



FAO Rwanda Newsletter

March 2020 — Issue #1



Leveraging the power of technologies in agribusiness



Dear reader,

Activities at FAO Rwanda Office during the first quarter were intense with the unveiling of a number of projects.

In January, FAO joined forces with other UN agencies and the government of Rwanda in a new project aimed to strengthen Rwanda's social protection.

February saw the launching of a Technical Cooperation Programme project in collaboration with Rwanda Development Board (RDB) to digitalize commerce in agricultural value chains. The initiative will strengthen the capacities of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to be more competitive on local and foreign markets.

Similarly, we made an emergency intervention to support the farmers in Kirehe district that were severely affected by floods late last year destroying crops.

We supported the efforts of the Government to prepare for the potential threat of desert locust invasion by training agriculture experts in control and management of the pest.

Lastly, as the world grappled with the Coronavirus outbreak, Rwanda was no exception. March, was a special month as FAO Rwanda staff started working from home following Rwanda's complete lockdown to control the spread of the COVID-19 disease in the country. It was a difficult time and a different way of doing office business but we adapted well to the 'new normal'.

Although, non-essential services and travels were suspended, those related to food supply chain remained functional, including veterinary drugs and animal feeds, agricultural inputs, harvesting, buying and collecting agricultural produce, extension services, and agro processing factories (feeds and food).

Delighted to share further details on our work in this newsletter.

Gualbert Gbehounou, FAO Representative

HIGHLIGHTS

- **New initiative to strengthen e-Commerce in Rwanda**
- **FAO trains agriculture experts in Desert Locust control and management**
- **Emergency project to support victims of floods in Kirehe district**
- **FAO and UN agencies join forces to strengthen Rwanda's social protection**
- **Home-based teleworking in the face of COVID-19: Staff's experience**
- **Knowing water better: Assessing water uses and needs in Rulindo**

FAO and Rwanda partnership to strengthen e-Commerce

FAO and Rwanda Development Board (RDB), entered into a partnership aimed to digitalize commerce in agricultural value chains.

Through the two year project “Support Local suppliers’ capacity development and promotion of online trading in Rwanda”, the capacities of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) will be strengthened to make them more competitive and link them with big buyers both in and outside Rwanda. The intervention targets three selected agriculture value chains; Horticulture, Livestock and agribusiness. It will also explore innovations in agriculture to support Rwanda’s efforts towards a cashless economy.

Activities will include: creating linkages for farmers and distributors of farm produce with buyers such as hotels; increasing the farm gate price for farmers’ produce; reducing the country’s import bill as well as allowing local companies to compete in both the local and global markets.

An e-Commerce strategy for agricultural value chain will be developed in line with the country’s ambitions towards the vision 2050.



Enhancing the skills and capacities of farmers improves production and quality of agro-related produce.

The RDB Chief Executive Officer, Clare Akamanzi said: “The partnership will provide the answer as to why big hotels and supermarkets continue to import agricultural related produce such as, poultry products, fruits, and beef with all resources at our disposal.”

FAO Representative to Rwanda, Gualbert Gbehounou, said: “As FAO, we support our member countries to engage in sustainable agriculture to ensure that agricultural production doesn’t degrade the environment. Farmers need to sell their produce to earn a good living. If they earn well from farming they’re able to improve and create jobs.” The project will have both direct and indirect benefits to the Rwandan economy, in terms of, reduction of hotel imports, job creation, poverty alleviation and ease trade deficit.



Participants carrying out simulation exercise of the desert locust control and management in Nyagatare district.

FAO trains agriculture experts in Desert Locust control and management

FAO, through the Regional Commission for Controlling Desert Locust in the Central Region (CRC), trained a total of 25 agriculture experts on Desert Locust survey and control operations, from 9-13 March 2020. The trainees were from the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) and agronomists from the districts in the Eastern Province.

The spread of the locusts, early this year, in the neighbouring countries; Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, raised Rwanda’s preparedness and readiness to keep the pest at a bay. Although the country hasn’t reported Desert locust invasion, has to prepare for the potential threat.

The training was part of FAO’s support to the Government of Rwanda’s existing preparedness plan.

The week-long training included two days sit-in and three days of simulation exercise conducted in Nyagatare District, Eastern Province that was more under threat to the invasion of the locusts. In a March “Desert Locust situation update”, FAO said the locust situation remained “extremely alarming in the Horn of Africa”, specifically Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia where widespread breeding is in progress and new swarms are starting to form.

FAO Representative, Gualbert Gbehounou, expressed his appreciation for the real efforts made by the Rwandan government to anticipate any possible events of the Desert Locust. He pledged FAO’s readiness to provide all possible means of support in order to achieve full preparation for the confrontation with Desert Locust.

Izamuhaye Jean Claude of Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB), said: “We acquired skills to compliment what we already have. The training was more hands-on and we look to transferring this knowledge to other technicians at different levels”.

The trainer, Essam Khalifah, said that FAO has a plan for all ecology of a given country threatened by the desert locusts or at risk of the invasion.

Emergency project to support victims of flood in Kirehe District

FAO in collaboration with the Government of Rwanda launched a project to support farmers that were severely affected by floods in Kirehe District that destroyed crops.

The disasters that struck the district late last year, submerged more than 50 hectares of rice fields and 3 954 Ha of cropland while about 90 domestic animals died. The majority of the people of Kirehe depend on casual agricultural work and for households' own subsistence farming. Relatedly, the district has been undergoing a prolonged drought and the recent heavy rains compounded the risk of unprecedented run-offs that resulted into flooding and landslides.

Through the project "Emergency support to rehabilitate and enhance agricultural production capacities of farmers affected by floods in Kirehe District", affected households will receive inputs such as certified seeds and fertilizers to recommence their crop production, and rehabilitate the irrigation infrastructures destroyed by the sediments depositions in the lowlands.

