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Thegnus Mbanilo, VBAA in Mpanga Village, becomes an Agro-dealer serving hundreds of small-holder farmers in Kilombero district

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Thegnus Mbanilo, 35 years old, is the Village-based Agricultural Advisor (VBAA) in Mpanga village in Mlimba cluster in Kilombero district. He started work as a VBAA in 2012. In 2014, with a little capital, Mbanilo started his own business of selling farm inputs in 2014. Despite his little capital, he has managed to supply farm inputs to his fellow farmers in his village. This is really helping farmers to access inputs locally.

Mbanilo is one of 50 VBAs in Kilombero district who has been trained in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) by the NAFKA Programme. Mbanilo has in turn been able to train 528 farmers on GAP.



Mbanilo trained farmers using FIPS-Africa's Mother and Baby demonstration protocols. He taught farmers around the Mother demos on how to prepare land, space seeds, apply fertilizer and crop protection chemicals.

To encourage farmers to experiment with GAPs on their own farms (Baby demos), he distributed small 100 g packs of seed of an improved high-yielding rice variety (TXD 306).

The demonstration plots performed very well and because farmers tried the technologies on their own farms, they were able to appreciate the difference between their traditional way of farming and the new technologies offered by Mbanilo.

Demonstrations resulted in an increased demand for improved seeds and fertilizers. He has now graduated to become an agro-dealer and has started to sell inputs and is advising farmers how to use them the right way. Mbanilo is known as a champion of fighting hunger and poverty in the village since he has managed to change farmers from harvesting 6-7 to 25-35 bags of paddy per acre.

For more information contact:

FIPS-Africa, P.O. Box 5523, 00200-Nairobi | Tel.: +254 20 2626990 | Email: fipsafrica@yahoo.com | www.fipsafrica.org

Last season, Mbanilo managed to sell 1.25 tonnes of *Yara Mila Cereal* fertilizer, 400 kg of improved rice seed (TXD 306) and 120 litres of glyphosate herbicide. He is planning to sell more inputs in the coming season.

“It’s like a dream. I never got an income of more than TZS 200,000 per year. But this season I earned TZS 2,250,000 (USD 1022) from my business. I can even say that my poverty ended as soon as NAFKA came.”. Mbanilo said.

NAFAKA has now connected him to Nokwim Investment, an input supplier in Mlimba, from who he will access inputs for sale next season. Preparing for that, Mbanilo has started to construct his own farm input shop which he expects to open in mid-November 2015.

Farmers who have started to adopt GAPs are enjoying a bumper harvest to be able to solve their long-term income and food security problems.

Prisca Lipangalala is a farmer in Mpanga village at Mlimba ward. Like most women in her village she is involved in rice production activities and has been attending GAP training offered by Mbanilo.

In 2013, her husband decided to migrate to Ifakara town and left Prisca with 4 children.

“It was very unfortunate my husband left me with a big family. I didn’t know what to do. Then I met Mbanilo who told me not to worry because agri-business can substitute for income from a husband”, she said.

After following the advice of her VBAA, Prisca managed to cultivate 2 acres of rice, and now she is enjoying a very good harvest of 51 bags of paddy. Before, she used to harvest 14 bags from the same plot.



“I can tell my fellow women that your farm can be better than your husband because I’m now able to pay school fees for my children from the sale of my harvest (1 bag is currently being sold for TZS 100,000.).

She has also influenced 20 neighboring farmers to adopt GAPs, “I’m now also a teacher to help my fellow farmers to alleviate poverty and hunger,” added Prisca.

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Severine Kihongosi, a 33 year old farmer, is another farmer trained by Mbanilo. He was given a small pack of seed to try out using GAPs on his own farm.

The small pack turned Severine completely away from the traditional to the improved way of farming. He is now a happy young man with expectations of a better life.

Before Mbanilo's interventions, Severine was harvesting 7 – 10 bags from 1 acre. This season, he has harvested 34 bags from the same plot.

"NAFAKA, where were you before? And why didn't you come earlier? We have been suffering from poverty and hunger for too long. Now I will be able to call myself a rich man when I sell my paddy for TZS 100,000 per bag. Well done, NAFAKA. You have changed our life in a very short time, be blessed!", said Severine.

Pius Mwendapili is one of the hardest working farmers in Mpanga village. He had been cultivating 3 acres every year by broadcasting a local seed variety, called Super Malolo, and harvesting a total of 15 bags from the whole plot.

Mbanilo trained Mwendapili on GAPs and he was gave him a small 100 g pack of seed of the improved TXD 306 variety to try out on his own farm.

The large yield from the small pack made him purchase 48 kg seed of TXD 306 from his VBAA which he planted using GAP without using any fertilizers.



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Mwendapili harvested 43 bags of paddy this season from the same plot despite the bad weather that affected many in the village.

“Next season, after selling my paddy, I am planning to buy fertilizer and I expect to harvest not less than 100 bags from my farm”, added the farmer.



Esther Mwangi, a 34 year old small-holder farmer, is another beneficiary of Mbanilo’s training. She adopted GAPs in 2013 when she tried a small 100 g pack of the TXD 306 variety. She harvested 28 kg of paddy from the small pack which she saved to plant on her farm.

In February 2014, Mwangi planted her saved seeds on her 1 acre farm, and used *Yara Mila Cereal* fertilizer, as advised by Mbanilo. Despite the bad weather, Esther harvested 20 bags of paddy. The size of her harvest surprised her family, as well as neighbors, as they used to get 6-9 bags per acre from conventionally-planted local varieties.

“NAFAKA has shown us a way to success. We used to grow rice only for our food needs but sometimes the harvest didn’t last the year. But now we are producing more than what we need for food and we can sell the surplus to make money” said Esther.

Esther has so far sold 600 kg of paddy and earned TZS 450,000. She used the money to buy a new sewing machine. She plans to sell the remaining harvest later when the price goes up. “Paddy farming in our village is now a big deal. If you follow GAPs, you are sure to kick out poverty!” she added.

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Amina Mohamed is a housewife and another small-holder farmer in Mpanga village. She was also trained in GAPs by Mbanilo. She has been farming rice for many years without success until the time she was given a small pack of seeds to try. “I realized a huge difference. We are poor because we didn’t know how and what to cultivate. I managed to harvest 21 bags of paddy from my 1 acre farm. This is like a miracle. I couldn’t believe a farmer like me could get such a big harvest. I used to harvest only 3-5 bags per acre”, she said. “I am waiting for the price to go up to TZS 120,000 per bag before I sell my paddy. I expect to earn TZS 2,280,000. This business is now like a gold mine”, she added.



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