



R.D.O

QUARTERLY BULLETIN

A PUBLICATION OF RWANDA DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION

ISSUE N° 3

JULY - DECEMBER 2021



National dialogue:

Gender & Youth mainstreaming in agriculture

- Incorporating farmers' feedback directly into advocacy
- Farmer organisations renew commitments under FtMA

FOREWORD



The civil society remains a strategic partner for the Government of Rwanda to achieve its development goals through interventions carried out by a multi-diversity of both national and international organizations in order to support the citizens' socioeconomic advancement.

Rwanda Development Organization (RDO) is among the Civil Society Organizations that have been accompanying and contributing significantly to the development of Rwanda. For the last 25 years, RDO actively played a significant role in changing lives of thousands of Rwandan on various socio economic aspects.

For this time, once again, we have made further progress in the year 2021 toward our ambition to be a rural community development actor in Rwanda. Our strategically strong position enhances our ability to achieve our purpose as an NGO which connects the rural poor to live a better today and build a better tomorrow in a safe and stable environment.

Inspired by our moto, vision and mission, the progress that has been made entails all the dimensions of sustainable development that takes into consideration stability of the environment, growth of the economy and inclusion of all people.

We strongly believe that people driven development is sustainable and inclusive. It is this kind of development that reduces the inequality gap between the rich and poor. We are well aware of the natural phenomena where the rich and the poor coexist. We however strive to reduce the gap through empowering communities to build self-sustaining social economic development initiatives that move them away from vulnerability.

For the past two years, COVID-19 has continued to expose fragilities of our existing agri-food systems, disrupting markets and putting immense strain on small holder farmers. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was not on track to meet the shared commitment to end global hunger and malnutrition in all its forms by 2030, but the pandemic has sent us even further off track. On a positive and optimistic perspective, this crisis has offered an opportunity for the privileged to re-think the need to support the poor for the COVID-19 impact had a heavy toll to everyone. RDO will leverage on this experience to work towards improving the disparities.

RDO will continue to strive and raise resources to support communities, based on the felt-needs and priorities of the beneficiaries. We shall empower communities with the required expertise and skills needed to identify and prioritise their needs in the planning, implementing and monitoring of activities.

We express our appreciation to all those that have contributed and supported RDO's efforts. We appreciate the contributions made by government ministries and institutions, UN agencies and other development partners that have supported RDO since its establishment and continue to give technical, moral and financial support to this end.

My gratitude to you all.

Eugene RWIBASIRA
Executive Secretary
RDO



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RDO Rwanda Kigali

LET'S HEAR FROM THE FARMERS

Incorporating farmers' feedback directly into advocacy



By Steven Nsamaza;

Eric Bapfakurera has known farmers and been around farming for as long as he can remember.

However, ask him when he started farming himself, and he can give you a straight answer: six years ago. That's when he joined a farmer organization in his Rwandan village and started earning an income from his work.

Unable to find any other job, Bapfakurera officially began farming after completing his secondary education. Initially, he began farming simply to survive. Then, in 2015, he began growing beans and maize, and—by employing good agricultural practices—he started harvesting surplus for the market and

earning savings.

But Bapfakurera's path to success has not been without challenges.

According to Bapfakurera, smallholder farmers throughout Rwanda face many issues that affect their ability to increase production. Many of these issues are common. Yet, many farmers do not know where or how to address them. In a country like Rwanda, where approximately 75% of the country's agricultural production comes from smallholder farmers, the impacts of those challenges are felt widely.

The Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), an independent public institution that regularly monitors

service delivery across public and private sector institutions, releases the Citizen Report Card that assesses citizens' satisfaction with services so that service providers can see where improvement is needed. The 2019 report card found that 41.8% of Rwandan citizens expressed dissatisfaction with the agricultural services offered by public and private institutions, indicating that the services are not satisfactorily contributing to improved agriculture development.

This finding contributed to the creation of the "Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi" (Voice of the Farmer) project, which aims to help raise farmers' voices by strengthening engagement between farmers and duty bearers at local and national levels through evidence-based dialogue.