Also, 3 000 farmers will benefit from the cash for work transfer meant to support their livelihood needs for the entire agricultural season, and about 250 Hectares of cropland will be rehabilitated.



The floods in Kirehe washed away many crops.

During implementation, it will build farmers' capacities for sustainable management of future such disasters in the district, with 50 Facilitators and 3 000 farmer facilitators and technician farmers trained in preparedness and response to future shocks.

According to ND-GAIN index of a country's vulnerability to climate change (2013), Rwanda ranks 131 out of 178 countries, meaning is highly vulnerable to climate change effects. Floods and landslides have been among the major disasters that have great negative impact on food security, health, environment and infrastructures in different zones of the country.

FAO and other UN agencies join forces to strengthen Rwanda's social protection

The Government of Rwanda and One UN in Rwanda launched a new project aimed to support Rwanda's efforts towards ending poverty in all its forms and reduce malnutrition.

The two year programme "Accelerating Integrated Policy Interventions to Promote Social Protection in Rwanda" targets the most vulnerable households in five districts; Kirehe, Karongi, Burera, Nyamagabe, and Rutsiro.



In Rwanda, poverty incidence is higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

Specifically, the programme will improve access of the households to social protection, and economic empowerment, while building their resilience to climatic shocks and improving their access to agriculture inputs and nutrition support. The programme is financed to a tune of about USD 3 million contributed from the Joint Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Fund, and participating UN agencies.

The UN Resident Coordinator in Rwanda, Fodé Ndaiye, commended the government of Rwanda that stands out as exemplary in its strong structure, clear goals, and effective commitment to achieving tangible results. Adding that this provides a conducive context for the UN to work, and partner with the Government and national stakeholders and contribute to the development and the wellbeing of the people leaving no one behind, through the very relevant for poverty eradication of the social protection framework.

Rwanda's Minister of Local Government, Shyaka Anastase said: "This Joint Program will accelerate graduation of poor households, create opportunities for the local communities and individual households to live a decent life, and build resilience.

The initiative is jointly implemented by three UN agencies, namely; FAO, UN Children's Agency (UNICEF) and World Food Programme (WFP), in partnership with national partners; Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC), Ministry in charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA), Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI), and Local Administrative Entities Development Agency.

Home-based teleworking in the face COVID-19: Staff share their experiences

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that more people than ever before are teleworking – using information and communications technologies to do their work away from the office. Rwanda reported its first COVID-19 case on 14 March 2020. This was preceded with a complete lockdown of the country to contain the spread of the SARS-Cov-2 virus that causes the COVID-19 disease in the country. As of 31 March 2020, there were 70 cases.

Just like other UN staff in Rwanda, FAO staff in Rwanda started working from home full-time. This was not going to be business as usual. It was a difficult situation for the staff, they were going to adapt to the new working arrangement.

The office offered logistical support to make teleworking as effective as possible, and the Managers looking out for the staff. Most of the colleagues at the office this was their first experience telecommuting, and they share their insights.

Christine Mukantwali had to convince her 6-year-old son that she needed to concentrate on her computer sometimes. “At first my son couldn’t understand why I cannot play and talk to him whenever he needs me. I had to explain to him that my working schedule had changed. He now understands that I’m teleworking”.

Alexis Ruzigana, said: “Working from home is a bit challenging, sometimes respecting traditional business hours requires another level of discipline. However, good internet ensures that office business is conducted smoothly”.

Jeanne D’Arc MatujeMukamwiza said: “Children are now studying and sending homework online. This has added to parents extra task of supervising and coaching them where possible. It is still challenging combining both the usual office work demand and attending to the students’ school needs.”

Gaetan Heri, manages the Nutrition project: “The concept of teleworking from home has not yet been fully effective among our stakeholders. This situation still complicates our bilateral exchanges on activity implementation. The light side is that I have been able to increase my technical skills related to contingency planning and adapt to the unconventional working setting.”

Rosine Mizero, said: “It was just a matter of getting used to the new working arrangement. The ‘take the things over control’ room is now much more explored.”



A woman provides water to her crops from Yanze catchment in Rulindo.

Knowing water better: Assessing water use and needs in Rulindo

Farmers in Rulindo district are predominately vegetable growers. They rely on rainfall, however, much of the water runs-off from its steep hills owing to the area’s mountainous landscape. Yanze River, the main source of water for the district, serves also Rwanda’s capital Kigali for domestic use. This diverse Yanze water needs (Rulindo farmers and the Kigali city) creates a challenge as regards to water allocation.

In the previous intervention, FAO built six water dams for the farmers particularly affected by water scarcity so they can irrigate their crops. However, these were not enough. In order to enhance water use efficiency, the FAO-led project “Knowing water better: Towards fairer and more sustainable access to natural resources for greater food security (KnoWat)”, is operational in Rulindo whose main objective is to assess the aspects of water accounting, governance and tenure as well as water use and management.

The KnoWat project provides additional technical support and capacity for the farmers through small scale irrigation. The project is expected to pilot the solar powered irrigation in the area. Improved agricultural water use in irrigated and rainfed agriculture play a key-role in coping with the expected water scarcity stress.

The KnoWat project has established a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) composed of government technical officers mainly from the Ministry of Environment (RWB) and Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (RAB). The TAG provides the technical direction of the project and will ensure project ownership and eventual sustenance and assimilation of project results and good practices.

The 2nd TAG meeting was held on 24-26 February. The meeting was preceded by a field visit by the TAG in Yanze catchment Rulindo district, to assess the status of irrigation infrastructure and the challenges farmers face as regards to water use, and consequently suggest solutions.

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