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## Neema Urassa, Village-based Agricultural Advisor in Kiteto district, improves the lives of hundreds of farmers through supply of seed of improved maize varieties and information on best crop management

Success story: July 2014

“The respect I have in Kiteto town is overwhelming. People now call me *Mama Shamba* (Extension Officer) not only because what I teach works but also because I supply them with improved maize varieties at the right time,” says Neema Urassa, Kibaya Village Agricultural Based Advisor (VBAA).



**Left :** Neema Urassa fixing an advertisement for maize varieties bearing her phone number. This way a farmer can easily make orders for seeds during the planting season. **Right:** Urassa on a maize plot.

Urassa, is among the 49 VBAs who are keen, hard-working farmers who provide the appropriate inputs, and associated advisory services on good farming practices to all farmers in their Villages.

Through the VBAs, the NAFKA Program has created rural self-employment opportunities whilst providing inputs and knowledge to farmers on how to improve their crop productivity.

Last season, Urassa sold 6 tonnes of seed of improved maize varieties to farmers in Kiteto district, and she has taught them how to improve their yields through good crop and soil management.

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"I am currently building a modern kitchen in my house from the money I got from selling the seeds," she said.

Farmers in her village conventionally farm about five acres, and would sow up to 20 kg of seed per acre by planting up to four seeds in holes spaced far apart.

"When I told farmers that they should plant only one seed per hole in lines 75 cm apart, and 25 cm between seed they thought I was joking. But I gave them small 100 g packets of samples of improved seed to try on their farms, and when they saw the results on their *Shamba Mtoto* (small trial plots), they started to call me to ask me to sell them larger quantities of seed to plant on larger areas," she says.

Juliana Mollel is one such farmer. She experimented with the DK803I maize variety on a 5 m x 5 m plot in February 2013.

"The crop was amazingly green throughout its development. It had huge cobs full of grains," says Mollel.

In January 2014, she purchased 24 kg of the seed from the VBAA and planted on 3 acres. "I was happy because the seed was available when I wanted it, and I was also sure that it was genuine seed because I trusted the VBAA."

The farmer used to plant maize on two acres using recycled seeds she got from neighbors. She used to harvest 12 bags per acre. "It was a waste of my time, energy and my little resources," she says.

Last season, after adopting the improved seed and proper seed spacing, the farmer harvested 24 bags from an acre.

"I will sell 70 bags and build an underground water tank with a capacity of 24,000 litres. I have always dreamt of harvesting more rain water," she says.







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Truphosa Losioki lives in the same village. She was one of the many farmers who was skeptical about harvesting more maize with good farming practices.

"I did not want to plant 1 seed per hole because of the risk of poor germination due to rain failure. I changed my mind when I tried what Urassa taught us using the small packs of seed," she exclaims.

She first tried the new way of maize planting in February 2013 and was amazed at the results a few months later. In December 2013, the farmer purchased 80 kg seed of the DKC80-53 variety from Neema Urassa. She planted the maize on 10 acres and harvested 138 bags in May 2014.

"In July, I earned TZS 3.5 million (USD 2188) from selling 100 bags of maize. I have never harvested more than 30 bags from the 10 acres and I have never sold more than 8 bags in my life!"

The mother of 3 is building a modern four bed-roomed brick house in Kiteto. "I intend to grow maize this way on many more acres of land in order to not only complete my house, but also take my children to Dodoma University," says Losioki.

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Hamis Athuman also planted the DKC80-53 variety in February 2014. He bought 28 kg seed from the VBAA after being impressed by the performance of the maize on a small demonstration plot he set up on his own land.

“From the trial plot I harvested 14 kg grain using the 100 g small pack of improved seed! I practically saw the significance of spacing, weeding and use of manure,” he says.

Athuman harvested 78 bags (each weighing 100 kg of maize) in June 2014. He stored 15 bags for food and sold 63 bags for TZS 2.3 million (USD 1,438).

“Since I have enough food for my family and my children are no longer in School, I have purchased 60 Iron sheets and enough bricks to put up a modern house. Maize farming is my only source of income so I will put more effort in it,” he says.

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In the same village, Mrs. Dekarisa Munuo had to create space in her house to accommodate extra bags from her maize harvest. She improved her maize production after adopting the use of improved varieties and good seed spacing.

