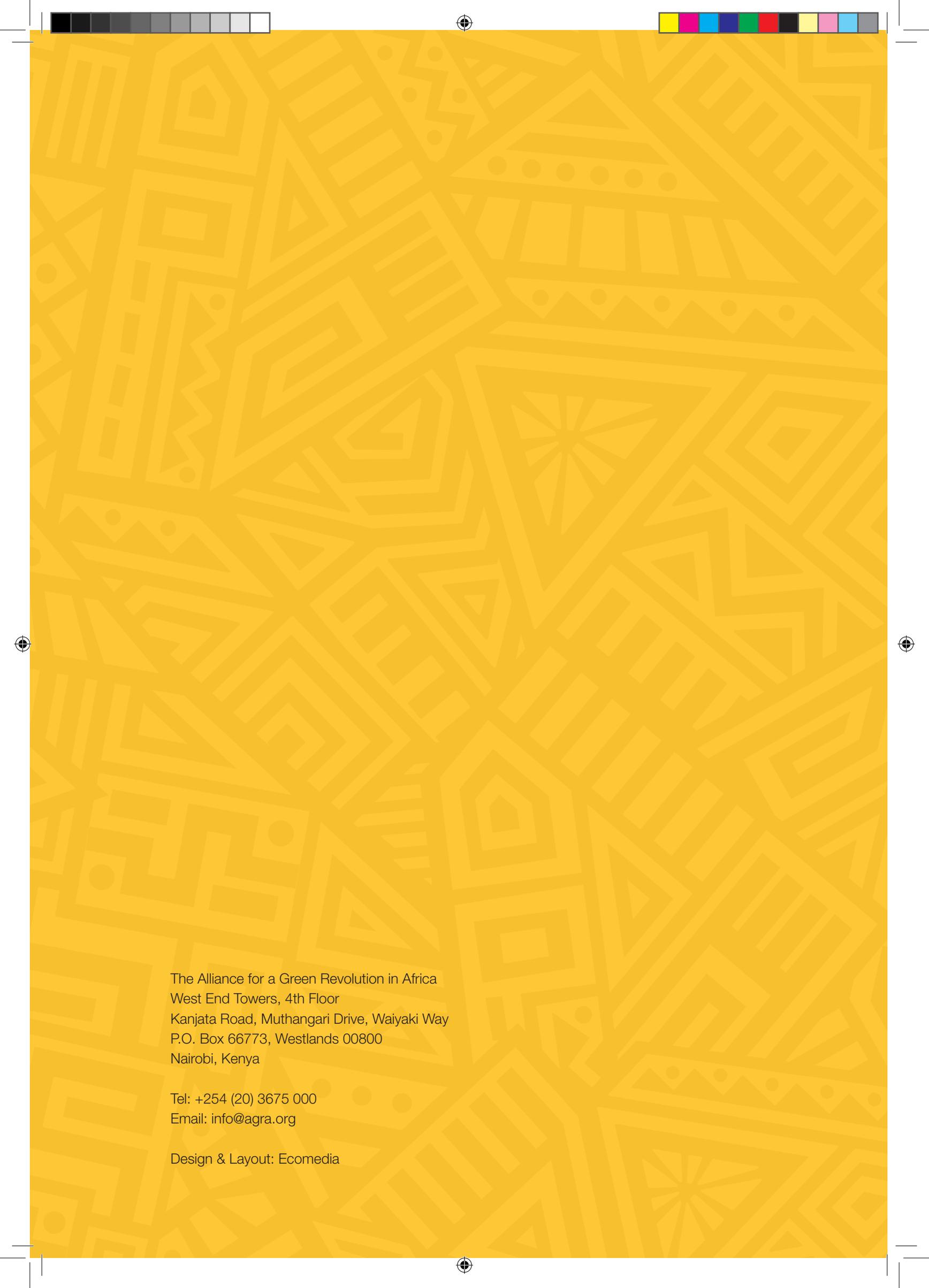


[www.agra.org](http://www.agra.org)



## Extension Strategy: AGRA's Private Sector-Led Approach to Extension



The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa  
West End Towers, 4th Floor  
Kanjata Road, Muthangari Drive, Waiyaki Way  
P.O. Box 66773, Westlands 00800  
Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: +254 (20) 3675 000  
Email: [info@agra.org](mailto:info@agra.org)

Design & Layout: Ecomedia

# AGRA's Private Sector-Led Approach to Extension

## Background

In most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, crop productivity of smallholder farmers is very low. This has consistently been attributed to the persistent use of low-yielding, local crop varieties, poor soil fertility, and poor agronomy.

The low use of improved seeds and fertilizers in these countries stems from a lack of awareness of the value of improved seed and fertilizer, resulting from an ineffective extension service. Governments admit they lack sufficient numbers of extension agents and the resources to enable farm visits. In fact, the extension agent-to-farmer ratio in Africa commonly varies from 1:3,000 to 1:10,000. Farmers complain that extension agents rarely visit.

