

AGRA **impact series**

Village-based Advisors assist farmers gain access to last-mile yield-enhancing inputs and extension services

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Over the past decade and a half, AGRA has reached out to millions of smallholder farmers across Sub-Saharan Africa with improved technologies and access to markets to facilitate and catalyze agriculture transformation and consequently enhance food and nutrition security. The majority of such farmers, who, have benefited from such interventions are located in hard-to-reach geographical areas.

Crop yields of most smallholder farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa are very low because farmers use inappropriate crop varieties, inappropriate fertilizers, and poor agronomic practices. The problem is exacerbated by ineffective public Extension Service delivery. Currently there is about 1 Government Extension Officer to 3,500 farmers which means few farmers are visited and trained on improved crop varieties and how to improve agronomic practices. As a result of low demand because of lack of awareness, farmers have to travel 30 km to access the appropriate farm inputs

In order to overcome this problem, AGRA has been working with Regional governments to introduce a private sector-led Extension Approach, which involves the identification and training of self-employed Village-based Advisors (VBAs) to demonstrate improved crop varieties, fertilizer blends, and to practically teach farmers Good Agronomic Practices (GAP). AGRA has over the past three years, identified and trained 27,000 VBAs, who have assisted to directly reach approximately 6.7M smallholder farmers with promoted interventions.

Seed and fertilizer Companies support VBAs by providing inputs for their Mother-Baby demonstration farms, which have proved to be effective in rapidly creating demand for seeds and fertilizers. Many

seed and fertilizer companies leverage this system to introduce their products to smallholder farmers to increase sales. This dovetails into AGRA's support to the seed system as it provides the requisite architecture to facilitate access to seed and other agro inputs through downstream agro inputs distribution system. As a result of their efforts to demonstrate improved maize varieties, and to teach farmers about Good Agronomic Practices, VBAs have started to graduate to become agro-dealers or agents of Agro-dealers to supply inputs to farmers

Thus, AGRA has developed over 30,000 agro-dealers across Africa, through whom a total of 422,000 MT of seed and over 1.5 million MT of fertilizers had been sold to farmers by June 2020. This has greatly enhanced access of smallholder farmers to essential agro inputs as well as output markets needed to increase their productivity. The expansion of agro-dealer networks into rural areas has resulted in opening new agro dealer shops in most countries. This has led to reducing the average distance covered by farmers within AGRA-focused geographical areas to less than 10 km; in some cases about 2 km.

Over the past three years, AGRA has facilitated the training and supported 2,067 VBAs as rural agro dealers and, this has improved the agro dealer density and tremendously reduced the distances covered by farmers from about 20 km to less than 6 km since their shops are located within the respective farming communities. Thus, the crowding in of VBAs in the downstream inputs distribution system is bearing fruit. The other component of the model also comprises business linkages between retail agro-dealers and existing VBAs as well as the hub agro-dealers to strengthen the inputs supply chain. This enables hub agro dealers to give inputs on suppliers' credit to retailers, and the latter do the same to VBAs.

Case Studies

Kiambu agro-dealer benefits from access to credit

One entrepreneurial VBA in Kiambu County in Kenya, Peter Nyutu, has opened an agro-dealer shop, Imani Five

Investments, near Githunguri town, and receives seed on credit from seed companies for sale to farmers. Peter is one of 425 VBAs have been selected and trained by the Kiambu County Government, who have each trained 200 farmers using the Mother-Baby demonstration farms approach (85,000 farmers).



Left: Peter Nyutu, a VBA who has graduated to become an agro-dealer, at his shop near Githunguri town. Right: VBA Julia holding a 2 kg pack of seed of the WH101 variety which she sells to farmers

In the 1st season of 2020, he sold approximately 4 tonnes of seed of different improved maize varieties through a network of 20 VBAs and farm inputs stockists in his locality. Maize varieties sold by VBAs are performing

very well this season, and farmers are expecting to harvest enough maize for their families' needs to last until their next harvest.



Left: Youthful farmer, Veronica Nyakio, displays her harvest from within her granary. Above: VBA Hellen from Kiambururu Village shows one of the farmers who purchased the seed of the WH101 variety

One of the beneficiaries of the new varieties is Veronica Nyakio, the daughter of Michael Waweru, an avid farmer who is now aged and retiring from active farming but happily handing over the newfound secret to his 30-year-old daughter.

Veronica is a proud youth, as she presents the fruits of adapting to new and improved farming practices with the support of the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). "From this garden, our family now has sufficient food and has earned enough income to cover other needs that the family identified," she says.

