

**“SARO 5 IS REALLY A MIRACLE SEED”** - A success story of Mrs Emilia Eli Mligo, a model farmer in Kapunga village

Mrs. Emilia Eli Mligo is rice farmer at Kapunga village, Mbarali district in Mbeya region, Tanzania. She started growing rice in the early 1990's. Before Africa RISING-NAFAKA project intervention, she used to grow *Zambia* and *Mwendambio* traditional varieties. She didn't know about improved rice production techniques that entail such aspects as using proper seeds of high-yielding varieties, proper preparation of seedlings and planting them at proper spacing, judicious use of fertilizers and pesticides, proper irrigation water management and timely harvesting. She used to harvest not more than 28 bags (each of 100 kg) per hectare. "The challenges of rice farming were innumerable" noted Mrs. Mligo. "Five years back the only seeds available to farmers were those of traditional varieties that, although preferred by local buyers, they were low-yielding. My income was very low, I could hardly afford even enough food for my family for more than two months", she continued. "As I had never attended any training on rice production, I had no knowledge of the technologies to improve rice production. For instance, I was planting very old seedlings (of even more than two months old) randomly in a poorly-prepared field with no bunds around and I didn't know that even the rice crop needed fertilizers in order to produce high", she emphasized.

In 2017, she was introduced to the Africa RISING-NAFAKA project and joined a group of 25 fellow farmers who volunteered to establish and manage a mother demonstration plot in the guidance of the VAEO and Africa RISING-NAFAKA project staff. After receiving classroom and on-farm training on good agricultural practices on rice production that was conducted by TARI-Dakawa researchers in collaboration with NAFKA staff, Mrs. Mligo said, "It was during such trainings that I was introduced to the improved rice varieties, *Komboka* and *SARO5*. I was assured by the trainers that the varieties were not only high-yielding but were also palatable and could fetch good price if grown with good agronomic practices". When asked about the new varieties introduced by the project Mrs Mligo had this to say, "Prior to the project, we had grown a variety we called SALO. As with many farmers in Mbarali district, the first time I heard of SARO5, I thought it was the same familiar variety, SALO. I almost lost interest in it as the grains of the former SALO variety have poor quality, specifically white bellies which we call *vijiicho*, rendering it to selling at very low price as compared to the traditional/local varieties", she added. "I almost left the group lest I should waste my time for something not profitable but, thanks for the encouragement by my fellow group members, I stayed to this surprise", noted Mrs Mligo. Motivated by the high yield and the quality of

grains of SARO5 and *Komboka* harvested from the group's demo plot, Mrs Mligo started growing SARO5 variety in the subsequent season of 2017.

"The yield of the varieties SARO5 and *Komboka* we obtained from such a minute piece of land, the demo-plot, was a real miracle to me. In addition, the grains of these varieties were quite good on milling, they didn't have *vijicho* as I had expected. This SARO5 is quite different from the SALO we had been growing for ages. It seemed to me the season was delaying. When the season finally arrived I obtained some seeds of SARO5 from the mother demo-plot and managed to multiply them for subsequent seasons following wholeheartedly the techniques I had learnt from the classroom and on-farm trainings I had received in the demo-plots from the Rice Team, TARI-Dakawa researchers and NAFKA staff", she continued. "I repeat it, it is a real miracle since, by last season, 2019, I managed to cultivate one hectare-field using only 25 kilograms of my own saved seeds of SARO5 variety and I harvested 86 bags, about 8.6 tons. My God... from 2.8 to 8.6 tons per hectare. This is quite a real miracle. SARO5 is really a miracle seed", she added.

Mrs Mligo was one of the first farmers who volunteered to be the model farmers as one of the technology scaling strategy adopted by the AfricaRISING-NAFAKA project in 2019 rainy season. She volunteered to cultivate 1.5 acres of rice field (in addition to the oneacre field that was asked by the project) from her own resources except for the grant of 10 kg of improved seeds of SARO 5 (TXD306) she was offered by the project to start with. She cultivated one hectare in total. From the 2019 harvest, Mrs Mligo sold 40 bags at Tsh 50,000/= per bag and earned Tsh. 2,000,000/=, the money she used to cater for her grandchildren's schooling and other domestic needs. The remaining 46 bags she saved for food, seeds and anticipated medical expenses. She also initiated construction of her new house.

The 2020 season, she has cultivated one hectare of SARO5 and has started multiplying *Komboka* in a small area, all this using her own resources. "I want to complete my house this year. I am confident, from the status of the crop in my field I am going to make it again. I expect to get even higher yield than that of the last season", explains Mrs Mligo when asked about her plans for the 2020 revenue expected from her field.

Mrs Mligo is very thankful to AfricaRISING-NAFAKA project for elevating her to her current economic position and she swears to be the untiring technology disseminator to other rice farmers in her village and elsewhere in the country. "Thanks to the AfricaRISING-NAFAKA project training I am now able to train my neighbours especially on planting at proper spacing and other improved technologies", noted Mrs Mligo. "I owe much to the Africa RISING-NAFAKA project for what I have achieved so far. To show my gratitude to the project I promise to continue disseminating the technologies I learnt by training as many farmers as possible, by examples, so that they improve rice productivity and increase their income as I have done".



**Photo 1: Mrs Mligo standing in front of her old house (A) and nearly completed new house (B) at his home village in Kapunga village. Credit: Didas Kimaro**



**Photo 2: The current view of Mrs Mligo's new house from a distance. Credit: Didas Kimaro**