As AGRA contemplates ways to reach 9 million farmers as a core goal of its strategy, one of the biggest challenges is how to quickly and cost-effectively reduce the extension agent-to-farmer ratio to a more acceptable 1:500 and rapidly create demand for - and access to - improved seeds, fertilizer and other yield-enhancing inputs.

Recognizing the growing role of the private sector in the lives and livelihoods of Africa's smallholder farmers, the AGRA extension approach involves identifying and training self-employed, village-based "agripreneurs" or "advisors" (VBAs). VBAs are linked to input companies to promote seed of improved crop varieties and fertilizers together with good agricultural practices, and often become vendors of such inputs at the village level.



*Many VBAs graduate into Village-based Agro-dealers or Agents for Companies. This motivates them to continue offering services to farmers after the end of a project.*



## Components of the AGRA Private Sector-led Extension Approach

### 1. Farmer needs assessment

AGRA's approach to extension begins with a quick assessment of farmers' needs. This is necessary to understand farmers' constraints and management practices, and to identify the inputs and key extension messages they need for increasing their crop productivity. After assisting farmers to understand their constraints, extension agents and VBAs advise them on how to modify their existing practices. Often, large increases in productivity can result from small modifications in farmer practice such as the use of improved seed, fertilizer, and/or changes in the way farmers space their seeds or place fertilizer. This forms the basis for designing tools for extension agents and VBAs to assist in the communication of key extension messages to farmers.

### 2. Self-employed Village-based advisors

A VBA is a kind of "lead farmer" who is selected by Ministry of Agriculture extension agents together with farmers in his or her village. The ideal VBA is an honest, hard-working farmer who is trusted by fellow farmers to share technologies and knowledge with them.

VBAs are taught several skills by partners (e.g., government extension agents, input companies, offtakers):

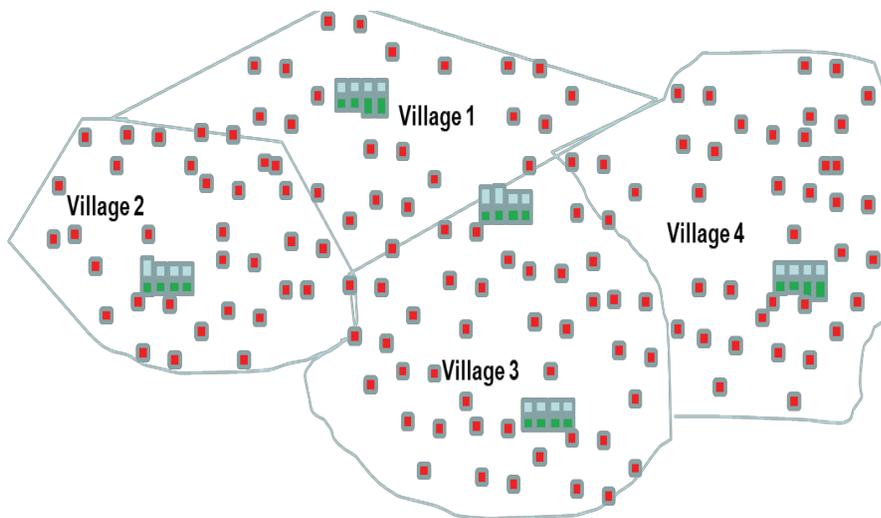
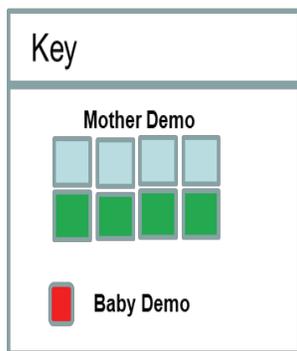
- ✓ How to reach all farmers in their villages, including women and youth
- ✓ Good crop/soil management and crop protection
- ✓ Post-harvest crop protection, grain quality standards
- ✓ How to make money from input supply, aggregation of farmers' produce and related services.

Apart from becoming better farmers, VBAs earn money from a range of services that include sales of seed and fertilizer. This motivates them to continue offering services to farmers after the end of a donor-funded project. Increasingly, VBAs are also being recruited to teach farmers how to improve the quality of grain they bring for sale to buyers, thereby reducing post-harvest losses. VBAs are also serving as focal points for negotiations between buyers and groups of farmers who are able to offer larger volumes for sale to reputable buyers. While originally designed to increase farmer awareness and adoption of improved seed and fertilizer, the VBA can serve as a conduit for a diverse range of products and services (e.g., crop insurance) which are of potential interest and value to smallholder farmers.

### 3. "Mother-baby" demonstration method

VBAs use a "mother-baby" demonstration method to rapidly create demand for inputs; high-yielding seed and fertilizer. Farmers are taught about good agricultural practices through a "mother demo", which is used as a focal point for a Farmer Field Day later in the season. After being trained, 200 or more farmers in a village each receive a small (50 g) pack of seed of a new variety together with a 200 g pack of blended fertilizer to enable them to conduct a "baby" demo on a sThe *small pack* gives all farmers in a village - **whether they are male or female, wealthy or poor, including the youth** - the opportunity to "learn-by-doing" on their own farms with little risk.