The Rwanda Development Organisation (RDO), with support from InterAction, designed the project to elevate smallholder farmers, especially women and youth, by promoting their active participation in local planning and budgeting processes and engaging local leaders. But what evidence was needed for advocacy with local and



Training farmer representatives on the use of survey CTO

national authorities in Rwanda? How would it be collected?

Building a Farming Data Collection Tool

RDO developed a digital application using SurveyCTO to collect and analyze data from farmers' organizations. The application was customized to suit the project and designed with an eye toward RDO's ability to use the application in the future.

To ensure that farmers are at the center of the problem-solving process, RDO trained representatives from farmers' organizations to use SurveyCTO. RDO decided to rely on farmer representatives, as opposed to its own staff, to collect data from farmers for several reasons. First, it places farmers and their representatives at the

center of the process, giving them the ability to collect data about the issues they face. On a more practical level, farmers are more likely to provide candid responses to fellow farmers from local organizations, whom they know, rather than outsiders.

RDO established three-person coordination teams, comprised of local farmers, in each district to consult monthly with farmers' organizations throughout their districts, gathering data on the issues faced by farmers and logging that into the application.

Coordination team members were selected by their fellow farmers based on educational background, knowledge of digital tools, and their ability to travel throughout their respective districts. This democratic process for selecting the coordination team members ensured credibility among farmers in

Kayonza and Nyagatare. RDO trained these individuals to identify the problems farmers face and use the SurveyCTO application for digital data collection. Once the district coordination teams were formed and their members trained on using the application, RDO facilitated regular field visits by providing district coordination teams with transportation to different cooperatives.

During data collection, a discussion approach is used to facilitate open dialogue during which issues and concerns can be raised. Because the data collectors are farmers, they are able to chat openly with fellow farmers.

Members of the district coordination teams were given smartphones with the customized SurveyCTO application installed, allowing them to collect data offline, as many farmers' organizations are located in remote areas.

The application allows users to enter, edit, and validate data offline. Once online, users safely and securely upload the data to cloud servers, where it can be downloaded and analyzed. RDO's team uses the data to create evidence-based reports detailing the issues confronting farmers that play a key role in local and national pro-smallholder farmer advocacy.

Bringing Evidence to Bear on Advocacy

After the first district reports were completed, RDO organized dialogue meetings at the district level in Kayonza and Nyagatare, bringing together farmer representatives, district officials, extension service providers, and the coordination teams to discuss the findings and forward the reports to the appropriate individuals or government institutions.

The SurveyCTO application has been critical to RDO’s evidence-based advocacy in Kayonza and

Nyagatare. It enables farmers organizations to approach district officials and extension service providers with concrete data—the types of issues confronting farmers, the prevalence of those issues, and where they are experienced.

This has benefited farmers on two fronts. First, the data collected gives added weight to their advocacy. Second, it allows farmers to cite their full array of concerns readily.

In their visits to farmers organizations in Kayonza and Nyagatare, the district

coordination teams identified a wide variety of issues impacting farmers along multiple dimensions, ranging from service delivery and the quality of inputs to a variety of infrastructure, financial, and sociocultural challenges.

Specific issues cited by farmers organizations include seeds quality, access to storage and drying facilities, post-harvest tools, accessibility of agricultural loans and insurance, registration of cooperatives, and adaptation to the effects of climate change, among others.



THE TABLE BELOW

summarizes a variety of challenges cited by farmers organizations. The list illustrates the wide-ranging obstacles farmers in Kayonza and Nyagatare face, though it is by no means a comprehensive list of all challenges cited. These findings were drawn

directly from data collected in the SurveyCTO application.

During a recent meeting, the Mayor of Kayonza District welcomed the initiative. He echoed the need for farmers to play a more active role in planning and seeking solutions to agricultural issues.

District officials in charge of agriculture who attended the dialogue with farmer representatives agreed to farmers’ active participation in local planning and budgeting processes on agricultural issues and committed to continue engaging farmers on matters of concern.

