

NEWS & FEATURES

Round Potatoes, Big Dreams: How Igoma AMCOS Grew from 20 to 300 Members and Managed TZS 800M Loan

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Igoma Village, Mbeya District —

Fueled by the vision of thriving through round potato agribusiness, Igoma Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Society (AMCOS) has grown from a modest group of 20 farmers to a strong network of 300 members in less than two years. The members collectively farm approximately 1,560 acres. Supported by sustainable farming, strategic collaborations, and a TZS 800 million loan, this cooperative demonstrates how rural communities can unlock prosperity and self-reliance.

In March 2022, Igoma AMCOS began with a simple yet powerful vision: to uplift their community through sustainable potato farming. Guided by the Igoma extension officer Erasto Anthony Mhagama and supported by the Mbeya Regional Secretariat and the SAGCOT Centre, Mbarali Cluster office in Mbeya. In April 2023, the AMCOS was registered and started with 20 farmers. Through hard work, trust, and a shared commitment to growth, the cooperative quickly expanded, attracting hundreds of new members eager to be part of this transformative journey.

“Our members are planting the seeds of a brighter future,” said Mhagama. “This cooperative is not just a business—it’s a lifeline for the community.”

Strengthening the Potato Value Chain: Igoma AMCOS is revolutionizing the potato value chain by focusing on local seed production, potato sorting and packaging. By the guidance of SAGCOT Mkulima kwa Mkulima Initiative under Lusitu Agribusiness Group from Njombe and global leaders like HZPC and local institutions such as Mbeya University of Science and Technology (MUST), the cooperative was introduced to improve potato seeds and advanced farming techniques, boosting yields and quality.

The cooperative has a selling contract with East Africa Foods a SAGCOT partner who has invested in value-added processing. Plans for modern storage facilities with cold rooms and sorting facilities will further reduce post-harvest losses and empower members to time their market entries for maximum profit, as currently, the sorting is done on farms.

Unlocking Potential Through Strategic Partnerships: A key turning point came when Igoma AMCOS partnered with East Africa Foods, which has introduced potato purchases in kg, unlike other buyers who have been purchasing using volumes also known as Lumbesa. HZPC, a global leader in potato breeding. Members learned advanced techniques through demonstration plots and hands-on training that significantly increased yields. The Mkulima kwa Mkulima initiative with Tajirika na Lusitu further empowered members with practical skills and

record-keeping training, transforming Igoma AMCOS into a regional model for sustainable farming.

“We’re not just producing more; we’re producing better,” Mhagama shared. “And with better produce comes better opportunities for our members,” shared Mhagama.

Investments in collection centres and cold storage facilities are crucial for ensuring better market prices and reducing post-harvest losses. However, this remains a significant challenge for Igoma AMCOS, as they still lack the necessary funds and technical know-how to implement these improvements effectively.

A Data-Driven Approach to Success: Igoma AMCOS takes a unique, data-driven approach to farming. Members rotate potatoes and maize across zoned fields, achieving peak yields of up to 50,000 sacks of potatoes per acre—all without irrigation. This strategic approach maximizes productivity and adapts to changing conditions, ensuring consistent growth.

Enhancing Prosperity Through Strategic Collaboration: The influence of Igoma AMCOS transcends its membership. In 2023, demonstrating exceptional financial acumen, the cooperative secured and fully repaid a TZS 400 million loan from CRDB Bank within just six months. This swift repayment showcases their robust financial health and prudent management. With this achievement, Igoma AMCOS sought to double their financial leverage by applying for a TZS 800 million loan to expand its operations. However, considering the cooperative’s capacity and future growth potential, the bank approved an additional TZS 400 million loan. Igoma AMCOS is actively repaying this new loan, further solidifying its reputation for financial responsibility and enhancing its ability to scale operations effectively. The plans are ongoing to train the farmers on irrigation practices and technologies to ensure income for the whole year and give confidence to the bank to release more loans to the AMCOS members.

“This cooperative has given us access to larger markets and better prices,” shared one member, Balton Angolile Mwakasura. “Before, we were isolated. Now, we are part of something powerful that uplifts us all.”

A Model for Sustainable Rural Development: Igoma AMCOS embodies the principles of collective action and sustainable development championed by SAGCOT. By organizing farmers, connecting them to larger markets and reliable input suppliers, and fostering community bonds, the cooperative is a result of a replicable model for agriculture development already implemented by potato farmers organization in the SAGCOT Corridor, namely Lusitu Agribusiness Group and ISOWELU AMCOS in Njombe Region.

A Future of Possibilities: As Igoma AMCOS looks ahead, its ambitions are clear: seed production, infrastructure upgrades, and value-added training are just the beginning. Each new project brings hope and opportunity, turning a once-small cooperative into a thriving community force.