Veronica is one of 29,300 farmers that have so far been trained by Village-based Advisors (VBAs) in Kiambu County. Her story is a result of training and support has become a catalyst for farmers to acquire new knowledge and learn new techniques that helped expand their horizon for the benefit of their families. In the end, it taught them to stand on their own and become models of empowerment in their community.

"Before the training, we used to plant maize seeds anyhow, but now I have learned to grow early-maturing hybrid varieties and apply optimum seed spacing. That added to correct methods of manure and fertilizer placement and fall armyworm control, I have been able to harvest ten times more than before," she adds.

The income her family got helped them to buy a water tank. "Accessing water was a nightmare because I had to

spend hours ferrying water from a distant source to our home. But now that we have a water tank, I can finish my house chores in record time. With extra time, I can attend to the chickens, cows, and goats that also drink plenty of water and now produce more milk and eggs, respectively," she adds.

The dear daughter to Mr. Waweru says, "I love my parents, and I pray that they live longer. Now that we can supplement their meals with milk and eggs, my parents look healthier, and I know they will live long. We have been tough that breakfast is an important meal of the day, and their breakfast is now full of much-needed nutrition."

Veronica also used to cook from a kitchen with a broken roof, from the sale of the bountiful harvest she and her parents were able to buy new iron sheets and now cook from a comfortable kitchen. The family is also able to create jobs for others who help them with the construction of various structures on their farm. With more than 50 animals (cows, goats, sheep, and chickens) on their farm, the family is also able to harvest manure from the animal waste matter.

A new beginning has dawned for the family of nine. Before now, their maize store was an empty structure idling and having no use. Now the store is never empty and stands as a sign of certainty for a future food source and evidence of hard work and optimism.

Koulikoro Region in Mali - VBA assisted to set up an agro Input Shop

Gauso Mangane is a VBA from Dioila in the Koulikoro Region in Mali. He is one of 142 VBAs in Koulikoro and Segou Regions, selected and trained by Malimark to become an Agro-dealer. He established an agro-dealer shop in May 2019, to assist farmers within his surrounding communities to gain access to inputs. This has reduced farmers distance to about 4 km to access inputs instead of the hitherto average of 16 km distance to access them. Agro inputs sales have started and Gauso is optimistic that he will make good sales due as a result of his Extension work the previous season.

Gauso who is providing extension services to smallholder farmers, accessed CFA109,000 (\$218) credit line for three months from Camara Semence, a seed company, to procure and sell hybrid seed; as well as credit line from Toguna and Elephant Verte for fertilizer and sell to farmers in the area. These input suppliers are using his shop to reach out to smallholder farmers at Dioila. He spent CFA350,000 (\$700) from his own resources to refurbish the shop and is paying monthly rent of CFA12,000 (\$24). "I want to grow my business to build a bigger shop", said the elated Gauso. He anticipates selling 400 kg of seed this season.

Malimark, an AGRA grantee has so far trained most of the VBAs in technical aspects of agro input management,



financial management and entrepreneurship. They aspire to become agro dealers because they now know there is a local market and a business to develop.

Ramatulai Coulibaly, a Malimark Field Agent said "Gauso is very resilient. He persevered to access credit for seed and fertilizer for sale in the shop. I believe he will be a successful agro dealer"

In Niger state, a one-stop agro-dealer shops eases farmers' woes

As part of efforts to increase access to agricultural inputs for farmers in rural communities, the North Central Input and Agro Dealers Association of Nigeria (NOCAIDA) established and flagged off a one-stop-shop for agro inputs using the AGRA renovated warehouses at Essa village, Katcha Local Government Area, Niger State in Nigeria. These shops have helped farmers in the community to readily access inputs in the 2020 season.

Rice farming has been an age-long practice for Essa smallholder farming community in Katcha Local Government Area, of Niger State, a largely agrarian State in North Central Nigeria. For years, they lacked access to appropriate farm inputs due to the remote location of their community. Farmers in such a predominantly rice farming community had to travel 20 km to Bida City, the closest urban center to buy farm inputs (Fertilizer, seeds and agrochemical), leading to increased cost of production as they often pay huge amount as transport cost. Consequently, most of the farmers resort to cultivating seeds saved from previous season resulting in low crop yields.

Umar Mohammed Badeggi, a Community Based Advisor (CBA) searched for ways to change the condition of farmers in his community. He used part of his income from his farm to procure farm inputs from Bida, the closest urban centre, and sell to farmers in his community.

He ran into losses because majority of the farmers in the village were not aware that farm inputs were then available in their community. The tedious farming cycle persisted and Umar ran into losses due to the low patronage of his agro-dealer shop.