“What I think was a hindrance to my success with farming was the use of the traditional varieties and the many seeds per hole I used to plant. Mama Urassa, not only sold the seed to me but first taught me how to plant maize on a small plot so when I made a decision to purchase seeds I knew I was expecting a boom,” she said.

Munuo used to harvest a total of 40 bags of maize from her 10 acre farm. In January 2014, she planted 80 kg seed of the DKC90-89 variety and she harvested 150 bags of maize from the same plot.

“I will store the maize up to August and then sell 130 bags at a better price. My husband and I will then decide what we will do with the money,” she says.

Munuo is a businesswoman at the Kiteto trading centre, and she had never planted maize for sale. She is now planning to farm 20 acres of maize and become a serious maize producer thanks to the efforts of the NAFKA VBAA.

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Mr. and Mrs. Minja have now become dairy farmers. They bought dairy cows from income from their maize harvest in June 2013. "My wife and I invested in the improved seed and we are now so happy that there is no turning back. We had never harvested more than 30 bags after all the hard labor involved in planting maize on many acres of land. That season we harvested 70 bags from just three acres," he says.

"We have a breakthrough because of the simple but effective techniques we practically learnt from NAFKA. The VBAA was always available and would arrive on call even when we wanted improved seed," says Mr. Minja.

In January 2014, they increased their acreage planted to maize to 10 acres, up from the 3 the previous season. They planted 80 kg seed of the DKC80-53 maize variety which they bought from Mama Urassa. In May 2014, they harvested 160 bags, each weighing 100 kg. They have since sold 100 bags for TZS 35,000 (USD 21) per bag, and they are planning to buy one more dairy cow.

The retired Government Officer says he no longer worries about receiving his pension because he has discovered a good income-generating activity that will not only empower him to make money but keep him busy.

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All their children have completed school meaning that the burden of responsibility is low compared to the earlier days. "We will now get income from selling milk produced by our dairy cows in addition to selling the extra bags of maize from our harvest," says Mrs. Minja.

Anitha Semwande will finally purchase a mattress for her family in August 2014. She has for a long time been sleeping on a mat with her family of four.

Having a mattress was a luxury because she needed money for food more than she needed a mattress. She has just harvested 40 bags of maize. She will sell 27 bags and pay school fees and buy the brand new mattress.

"I used to pick big maize cobs from neighboring farms and save them for seeds for my farm. But I would only harvest 6 bags from my 2 acres, whereas my family needed 13 bags for food. My children and I would work for long hours but we would harvest less than we need," says Samwende. She would seek

paid work on neighbouring farms to purchase the extra maize to meet her family's food needs.



This season, she planted maize on 2 acres. She bought 16 kg of improved maize seed from the VBAA. As advised by Neema Urassa, she planted one seed per hole using a spacing of 25 cm x 75 cm.

"Everyone in the village admired the neat spacing and performance of maize on my plot. At harvest time, I was visited by many farmers who also wanted to pick bigger cobs to use as seed, but I advised that it was not recommended to replant from the harvest of a hybrid maize

variety," she says.



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In June 2014, Said Humbe of Kibaya village harvested 60 bags from 3 acres planted with the SC403 variety. He had known about good spacing and proper use of manure but had never decided to purchase improved maize varieties.

"I never saw the value of buying the varieties until I saw a neighbour's farm with two cobs on one plant. She had planted one of the DK varieties. I asked her where she bought the seed and she directed me to Urassa. I chose the SC403 variety," he explains.

Humbe used to harvest six, 100 kg bags from an acre. He believed that was the potential of his land. This season he harvested 20 bags from an acre. He hopes to sell 27 (100 kg) bags when the price of a bag rises to TZS 50,000 (USD 32) in September.

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“In February 2014, I planted 2 kg seed of the SC403 variety that I bought for TZS 9,000 (USD 6); I was among the late planters in this village. I was not sure of harvesting even a bag because the rains were almost ending. Neema Urassa told me that this was an early-maturing, and so drought-tolerant variety. I believed her,” Says Ericka Honya.

From her 0.25 acre plot she used to harvest only 2 bags using seed of the traditional varieties, whereas she needed 4 bags to feed her family of 4 in a year. This season she harvested 5 bags from the same plot.