Findings from SurveyCTO application	
This table contains a selection of findings drawn directly from the SurveyCTO application, based on conversations with farmer organizations in Kayonza and Nyagatare. The challenges are grouped by the type of challenge. Each finding shows the percentage of farmer organizations that reported that challenge.	
Delivery of extension services	
66%	Dissatisfied with extension services provided by Social Economic Development Officers
55%	Do not have farmer field school extension services
91%	Have not received soil testing to determine fertilizer needs
Provision and quality of inputs	
54%	Farmers who received hybrid maize seeds had yield issues
73%	Did not receive hybrid (best) bean seeds
93%	Do not have access to tarpaulins for drying maize and beans
100%	Do not have access to mobile maize drying machines
Infrastructure	
52%	Experienced challenges with feeder road networks required to bring produce to market
Financial	
84%	Difficulty affording pesticides
55%	Difficulty obtaining agricultural loans
Sociocultural	
86%	Noted challenges specifically affecting women farmers
93%	Noted challenges specifically affecting young farmers
Citizen engagement	
79%	Do not know what is contained in the District Development Strategy for agriculture
100%	Do not know what is in their district’s current budget for agriculture
Created with Datawrapper	

RDO ACTIVITIES IN NUMBERS

124,574

supported to resiliently increase their agriculture productivity through training in Good and Climate Resilient Agriculture practices (GAP & CSA)

72,664

families with lactating women benefited from integrated nutrition

243

cooperatives linked to potential markets of their produces through the promotion of forward-delivery contracts

296,084

trees planted for controlling erosion, improve soil structure and enhance carbon sequestration

3259

smallholder farmers linked to finance institution

9,538

households supported to acquire proper sanitation facilities

9,538

adolescent girls and young women supported with capacity building in Sexual and Reproductive Health, SGBV, and HIV prevention

CROP MAINTENANCE HELPS TOMATO FARMERS RAISE PRODUCTIVITY

Bimpinduka Cooperative in Nyagisozi sector, Nyaruguru District was given a free greenhouse to improve the productivity of their vegetable farming. The cooperative thought the greenhouse was a game changer and they decided to grow tomatoes as a fast selling produce.

After the first season of good tomatoes production with support of the greenhouse service provider there was a drastic fall in production. The unfortunate turn of events was a result of low skills and diseases outbreak.

The cooperative's investment could not be recovered because of poor yields.

An Agronomist from Rwanda Development Organisation (RDO) based in Nyaruguru district seeking to support farmer organisations visited Bimpinduka Cooperative and found that the tomatoes were victims of bacterial wilt.

"We were told that our tomatoes had a disease and there was no cure." **Anastasia Nyandwi**, the president of the cooperative said. She adds that the agronomist gave them an alternative to continue their tomato farming. Nyandwi explains that from



that time they were to do things differently by changing the traditional methods to good agriculture practices.

The farmers were advised to plant the tomatoes in separate pots or polythene bags to avoid contact of the different plants in order to avoid transmission (of diseases from one plant to another) and those working in the greenhouse to become more

Crop management

If bacterial wilt is present in a field, you are advised to remove infected plants immediately from the greenhouse or the field and bury them into the soil so as to not spread the bacteria to other plants. This completely diminishes disease in future if the pathogen has not already spread to adjacent plants. Shakur explains that, they started planting tomatoes each

RDO agronomist also advised on the use of bacterial wilt tolerant variety of tomatoes which can be used to successfully control the disease where there is no cure.

“With the technical support from RDO we were able to get a bumper harvest, through the advice of the agronomist, we bought good seeds and the harvest earned us about Rwf 200,000 and we are still harvesting,” Nyandwi gestures towards the last harvest of the season estimated at 200kg.

She is quick to add that; her cooperative was established as a way to fight against malnutrition in the area. Therefore, members of Bimpinduka (Be the Change) cooperative are given vegetables to feed their families given the nutritional benefits of vegetables.

The cooperative which has 109 members with 89 women primarily grows vegetables and has nursery beds for fruit trees. They attribute their increased activities and success in raising productivity to UN Women support through RDO, Imbuto Foundation, Duterimbere and INADES.

