

## AGRA Impact Series



# Curbing post-harvest loss and revamping rural youth employment through mechanization, Geoffrey Munyengera's story – Uganda

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## THE REGIONAL EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY TRADE IN STAPLES PHASE-II (REACTS-II)

It has taken sheer determination for Geoffrey Munyengera to triumph over the tragic circumstances of his own childhood, and to become the rural agropreneur and employer he is today. He is also a valued partner for the AGRA-funded Regional East African Community Trade in Staples Phase-II (REACTS-II) project implemented by Kilimo Trust from April 2018 to March 2021.

Amongst the constraints to commercialization of agriculture by smallholder farmers in East Africa and the development of agricultural value chains is their limited access to inputs, finance, technologies and markets. The REACTS-II project took a market-led value chain approach that has opened up access to guaranteed and reliable markets for maize farmers in Geoffrey's locale in Iganga district, Eastern Uganda.

Orphaned at the age of 13 years, Geoffrey dropped out of high school and became an apprentice at a metal fabrication workshop in Namasoga village, Iganga district in 2002. He tended his garden of maize before undertaking the daily five kilometer trek to the workshop to learn the trade. It was not until 2005, when he had saved up UGX80,000 from the proceeds of his maize farm sales to set up his own workshop.

By the time he encountered the project in 2018, Geoffrey was a self-made metal fabricator, operating his own company, Munyengera Agro-machinery Ltd. making agricultural machinery for shelling beans, groundnuts and maize. However, he had also started to notice that farmers were experiencing challenges with the management of their harvest.



At a subsistence level, most smallholder maize farmers were constrained by their limitation of finances and thus unable to invest in the purchase of mechanized tools like maize shellers. This was the opportunity that Geoffrey and a growing number of rural youthful agropreneurs in Uganda are tapping into.

They provide services to farmers at a fee and create employment opportunities for other youths in their locales. For instance, a mobile maize sheller keeps five youths employed, that is the owner and four operators. On average, the owner earns US\$1,891 per season, while each of the operators earn US\$205 in commissions. By implication REACTS-II project support has generated 120 jobs for young people (85, from the maize shellers, 20 from the bean threshers and 15 from the cleaners).

The REACTS-II project, introduced Geoffrey to a cost-sharing arrangement where farmer organizations paid up 50% for machine fabrication

to their specification. He was also facilitated to attend national exhibitions and involved in the training of 54 machine operators whom he taught maintenance and repair skills. He was also assisted to update his business plan and linked to other partners. The icing on Geoffrey's cake was the production of a promotional documentary about his work.

The partnership has led to the procurement of 17 mobile maize shellers, three cleaners and four mobile bean threshers worth US\$42,972 from Munyengera Agro-machinery Ltd. Geoffrey's company currently employs 25 people, and as the company's portfolio expands, there is potential to grow the workforce. His clients have mainly been cooperatives and individual youth agropreneurs serving at least 7,320 farmers on a seasonal basis. These interactions are also responsible for the significant improvements to the quality of produce.