She has only sold 1 bag of maize to get money for other domestic needs but as she says, “we now have enough to eat; I will no longer toil looking for money to buy extra food.” The farmer also understands the meaning of drought-tolerant varieties.

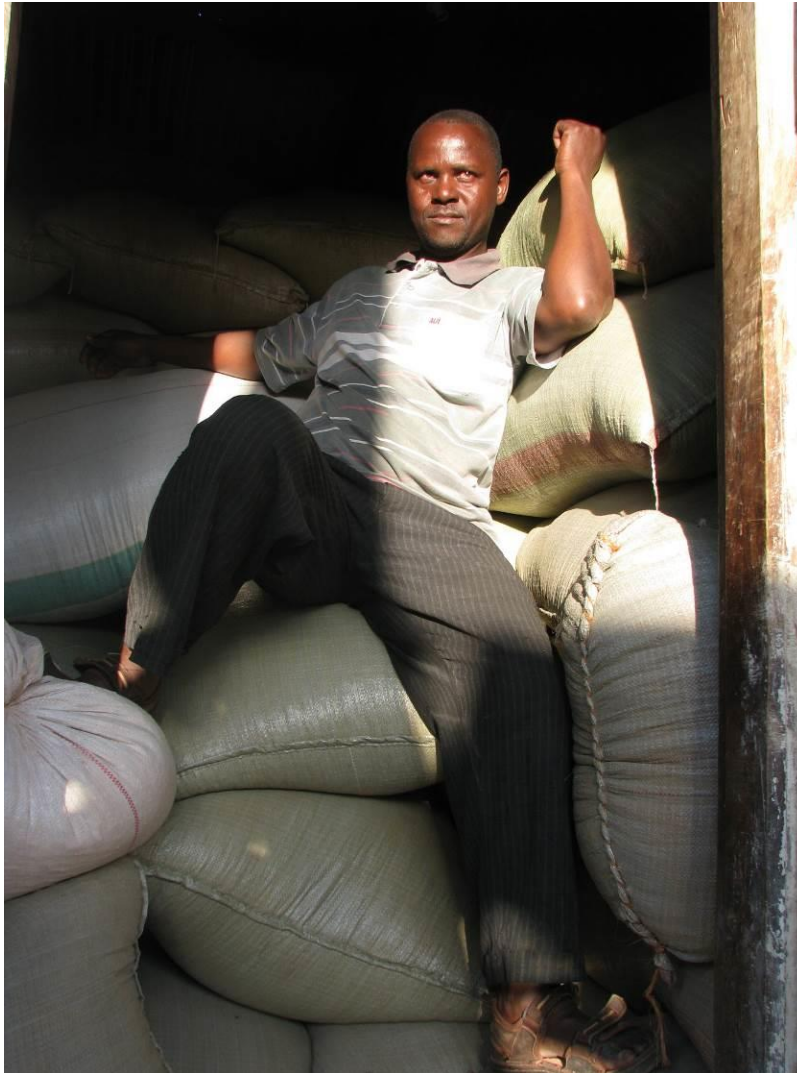
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In 2011 Richard Mbise a farmer in Kibaya Village planted maize on 30 acres but harvested 50 bags from the plot. "It was so disappointing."

In January 2013, he started to improve on his maize farming after realizing that he could harvest more bags if he planted improved varieties at the right time, using good seed spacing and fertilizer placement.

After learning from the VBAA, in February 2012, the farmer took home a 100 g small pack of seed of an improved variety and planted on a 5 m x 10 m plot. Using the good spacing, one seed in a hole and use of manure, he harvested 13 kg of maize from the small plot.

My calculations showed that if I planted on an acre then I would get not less than 22 bags. That is why I bought 150 kg seed of DK8031 from Neema Urassa.

In June 2014, he harvested 300 bags from his 15 acre farm. "I have never harvested 100 bags since I started maize farming in 1999. This was a shocker. I am even ready to give the VBAA a bag of maize to thank her for teaching me the skills of maize farming," says Mbise.

The farmer is now planning to build a big store for next season's harvest because he wants to plant maize on at least 50 acres next season.

These are just eight of 1,500 farmers Neema Urassa has been teaching how to improve their maize crop productivity.

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