Under the Rural Women Economic Empowerment project (RWEE) which is financed by UN Women, RDO has trained farmers in good agriculture practises, gender issues, local planning and budgeting. The trainings are offered both in theory and practical for farmer representatives from different cooperatives.

Beatrice Uwizeyimana is a farmer promoter and a member of Bimpinduka cooperative, she has been trained to help other farmers and the new skills have also greatly changed how she does agriculture.

With the new skills earned and applied to her family garden, Uwizeyimana was able to raise productivity almost three-fold from 70kgs to 200kgs, while productivity increased the seeds she used decreased by 2kgs.

Uwizeyimana also heads a group under the cooperative called Abakundamurimo which has 28 members and she has been helping them to improve their farming practises. She says many are now experiencing increased productivity and where they need more expertise an agronomist from RDO is there to help them.

She observes that, most of the members are slowly becoming commercial farmers unlike before when they could not reserve anything for the market.

Women members of Bimpinduka revealed that productivity of their agricultural activities have improved and have realized that they are capable, in a sense that they were confident to engage in small scale on and off farm activities.



RDO Programs Officer, Diana Mugwaneza with Djibril Shakur, the field officer visiting Bimpinduka Cooperative to assess progress

cautious when they are visiting the green house. Djibril Shakur, RDO field officer in Nyaruguru says that after identifying that the tomatoes were affected by tomato bacterial wilt which couldn't allow crops to grow till harvesting and no readily available drug to use, advised the adoption of good agriculture practices that would enhance the crops' strength to tolerate diseases.

in a separate container and would monitor if there were any affected plants which would be removed to ensure that they do not infect others in any case.

Farmers were all taught how to handle the tomatoes because along with their tools, they would also transmit the disease. Therefore, having trained the farmers to control the transmission by their own hands or through farm tools it diminished the disease.



IMPROVED POST-HARVEST HANDLING INCREASE INCOME FOR RWANDA'S WOMEN FARMERS IN NYARUNYINYA

Poor post-harvest handling remained the number one problem to farmers in Nyarunyinya in Muhanga District due to poor methods and the use of rudimentary tools. In this rural area of central Rwanda, farmers lose up to 40% of agricultural products during post-harvest processes, as something is lost at every stage, from the start of harvesting to the final selling point. Thanks to UN Women's project launched to support women farmers, Theresa Mukashyaka and other women farmers have significantly improved their post-harvest handling.

Born in a family of farmers, Theresa Mukashyaka and her parents practiced subsistence agriculture and cultivated beans, cassava, sweet potatoes with various vegetables among other crops.

At 59, Mukashyaka has been practicing agriculture her entire life, as the only available profession for her. She considers agriculture a noble work and wishes it could be improved. In Nyarunyinya, where Mukashyaka was born, many farmers remain vulnerable regardless of generational farming families as they continue practicing poor agricultural methods.



Theresa Mukashyaka, a maize farmer in Nyarunyinya Village, Cyeza Sector in Muhanga District, Southern Province of Rwanda

"I didn't become a farmer by choice but inherited from my parents the profession as well as their agricultural practises which remained the same for years giving us poor proceeds until I was trained in good agricultural practises," says Mukashyaka.

When UN Women and its implementing partner, Rwanda Development Organisation (RDO) launched the project to support women farmers, Mukashyaka's cooperative, Tuzamurane Cyeza Cooperative, was selected because of its sizeable number of women members totalling to 401

women from a combined total of 865 members.

All the members of the cooperative were trained in the perspective of women's empowerment, provided with good agricultural practices and better methods about post-harvest handling and storage of grains. The project facilitated the acquisition of different post-harvest equipment like tarpaulins, hermetic bags, moisture meters and drying sheds, which helped them to improve the quality of their production.

Mukashyaka started to notice the immediate change on her 20 acres garden at home when production almost jumped tenfold when she applied the newly learned skills.

Before 2017, she was producing 80kgs from her 20 acres garden which increased to 700kgs in 2018. The production keeps on increasing as she applies good practices.

