Cooperation between Rwanda and FAO began in 1963, and an FAO country office opened in 1985. Since then, assistance has comprised an evolving range of interventions, including development projects and emergency response and rehabilitation. A more recent focus on improved policymaking is illustrated by FAO’s support to the mainstreaming of value chain development in Rwanda’s Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation. On the technical front, Rwanda was the first country to have embraced FAO’s Sustainable Food and Agriculture (SFA) initiative.

Matching FAO’s expertise to Rwanda’s development priorities

FAO assistance in Rwanda is shaped by the 2013-2018 FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF), which centres on four priority areas:

- Improvement of food security and nutrition among the Rwandan population
- Agriculture and livestock productivity through sustainable use of natural resource management, adapted to climatic changes
- Value chain development and private sector investment as a basis for boosting commercialized agricultural development
- Institutional collaboration and knowledge sharing in addressing agricultural development, food security and poverty actions

Jointly developed with the Government and other partners, the CPF is closely aligned with priorities in national development policies, namely the Vision 2020 and Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS III). It is also aligned with the Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation (PSTA III 2013-2018) as well as the country’s sectoral strategies for forestry, the environment and natural resources, and land.

Rwanda is a pilot country for “One UN”, a coordination initiative aimed at increasing the impact, coherence and efficiency of UN partners present in the country.

Nutrition: FAO promoting healthy diet among vulnerable households

Although achievements have been made with regard to food availability and accessibility, persistent malnutrition is one of Rwanda’s main challenges. In line with the high priority given to achieving food and nutrition security, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture are mainstreaming related interventions across the agriculture sector strategy and developing a nutrition action plan. The Government’s goal is to eradicate pervasive chronic malnutrition and stunting among children under the age of two.

Two joint projects to combat malnutrition among children were implemented by FAO – with UNICEF, WFP and WHO – in Nyamagabe and Rutsiro, which are two of the most affected districts.

The FAO-led component aims at promoting local production and consumption of nutritious and safe food as well as helping the affected households build more resilient livelihoods. In the field, activities focus on the distribution of small livestock, the construction of kitchen gardens and the provision of agricultural inputs and tools. Farmer Field and Life Schools (FFLS), an important and successful component of FAO’s activities in Rwanda, are stressing the benefits of producing bio-fortified crops as well as mushrooms. The sustainability of the project activities should be assured through capacity building, which also encourages households to assume ownership.

About 649 households in Nyamagabe and 2 120 households in Rutsiro benefited directly from this collaborative project.

Project funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the Netherlands.
Securing community livelihoods with bamboo

A current intervention under FAO’s Technical Cooperation Programme is promoting the sustainable management and use of bamboo resources as a means of sustainable development, poverty alleviation and livelihoods support for both rural and urban communities.

To date, the project has been implemented in two provinces in the districts of Nyaruguru and Kicukiro. Demonstration plots have been established to illustrate the benefits of good bamboo nursery practices, plantation management and market development. Already, bamboo resources have increased, and project participants have learned about bamboo technologies and uses. Participants have also gained from the economic opportunities resulting from related market development.

At the outset, members of the public were invited to attend training sessions, where they learned how to manage production sustainably and benefit from the tree as a market resource.

One community member admits to having had little previous knowledge about bamboo. “I knew that the tree could be used as firewood and for building, but I was not aware of its importance until I participated in this project. I now know that bamboo is a fast-growing tree species which can be used to curb land degradation and which can be harvested without cutting the plant down. The soil stitching effect of the root system remains firm, helping to reduce soil erosion.”

Support to commercial agriculture

Since 2008, FAO has been supporting value chain development for potato, maize, milk, passion fruit, cassava and pineapple, focusing on Burera, Gicumbi and Gisagara districts. All groups involved in these six value chains (19 cooperatives of 5,180 producers – of whom 2,640 women, 15 input suppliers, and 7 processors) are receiving assistance in accessing profitable markets, increasing their cash incomes from harvests and, above all, improving the nutritional status of their families. FAO’s assistance is in line with the Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation as well as the Crop Intensification Programme managed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources. The project has so far achieved remarkable results, including an increase in productivity and yields, adoption of new forms of value addition and cottage processing technologies, and improved access to more profitable markets.

Bringing quality milk to the market

In the Gicumbi District of Rwanda, FAO focused efforts on improving farmers’ food and nutrition security and increasing cash income through the intensification, value addition and commercialization of agricultural and livestock products. A particular emphasis was placed on the milk value chain, from the dairy farmers to the milk collectors, processors and retailers.

Building on past successes

The positive results achieved by the cross-border project led FAO and Rwanda’s Ministry of Agriculture to launch a new “Milk Bars Initiative” in 2014. This aimed at completing the milk value chain by encouraging the consumption of milk as a means of addressing malnutrition at the community level. The initiative has ensured that milk is available in trading centres across the country, where alcoholic beverages have traditionally predominated. Promotion of the Milk Bars will further contribute to improving the nutrition of vulnerable families.

“Food security and adequate nutrition for all is where sustainable development starts.”
José Graziano da Silva, FAO Director-General