Experience has shown that, when they succeed with their small sample packs, most farmers will save up to buy seed and fertilizer from their VBAs in subsequent seasons. VBAs then become agents of seed companies and nearby agro-dealers. The income they generate motivates them to continue their work. This method has been effective in quickly and cost-effectively creating demand for improved varieties amongst smallholder farmers in Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique, and Tanzania, and participating input suppliers have experienced rapid and sustainable increase in sales of their products. Moreover, once seed companies understand the potential for increased sales through promoting their products in this way, they are willing to donate one or more tonnes of seed in small packs to assist VBAs create demand on their behalf.

Through the combined use of VBAs, private sector interest, and small packs distributions, AGRA is able to reach hundreds of thousands of farmers living in a rural farming region in a single season. Over the course of several years of operation of this approach, AGRA expects to be able to reach, and even surpass, its goal of 9 million farmers.



*One tonne of improved seed, packaged into 50 g sample packs, can be disseminated to 20,000 farmers*



## 4. ICT4Ag

Information and communication technology (ICT) applications (e.g., animated video) are also employed to assist in training VBAs, and help them convey key extension messages that are needed by farmers. SMS messaging is used to advertise VBA services and reinforce the communication of key extension messages to reach millions of farmers by mobile phones.



## 5. Partnerships

AGRA is in the process of developing partnerships to implement its private sector-led extension approach in its 11 target countries. Partners include:

- ✓ Private sector farm input supply companies
- ✓ Agro-dealers
- ✓ Grain buyers
- ✓ National and international research institutes
- ✓ Government extension services
- ✓ Non-government organizations (NGOs)

Governments participate in formulating policy, developing training modules for selection and training of VBAs, and designing of content of key extension messages, and actively participate in selection, training and certification of VBAs.

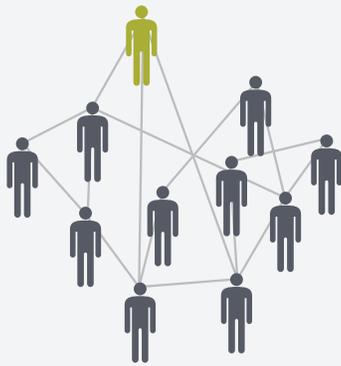
Partner companies provide inputs (e.g., seeds, fertilizers, and crop protection chemicals) as in-kind contributions to enable VBAs to conduct mother-baby demonstrations in order to rapidly create demand for their products.

NGOs assist local governments to pilot the extension approach in target regions. The pilots provide information to governments for scaling-out the approach to reach all farmers in their countries.

***AGRA's Extension and Capacity Building unit within its Program Development and Innovations (PD&I) team aims to build the capacity of governments and AGRA country teams to implement AGRA's private sector-led extension approach to catalyse adoption of technologies by farmers.***

VISUAL AIDS

# Agricultural Extension Interventions



## Current Situation with Government-supported Extension Agents

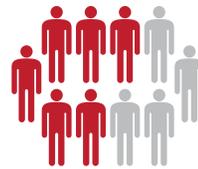
**1 Extension Agent : 5,000+ farmers**

- Insufficient number of Extension Agents
- Insufficient resources for frequent visits and training of farmers by Extension Agents
- Low adoption of technology resulting in low yields



### 01 Farmer Needs Assessment

- Rapid assessment done to understand farmer constraints and management practices and to identify the inputs and key extension messages they need for increasing their crop productivity.
- Ensure designs are adoptable, cost effective and appropriate for farmer needs.



### 02 Village-Based Advisors (VBAs)

- Men and Women identified and trained to serve as self-employed extension agents at the village level
- VBAs train farmers on good agronomic practices
- Seed and fertilizer companies supply inputs to VBAs for demonstration and sale to farmers.



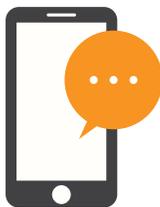
### 03 Mother-Baby Demonstrations

- **Mother Demos Size:** 0.25 acre (1/VBA)
- **Baby demos:** VBAs provide farmers with small packs of seed (50g) of improved and blended fertilizer crop varieties (250g) to enable them to learn by doing on their own with little risk. (200+ baby ideas / VBA / year)



### 04 Partnerships

- Consortia partners to develop and equip thousands of Village-based Advisors to offer inputs and services to millions of farmers
- Seed and fertilizer companies to provide seed and fertilizer for Mother and Baby demos
- Off takers, NGOs, Local Governments, Ministries of Agriculture train VBAs on Post-harvest Crop Management, grain quality standards, Mother and Baby demonstrations, GAP, Business Skills, how to sell inputs.



### 05 ICT4Ag – reinforce/support work of VBAs with Key Extension Messages

- Relevant Technical info through smart phones
- Videos with relevant content for teaching farmers on key interventions
- Bulk SMS from VBA to Farmers
- Advertise products and services at key times of season. e.g. *Fall Armyworm alerts*



### 06 Improve Extension Policy at national level

- Catalyze Systemic Change to improve delivery of Government Extension Services in Africa
- Enhance Extension Service delivery at national and regional levels to include private sector-participation