“BEFORE, NO ONE WAS PAYING ATTENTION TO SOME OF THOSE POOR METHODS BUT TODAY, I CAN'T EVEN THINK ABOUT HOW ONE CAN HARVEST MAIZE WITHOUT TARPAULINS OR HEAPING THE HARVEST ON DIRTY GROUNDS ”

The provided drying shed helped them to dry maize and the hermetic bags helped in storing their home food.

“We used to store in normal bags and our production would get damaged. Sometimes we would even use chemicals that are dangerous to our health. Now, this doesn't happen anymore thanks to RDO and UN Women who provided hermetic bags that don't require to use chemicals,” explains Mukashyaka.



NATIONAL DIALOGUE DISCUSS GENDER AND YOUTH MAINSTREAMING IN AGRICULTURE



Dr. Jean Chrysostome Ngabitsinze, Minister of state in the ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources

Rwanda Development Organisation (RDO) with partners on Tuesday, 14th December 2021 held a national dialogue on gender and youth mainstreaming strategy in Agriculture 2019-2026 at Lemigo Hotel in Kigali.

The dialogue came following an assessment of the strategy launched two years ago by the ministry of agriculture. The assessment was conducted with the overall aim of a baseline against which a more gender-responsive planning, programming, monitoring and reporting and advocacy can be established.

Officially opening the dialogue,

the Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, Dr. Jean Chrysostome Ngabitsinze said that when you look at all the value chains in agriculture and you see youth and women involved you will understand why we should have a strategy.

“**OVER 60% OF RWANDA'S POPULATION ARE YOUTH AND WOMEN, MOST OF THEM ARE INVOLVED IN AGRICULTURE. BUT THERE ARE INEQUALITIES ALONG THE VALUE CHAINS LIKE WHEN YOU OBSERVE ACCESS TO FINANCE BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN, THERE IS A BIG VARIATION.**”

Dr. Jean Chrysostome Ngabitsinze

The minister recognised that there were some gaps in the strategy as identified by the assessment indicating however there was still time to change things together as the strategy was going into its third year of implementation, and there was going to be a review soon.

“We can do more, we can do better and that's why we are here to dialogue,” Minister Ngabitsinze said. Adding that, they are putting together resources so that the agriculture sector is not for one part of the population but for all.

Madam Fatou Aminata Lo, UN Women Representative in Rwanda observed that the assessment should help to have a much more granular understanding of the ways in which needs are being taken into consideration and come up with ideas and recommendations to improve and correct the approaches.

She underlined that the gathering was even more important since little progress had been made so far in implementation of the strategy that brings us together but it is still early in the years of the strategy and there was opportunity to shift and shape its final years.



Madam Fatou Amnata Lo, UN Women Representative in Rwanda seated next to Minister Ngabitsinze during the Dialogue.

She congratulated RDO for convening all stakeholders to the dialogue for rich discussions examining the findings and recommendations of the assessment and give candid feedback to improve it.

Madam Fatou highlighted the excellent partnership UN Women has had with RDO, saying that working with the organisation she found the team very effective, proactive and has always had frank discussions with the RDO Executive Secretary, Eugene Rwibasira.

The discussions came back to how very little progress had been made so far in the implementation of the strategy

and one of the major challenges was how institutional framework of the strategy was lacking clear definition of roles with regard to who does what, who reports to, and who coordinates the entire implementation process.

Another challenge discussed was how limited understanding of the link and difference between gender and women empowerment concepts and approaches as well as lack of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework of the strategy.

As many commended RDO for the initiative to organise a national dialogue, the assessment had pointed out limited policy

dialogue between policy makers, implementers and rights holders was another impediment affecting the implementation.

Access to information was highlighted during the discussions as an important precursor in the agriculture sector especially to the women and youth who face the most difficulties in low levels of the value chains.

Aurore Agasaro, a youth farmer underlined the importance of having the right information especially the youth who wants to know the reality of things.