However, this changed in May 2020, Essa community was selected by the North Central Agro-input Dealers' Association (NOCAIDA) as one of the communities for the establishment of a one-stop-shop for agro-inputs under the AGRA-supported Niger State Rice Consortium project.

NOCAIDA assisted Umar to set up a shop at the community last-mile agro-inputs center. Smallholder farmers now procure farm inputs from Umar's agro inputs shop. This has reduced the farmers' distance from over 20 km to less than 6 km, tremendously taken away any transportation cost to access inputs, and consequently reduced cost of rice production.

At the launch of the Center, Alhaji Suleiman Mustapha Rijau, the Managing Director of Niger State Ministry of Agriculture and Mechanization (NAMDA) inaugurated the shop on May 20, 2020. He emphasized Niger State Government's commitment to adopt the PIATA AGRA model to distribute inputs to 13 input sub-stations across the state. The flag-off featured inputs (seed, agrochemical, fertilizer) exhibition and sales from 17 major input companies and hub agro-dealers directly to 200 farmers. The Association also used the platform



to continue farmer sensitization on social distancing, handwashing; use, and distribution of facemask to participants.

Umar, through NOCAIDA intervention has now become a major agro dealer in his community. Most of the farmers buy agro inputs from his new shop located at the center. This has enabled farmers to have easy access to farm inputs. Now, Umar is able to grow a larger portion of his 15-hectare farm due to the extra income from the sales of farm inputs. Umar is happy that CBAs have been empowered to become better agro dealers in his community.

In his words: "Thanks to AGRA-PIATA for coming powerfully to help the CBAs and smallholder farmers in our community. I will be able to use the proceeds I have from my shop to acquire more farm lands from the nearby community to expand my business, I can comfortably take care of my large family because I have more than one stream of income"

The center has also kick-started the business of agro dealership for some youth in the community. It identified and trained six youth, and have been selling input on commission basis for NOCAIDA. NOCAIDA taught the Agro-dealers in the community on proper marketing skills and some received credit facilities to enable them acquire shops in the community market square. It undertook awareness campaigns in remote areas of the communities for agro-dealers. This has saved smallholder farmers time and money to purchase the required inputs from their locality instead of travelling over a long distance



Alegria Francisco: A Youth Rural Agro-dealer from Ribáuè.

Alegria Francisco is a youth agro dealer from Caiaia Village, who graduated in Ribáuè Secondary School (District of Ribáuè). Caiaia is a village where horticultural production (vegetables) is a key activity that mainly produces tomatoes, onions, green peppers, and cabbage that are usually sold in the city of Nampula, at the Waresta Market.

Alegria used to be a vegetable producer who decided to switch to marketing after graduating from secondary school. Instead of producing, he started buying from other producers and transported all produce to Nampula to sell as a bulk trader.

His normal income included selling 12 baskets of vegetables per month for 500 MT each (about \$100 per month)

Opportunity to become an agro-dealer

In June 2018 he was identified by Otumiha as a trader with potential to become an agro dealer. After attending trainings on product knowledge and business management he decided to start the real input business.

In December 2018 he benefited from a matching grant (21,000 MT about \$350) for the acquisition of inputs, a demonstration kit and for the rehabilitation of his shop.

The intervention:

AGMARK role within the Otumiha Consortium focuses on supporting the establishment of input provision systems by strengthening of Agro-dealers and development of SME to provide inputs and production marketing services to farmers as well as the linkage between re-sellers and suppliers in order to bring to the farmers inputs at competitive prices.

TESTIMONIAL from Alegria Francisco:

Thanks to the Otumiha project and its financial partners for the support I received to grow my business. This project took me out of Caia so now companies and government recognize my contribution in input provision to Ribáuè farmers". "This is a more stable business comparing with buying and selling vegetables"

With the incentives, he accepted to use his farm to establish a demonstration centre for improved varieties of soybean and maize.

Taking advantage of his location (vegetable growing area) by January 2020 he was able to sell 1510 grams of vegetable seeds amounting to 22,030 MZN (about \$355), as well as fertilizers (42,950 MZN or \$693), pesticides 14.750 MZN (\$240), small agricultural tools 15.480 MZN (\$250), maize and soy seed

His next step was to scale up fertilizer sales by buying them locally (double amount), received vegetable seed from K2 (Klein Karoo Seedco) 5-10 kg on consignment, and improved his connections with the Hub-Agrodealers from Ribáuè and Casa do Agricultor in Nampula.

Currently, Alegria is benefiting from the local sales initiative of the Casa do Agricultor and PROMA COMERCIAL from where he receives inputs at the shop free of transport costs.

According to PROMA COMERCIAL (Hub agro dealer), Alegria is one of their regular clients and he is now benefiting from the company's retail discounts (10%).