

## AGRA Impact Series

Justine's taking a record of seed sales at her input shop, which is located at Kakumiro road, Mubende municipality.  
Landmark Media Consultancy/Joseph Buule.

UGANDA

# The potential for young women to tap into agro-business

**New opportunities are emerging to expand small agro business ventures for young women village based agents due to overcoming knowledge gaps in production and marketing of quality beans and maize.**

In April 2018, the Regional East African Commodity Trade in Staples, Phase II (REACTS II) was launched. It is a US\$1,300,000 co-funded project by the Alliance for a green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and implemented by Kilimo Trust (KT) in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda with the aim of improving value chains of beans and maize in Uganda. "With the consortium approach, various value chain actors are pooled together with the off-taker being the lead with a commodity outlet and an export market. The off-takers are linked to the farmers through the village based agents (VBAs) who act as the pulse and grain collectors," says Patrick Muganga, the senior program officer at KT in Uganda. Although the country is endowed with good climatic conditions that favour good harvests, the beans and maize have always been mishandled at the various value chain

levels, thus affecting the crops' quality and markets. Patrick illustrates that the country could not export much from the bumper harvests of maize in 2017 because large volumes of the maize were infected with aflatoxins. So, many farmers were stranded with the produce, which affected grain prices.

Patrick asserts that although the VBAs were important players in bean and maize trade, they had meagre knowledge in controlling quality and trade of the crops. So, KT's approach in solving the problem was to promote their activities. Besides serving as aggregators, several VBAs control the agro-input supply chain, train farmers and provide post-harvest handling services, thus serving as a perfect entry for improving the crops' value chains.

Justine Naiga-Katushabe is a 35-year old and



Justine displaying a bean thresher and drier she acquired through a matching grant with KT.

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Youth weighing maize grain at Justine's store, which is about 10 Km from Mubende municipality.

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an agro-entrepreneur in Mubende municipality, which is about 150 KM from Kampala city. She is a mother of three. She is an aggregator and a trained VBA of Sanyu investment Limited, an off-taker and exporter of beans and maize. Justine was first trained by KT in October, 2018. Justin's input shop used to have a small stock. She has grown her business after undergoing several trainings in business skills, post-harvest technologies, grain quality control and sustainable use of agricultural inputs. "I had a small working capital of UGX: 900,000 (US\$244) and a few customers. The profits from shop were meagre to support my family," says Justine. By then, her collection centre was not so active because she had a small farmer base from which to buy the produce and it was also difficult for her to organise input promotion days due to lack of finance. "The transport to various locations was expensive. The commissions earned from the produce aggregated and inputs sold could not cover all the expenses incurred in the field," she explains. In the process to diversity her earnings, Justine started a primary school that was constructed using wooden structures. However, in 2018, she knew KT through the off-taker. Not only did Justine receive several trainings and study tours that increased her knowledge in agribusiness, but KT started financing the input promotion days. "More manufacturers and suppliers were invited to exhibit their inputs. Farmers were exposed to new agricultural technologies. More farmers were reached out on radio talk shows," she narrates.

This turned to be Justine's turning point. "Because farmers adopted to good farming practices, the input sales at the promotions increased. I earned a lot of commission, for example, UGX: 200 (US\$0.05), UGX: 500 (US\$0.14) and UGX: 1,000 (US\$0.27) from each piece of hoe, KG of maize seed and KG of bean seed sold, respectively. It enabled me invest in my input shop and I later started selling some of the stock from my shop at the promotion days. It made my business grow up to the current capital of UGX: 32,000,000 (US\$8,661)" she explains. Increase in use of new technologies has improved the yields and quality of the crops. "I am happy that my farmers have started benefitting from farming. They are taking farming as a business because the rate at which they apply fertilizer is increasing. The quality of produce too has improved" she narrates.

With a grown base of 20,000 farming households, Justine has never looked back. Through a matching grant arrangement, she obtained a bean thresher in 2019 at UGX: 7,000,000 (US\$1,895). "I paid half of the money and KT paid the rest. I am happy because the thresher has enabled me to serve more farmers. The post-harvest losses have reduced from 27% to less than 3%, which has increased the quality of bean produce so as the market. My farmers are happy too because of the improving livelihoods. They are buying motorcycles; constructing permanent houses and they are giving better education to their children," she explains. In addition, she has been able to buy a maize Sheller, which too has increased



Newly constructed classroom blocks Justine's school, which is about 6 Km from Mubende municipality.  
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the quality and market of maize. Actually, she supplied up to 58 tonnes of maize to the off-taker that earned her a commission of UGX: 5,800,000 (US\$1,570) in the previous season.

In a way of giving back to the community, Justine has helped many youths to earn a living. She has so far trained six young VBAs of which two are female. "They pick pesticides and herbicides from the shop and pay me after they have sold to farmers. They earn a commission that has upgraded their livelihoods. Some have started constructing houses too and take their

children to good schools," she explains. At the aggregation centre, Justine employs seven workers who earn an average of UGX: 15,000 (US\$4) daily during the harvesting season. She has been able to expand her school. "I have been able to construct two permanent blocks and the student number has risen from 28 to 121 pupils," she said. She has on many occasions been hired by public and private organisations to train farmers in appropriate farming techniques around the country.