She said that starting agriculture on her part was to practise what she was teaching while



Eugene Rwibasira, the Executive Secretary of RDO making intervention during the Dialogue

undertaking consultancy to support farmers and she now better understands as a youth and woman farmer means.

Eugene Rwibasira, The Executive Secretary of RDO said that the strategy was very important since it recognises

“WOMEN AND YOUTH INCLUSION IS VERY SUBSTANTIAL IN AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT BECAUSE WHEN YOU BRIDGE THE GENDER GAP YOU INCREASE GDP BY A CERTAIN POSITIVE MARGIN.”

Rwibasira said that the assessment identified gaps in the strategy but also showed that there was need to work together as different stakeholders in order to improve.

John Mutamba, a gender expert and consultant who conducted the assessment explained

the wide gender gaps in the agriculture sector found where women are in disadvantaged positions with regard to access and control to resources and services, participation and decision making.

According to research findings, working women in Rwanda are more involved in agriculture at 63% as compared to men who stand at 43 per cent.

The gender and youth mainstreaming strategy is a comprehensive document on mainstreaming gender in agriculture sector but two years after its launch it is yet to be widely disseminated and implemented.

The study found that there is weak engagement and ownership of this strategy among stakeholders as well as weak

institutional framework of the strategy with no clear roles and responsibilities of implementing partners.

It was found that many who are involved in the sector blamed insufficient budget allocations that are made to address gender mainstreaming needs as well as lack of conceptual clarity about gender mainstreaming approach and women specific programme interventions.

Another important component found is lack of a well-defined role of the private sector and civil society organisations in the strategy.

Odetta Mukarusanga, from Abanyamurava cooperative of farmers in Kayonza, attended the dialogue and thanked the organisers for including farmers during the discussions. She said that when you include beneficiaries in the planning processes it greatly helps in reaching your targets.

She said that, when farmers know that they participated in something it even greatly enhances ownership and you are sure of good results.

The dialogue was the first step where the study findings has initiated discussions that will also create an advocacy tool to engage different actors in finding solutions to effectively tackle gaps in the strategy.

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE SPURS SMALLHOLDER AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT



By Steven Nsamaza;

Dativa Uzamukunda, a farmer and an agro-dealer from Nyagatare district in Eastern Rwanda has been struggling to share some farming tips with local growers and help them increase yields and profits.

“It was challenging for the majority of local smallholder farmers to gain easy access to up-to-date information on inputs and production,” she said.

The local service providers were also not providing the right solutions to our problems.

In a move to improve the efficiency of farming operations, Rwanda Development Organisation (RDO), in collaboration with district authorities have adopted a new knowledge platform for information exchange which is now helping smallholders farmers to be equipped with skills with constant advise and updates on issues like improved seeds needed and how to apply pesticides as well as other agricultural inputs and needs.

The initiative dubbed Ijwiri’Umuhinzi (Farmer’s Voice)

which is currently being implemented in two rural districts of Kayonza and Nyagatare in the Eastern Province by RDO, is seen as voice to smallholder farmers and was developed to know why smallholders were not appreciative to some of the services they are given.

“The major purpose is to support smallholder farmers especially women and the youth to have a voice and engage local leaders through dialogue,” said Eugene Rwibasira, the Executive Secretary of RDO.

The 2019 Citizen Report Card by Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) indicate that across Rwanda, a proportion of 41.8% of farmers were unsatisfied with agricultural services provided to them while only 55.0% appreciate.

Following the study indicating that a large number of farmers were not satisfied by services given to them by relevant institutions in the agriculture sector, the new platform is proving a forum to the unsatisfied smallholders to point out why they find the services they are given don't match with their expectations.

Among the issues that farmers raise include delivery of services such as improved seeds, drying and storage of produce, post-harvest handling, application of pesticides, market for agricultural produce, and infrastructural challenges like poor roads, bridges, electricity and climate change.



Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi initiative aims at raising the voice of smallholder farmers especially women and youth through their active participation in local planning and budgeting processes and engaging local leaders through dialogue.

