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Insights into our partnerships within Uganda's rice sector



## Spray Service Providers: Community-based Facilitators bridging the Extension Services Gap

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Based in Eastern Uganda's Bugiri District, the Bugiri Spray Service Providers Association has 19 core group members and provides crop protection and extension services to more than 800 rice farmers.

Twenty-four-year-old Barbra Nafuna has been farming rice since 2014. Prior to her involvement with the Bugiri Spray Service Providers Association, Barbra had very little understanding of how to protect her rice fields from pests and disease.

Like many of her fellow farmers, Barbra believed that witchcraft was the cause of pest and disease attacks on

her fields. The farmers would spread ash on the rice fields to try and prevent pest damage. Occasionally, the farmers purchased chemicals to try and reduce the spread of disease, but without access to information on the appropriate chemicals to use and how to apply them, the farmers would often purchase low quality or ineffective products that they then applied to their fields manually.

As a result, Barbra was one of several farmers who could not see any commercial potential in rice farming. The poor agronomic practices had reduced harvests, with only enough rice produced to feed individual households.



*I was never educated on pests and disease and how to combat them. As a result, in a good season, I would harvest only two bags of paddy from one acre of land, which was only enough to feed my family. Commercial rice farming was not an option for myself or others in my farmer group.*

**Barbra Nafuna,**

Farmer, Bukaye Village, Kapyanga Sub County,  
Bugiri District, Eastern Uganda.



## REACH-Uganda and Spray Service Providers

Bugiri District Local Government has 10 agriculture extension workers tasked with ensuring farmers have access to the knowledge and information they need to produce quality yields. However, with about 80,000 farming families in the district, these extension workers are responsible for supporting 8,000 farms each – an impossible task.

The International Fertilizer Development Center's (IFDC) Resilient and Efficient Agribusiness Chains Project (REACH-Uganda) project identified a gap in knowledge among farmers and a lack of farmer access to skilled crop protection specialists. This gap was not only a challenge for rice farmers, but it also extended to potato farmers. If production and productivity were to increase, smallholder farmers needed access to crop protection and extension services and information on good agronomic practices.

In July 2018, REACH-Uganda identified farmers in Bugiri and seven other districts in Eastern and South Western Uganda who were interested in providing crop protection and extension services. In partnership with CropLife Uganda Limited, 83 trainees were taken through comprehensive and practical courses on crop protection, crop management and post-harvest handling methods for both rice and potato.

At the end of the training course, 81 participants became certified spray service providers and were able to serve their farmer groups and communities as crop protection specialists. They could also provide agricultural extension services to farmers in order to improve rice and potato productivity.



In 2020, with the support of REACH-Uganda, the spray service providers established four demonstration gardens and organized four farmer field days in Eastern Uganda. In total, 407 farmers (235 women) across Eastern Uganda were trained in good agronomic and post-harvest handling practices for rice. More than 2,000 farms were serviced by different spray service providers with each provider reaching an average of 20 farms in a season. REACH-Uganda facilitated continuous monitoring and refresher courses for the spray service providers to ensure that farmers in the community were aware of the latest in good agronomic practices.

REACH-Uganda then linked the spray service providers to legitimate agro-input suppliers to ensure access to quality fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides for crop management. By taking this approach, farmers in turn received quality inputs. Additionally, REACH-Uganda supported the spray service providers to hold three radio talk shows and one show where farmers were invited to discuss their experience of working with the spray service providers. The objective of the radio shows was to work with the Bugiri District Agriculture Department to increase awareness of the spray service providers and the support they could provide to farmers.

"Before I attended the REACH-Uganda training with CropLife I was a farmer, but I did not know what I was doing. The extensive training provided in 2018, and the following

refresher courses, gave me the knowledge and skills to help farmers in my community increase their rice production," said Bugiri Spray Service Providers Association Chairperson, Kanunu Moses.

Kanunu added the Association had grown from 15 to 19 core members since 2018, and the members have since served 879 rice farmers (397 women) across a combined production area of 6,023 acres.

"The spray service providers delivered crop protection services, monitored the farmers' rice fields and advised on appropriate and genuine agro-inputs, such as fertilizers, to maximize production. Farmers pay for these crop protection services at an affordable rate (UGX 21,000-35,000 per acre), therefore the spray service providers, who are all youth aged 20-35 years, now depend on this as a primary source of income and incorporate their skills into their own farming practices," he said.

The Bugiri Spray Service Providers Association now has clients in the nearby districts of Mayuge, Busia and Namutumba as a result of the coverage on community radio stations. They also opened an agro-inputs retail outlet, providing farmers with a 'one-stop-shop' for genuine agro-inputs, sprays and extension services.



By the end of 2019, REACH-Uganda and CropLife had trained **137 spray service providers**, 82% of whom were actively providing services to farmers and 80 were active in spray service provider associations.





## Community Impact

Bugiri District Agricultural Officer, Nimmy Mugabi, explained the impact the spray service providers were having on the community.



*As the Local Government, we greatly appreciate REACH-Uganda's initiative with the Bugiri Spray Service Providers Association because they bridge the gap and reach out to farmers to control pests and disease and share information on proper crop management.*

**Nimmy Mugabi,**

Bugiri District Agricultural Officer.

"As the spray service providers are community-based, they provide quick and readily available services, unlike the government extension workers who, because of their heavy workload, can take 2-3 days to attend to farmers," he explained.

Barbra Nafuna found out about the Bugiri Spray Service Providers through the radio talk shows organized by REACH-Uganda. She heard the providers talking about the importance of proper crop management for increased yields.

"I contacted the spray service providers and, with my farmer group Bukaye Rice Farmers Group, attended farmer field days during which we picked up practical skills such as the use of quality rice seed, nursery management, line planting, crop protection and fertilizer application for improved rice farming," Barbra said.

Barbra now uses WITA9 rice seed and harvests up to 10 bags of paddy per acre. The spray service providers also linked her to buyers for her paddy, and she now earns UGX 2,000 per kg of milled rice, an increased from the UGX 1,500 she used to receive from her local single stage mill. With this additional income, Barbra pays tuition fees and purchased a goat and some chickens to diversify her farming enterprise.

This Bugiri community is one of several in Eastern and South Western Uganda that have benefited from REACH-Uganda's support to the agricultural extension system in smallholder farming communities. REACH-Uganda has also promoted youth-centric agribusinesses within the rice and potato sectors. With the continued expansion of the spray service provider associations, more farmers in the community will have access to quality extension services, resulting in increased efficiency in the rice and potato value chains.