Steven Uwizeyimana, president of "Twigire Rubyiruko", one of the youth cooperative that cultivates maize and Irish Potatoes in Kayonza District acknowledge that most of youth have limited involvement in policy dialogue.

In most parts of Eastern Rwanda, both development partners and local administrative authorities agree that most often young people's voices are not heard during the policy process, and so their complex and multifaceted needs are not met.

"To remedy this, youth need the requisite skills and capacities for collective action to ensure that their voices are heard," Uwizeyimana said.

Things were a little tough at the start, Cyprien Muhayimana, the Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Kayonza District explained, as some issues raised by farmers should be forwarded to the right authorities to address them.

"It was all a learning process for both, because we had to explain things for them and they would have to tell us how they did things. It was a mutual learning process," he said.

For example, one of the consultative meetings took note of farmers' grievances in Eastern Rwanda where they were asking administrative officials to improve infrastructures especially road networks and bridges mostly those that have been destroyed by heavy rains as a move to facilitate transport of agricultural produce to markets.



John Mugabo talking to farmer representatives during a district dialogue in Nyagatare

Common grounds through dialogue

Post-harvest handling was also discussed, farmers say they have made some progress on this issue but find problems in drying their maize during the wet season while others still lack enough storage facilities.

During the discussion between members of farmers' cooperatives and district authorities both parties have to strike a balance and seek common grounds through dialogue.

So far Rwanda has been supporting smallholder farmers and their cooperatives by linking them to formal financial services that allows them to scale-up and enhance their production.

During these interventions smallholder farmers are supported with a range of services to promote farming as a business, use of improved inputs and enhancing crop post-harvest management.

John Mugabo, coordinator of the initiative explained that the project came as a voice to smallholder farmers and was developed to know why farmers were not appreciative to some of the services they are given.

"This is an excellent initiative," because it allows "us to know one another" and "to adapt to working together to improve farming activities which needs modern practices for enhancement and development" Mugabo said.

Agriculture has been a historical mainstay of Rwanda's economy contributing almost one-third of Rwanda's GDP and employing approximately 68 per cent of the country's working population.

But some Agriculture experts say there are still gaps to be filled in providing sufficient information for solving a certain problems faced by stallholders' farmers.

Alex Mutwarasibo, one of the

Agriculture experts and senior lecture at a local University in Rwanda noted that apart from providing relevant information at all stages of production, farming cooperatives are still struggling to identify their needs.

"Decision makers still need to develop effective grievance mechanisms for smallholder farmers before mobilizing appropriate public investment in roads, irrigation and poor credit facilities which have severely constrained the productivity of Rwandan rural agriculture," the Rwanda economist expert said.



FARMER ORGANISATIONS RENEW COMMITMENTS UNDER FtMA



that FtMA was helping in market linkages and more cooperatives had joined the platform.

“ PASCAL HABUMUGISHA FROM WFP OFFICE IN KIGALI SAID THAT SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FtMA IN RWANDA IN 2016 IT HAS MADE TREMENDOUS PROGRESS TO LINK FARMERS TO THE MARKET. THE PLATFORM STARTED WITH ONLY 27 COOPERATIVES AND ONE BUYER – RGCC, TODAY THERE ARE 287 COOPERATIVES SUPPORTED UNDER THE INITIATIVE. ”

**Pascal Habumugisha
from WFP office in Kigali**

He explained that of the 14,000 MT maize productions pledged by farmer organisations 12,000 MT were contracted. Cooperatives totalling to 213 signed forward delivery contracts and 13,700 MT delivered to FtMA buyers representing 114% of the contracted volume with Rwf 3.4 billion in total sales.

The platform which was created to support smallholder farmers through their organisations has also led to increased production as well as improved quality produce.

Farmers are trained on how to improve quality starting from the preparation of their farms, good agriculture practices, post-harvest handling and storage, quality control and food safety trainings to ensure they have high quantity and quality produce in each season, and be able to bring surpluses on market.

Farmer cooperatives under Farm to Market Alliance (FtMA) called on big buyers to improve working relations including timely payments and respect of contractual obligations, the call was made while renewing their commitments in meetings with stakeholders including buyers and financial institutions.

The meetings organised by Rwanda Development Organization (RDO) and Rwanda Rural Rehabilitation Initiative (RWARRI) with support from the World Food Programme (WFP) were aimed at reviewing the achievements of the past seasons, share lessons learnt and challenges faced while chartering better linkages for the early market readiness of 2022A season.

Organised at the provincial level, the meetings were held in Kayonza on November, 30 2021

for the Eastern Province, Rulindo on December, 01 2021 for the Northern Province, Muhanga on December, 09 2021 for the Southern Province and Karongi on December, 10 2021 for the Western Province.

Diana Mugwaneza, the Programs Officer at RDO said that the meetings were delayed because of the prolonged dry spell that farmers faced but was important to meet to re-establish commitments so that farmers can sell their produce.

She said that all concerned stakeholders were invited to renew their commitments with farmers, these include cooperatives, big buyers, banks and insurance companies. The platform also provided an opportunity to sign contracts.

Mugwaneza observed that the intention was to discuss how to increase productivity, revealing

To increase the quality, FtMA has trained 33,638 farmers (48% women) focusing on Post-harvest handling and storage.

This has provided an opportunity for discussions on issues affecting farmers on the market, among those highlighted during the meetings were late payments from the buyers, the use of EBM (electronic billing machine) for tax invoices, buyers that fail to pay cooperatives as well as issues that lead farmers to losses.

Farmers say that some buyers collect their produce but take longer than the agreed period to pay while others blamed some buyers for agreeing to collect the produce but bring few trucks for transportation which leads to losses.

Big buyers present at the meetings including Africa Improved Foods (AIF), Rwanda Grains and Cereals Corporation (RGCC) and EAX assured farmers of improved services and each committed to make payments in real time. Many of the buyers provided a timeline when payments should always be expected and encouraged farmers to work with credible companies with contracts made under FtMA.

On the use of EBM, farmers were advised to register with Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA) but since

many lacked knowledge they were promised advocacy to concerned authorities to help them.

Farmer organisations were also encouraged to acquire insurance coverage to avoid any uncertainties, and FtMA links farmers to financial institutions including those that seek access to finance.

The meeting also heard testimonies from farmers on how the platform is helping them improve productivity, provide information and link them to markets.

Theresa Mukashyaka, president of Tuzamurane Cyeza Cooperative in Nyarunyinya, Muhanga District applauded FtMA and RDO for supporting her cooperative to access markets for their produce as well as trainings and advisory services.

She attested to insurance coverage through the advice of RDO that salvaged her cooperative when disaster struck, and they lost everything but were compensated.

“Before we joined FtMA we never had a ready market for our produce, we are happy that RDO linked us to buyers through FtMA, we can now sale whatever we can produce,” said Seraphine Uwitanze from Ubumwe Gatonde Cooperative in Ngoma District.

Uwitanze says that having access to big markets has



changed their lives and led to the growth of their cooperative.

Dansira Uwamaria, the president of COOPCUMA cooperative in Rugarama, Gatsibo District said that her cooperative grew both in production and value, it keeps growing every year thanks to the available market created by the FtMA.

She revealed that they started with shareholding of Rwf.2,000 but have grown this to Rwf.75,000 and the cooperative is able to give out dividends every year.

FtMA platform offers market linkages in a sustainable way and brings along various partners including farmers, cooperatives, buyers, financial institutions, agri-focused organisations and non-governmental organisations that support farmers.

Best performing cooperatives in every district were awarded with prizes to recognise and motivate them. Awarded prizes included weighing machines, moisture content checking machines and tarpaulins to help farmers improve their harvests.

FtMA is the only initiative in the maize sector to have connected farmers through forward delivery contracts to the largest commodity buyers in the country. The initiative is making present financial solutions scalable through introducing third party guarantors and training farmer organisations on governance and financial practices.

The commitment of buyers is further strengthened through the promotion of increased adoption of advanced post-harvest handling and storage technologies amongst farming communities.



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