



Sustaining food systems with rural women in agriculture



Message from the FAO Representative

Dear Reader,

We are almost at the end of 2020! For the most part of the year, the world has been battling with COVID-19 pandemic. We got familiar with the words like, build back better, lockdown, teleworking or 'working from here' and washing hands every now and then, etc.

It has been equally a challenging period working in the field, yet, colleagues at FAO-Rwanda have been resilient and doubled efforts to improve the livelihoods of the farmers in Rwanda. Immediately after the COVID-19 induced lockdown was lifted on the country, we distributed vegetables to farmers in Muhanga and Karongi districts to help them improve their diet, and to earn income from sale of the vegetables to build back better. FAO supported the government of Rwanda in its preparation to prevent and respond to Rift Valley fever, following an alert of the

potential risk in the region. There are many more interesting stories from the people we work in the field in this newsletter. We congratulate our FAO-Rwanda colleague, Jeanne d'Arc who was recognized by the FAO Director General as a committed staff to the Organization, and welcome to new staff who joined the office during the difficult times.

I move my vote of thanks to the FAO-Rwanda team, FAO regional and headquarters offices, our partners, service providers and the farmers for your commitment, together we have made it! I look forward to working with you, and more partners in the coming year.

I wish you a happy holiday season, and blessings in the New Year 2021!

Enjoy reading.

Gualbert Gbehounou,
FAO Representative

HIGHLIGHTS

- Empowering rural women to become entrepreneurs.
- Vegetable farmers in rural Rwanda are building back better.
- Increasing organic farmers in Rwanda.
- Clarifying gender equality in the gender-based violence fight.
- FAO increases Rwanda's vigilance on Rift Valley fever potential occurrence.
- FAO, IFAD launch project to increase water productivity for sustainable nutrition-sensitive agriculture
- Joining FAO during COVID-19

Empowering rural women to become entrepreneurs



Jackline standing beside one of her mango trees.

Jackline Niyonsaba cannot contain her excitement. In two months' time she will be harvesting quality mangoes. In 2018, Jackline received two high quality yielding mango seedlings from the project UN Joint Program "Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (JPRWEE)" which is a joint collaboration of UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UN World Food Program (WFP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and UN Women, to promote the economic empowerment of rural women.

She had never grown the 'Zirette' mango variety, and her hopes are high. "The mangoes will bring an added income to our family. We work for a daily wage on people's fields. I'll get about RWF30 000 from the two trees each year. It takes us a year to raise that kind of money," she said.

The project has, thus far, established 19 nurseries for avocado and mango seeds in three districts of the project intervention – Nyaruguru, Kirehe and Ngoma. Each nursery has around 1 200 tree grafted seedlings. They will be ready for planting next year - February 2021 - to be precise.

The two plants were chosen with the aim of improving food security and nutrition of the farmers, and increase their incomes from the sale of the fruits once harvested. Cultivation of avocados and mangoes is also aimed to initiate the farmers into entrepreneurship. "I have seven children. Once the mango and avocado trees have grown and I harvest, I will sell and pay for my children school fees, and also buy scholastic materials for them," said Redempta Kanyange.

"Avocados here are expensive, with the trees now in my farm, I'll be able to sell for income, and eat the fruits to improve nutrition," said Petronille Mukamugisha. Through the activities to construct the nurseries and graft the fruit trees, the farmers gained skills that potentially give them an edge in future work opportunities.

COVID-19: Building the resilience of vegetable farmers in rural Rwanda

Farmers in Rwanda were, in one way or the other, affected by the outbreak of COVID-19 which forced the country to lockdown in March this year.

In line with Rwanda's recovery plan aimed to save farmers from the effects of pandemic, FAO distributed vegetable seeds to the districts of Muhanga and Karongi to improve their agriculture productivity and food security, as well as to spur entrepreneurship among the farmers.

Christine Mukangoga, is a mother of five children. She is a farmer in Rongi sector, Muhanga district. She received vegetable seedlings including; carrots, cabbage and eggplants. In a month's time she'll be harvesting. She says the vegetables will help her to diversify her family's diet, and for income generation. Christine believes the support will help the farmers to build back better and to stay healthy.

"When I harvest the vegetables, there will be enough production to eat and to supply to the market. The money generated from the sale will help me to buy other food varieties that I don't grow, and also meet household necessities. During COVID-19 we found it difficult to get close to fellow farmers, and labor in the farm was not easily available," Christine said.



Christine in her farm.

About 3 530 farmers (1 446 women and 2 084 men) in the two districts received the vegetables seeds to address COVID-19-induced effects comprising, cabbage, carrot, onion, tomato, beetroot, eggplant, amaranth, French beans and cucumber.

Increasing organic farmers in Rwanda

Beatrice Kantarama, comes from a farming family in a rural area in Musanze district, Northern Province of Rwanda. She's been farming all her life. When she dropped out of school in secondary three and got married, she continued the activity. While growing up she found her parents growing crops in a 'traditional way'. Now, the mother of

four children, is a 'big sized' farmer growing potatoes and wheat on five hectares and three hectares respectively. "At home we practiced 'traditional' and inefficient farming practices. My eyes were opened when I trained as a farmer facilitator. I desired to grow organic food, but didn't know how," said Beatrice.



Beatrice showing farmers how she has reduced use of pesticides in her farm.

This year, FAO implemented a project aimed to promote a healthy, sustainable and hazardous pesticides-free agriculture.

Beatrice was among the twenty four (24) farmers from Musanze and Rulindo districts trained in the correct use of pesticides through Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach. Using the farmer field school (FFS) system, experimental plots were established planting potatoes and tomatoes. The farmers followed up the two crops throughout the Agriculture Season 2021A - from August up to mid December 2020 – when they harvested.

The first plot used the normal farmer practices (applying the quantity of chemicals pesticides as farmers normally use (over doses)); the second followed IPM procedures (applying recommended doses of recommended chemicals pesticides); while the third applied botanical pesticides extracted from locally available plants, and the four plot applied botanical pesticides extracted from locally available plants and in case pest and diseases resistance, apply recommended doses of recommended chemicals pesticides.

At harvest time, the findings showed that botanical pesticides are efficient and can fight against pests and diseases in Irish potato to achieve the desired production without harming the environment, while getting safe and healthy food.

"We realized organic agriculture is possible going by the outcome of the season long experiment. I'm determined to venture into organic farming. I had been applying unnecessary chemical fertilizer and pesticides," said Beatrice.

Camille Hodari, Agriculture Officer for Musanze district, said that they have already contacted potential markets that would buy the organic production. "Many enterprises are ready to buy the farmers' organic produce. Actually, people like organic foods and are willing to pay for any price tag placed on them. Organic produces are not easy to find in the district especially in Irish potatoes," said Camille.

Clarifying gender equality in the fight against gender-based violence

The Rwanda National Policy against Gender-Based Violence 2011, shows that although the government has made efforts in GBV prevention and response, there are remaining challenges that need to be addressed, including, persistence of some negative cultural beliefs.

Faustin, has been sensitizing families in his area about gender equality and against GBV, thanks to gender equality sessions he attended organized by the government of Rwanda. However, this wasn't the case a few years ago.

"I grew up knowing that home chores were for women and girls. One day, I came home and found my shirt not washed, I asked my wife why it was dirty, yet I had planned to wear it for the meeting the next day. She told me she had been busy. I beat her," said Faustin of Nyabihu district, in a remorseful voice.



Empowering men and women improves the household livelihood.

One of the main causes of gender-based violence in Rwanda is the couple's lack of understanding of how to manage family property.

"Before, I couldn't stand my wife asking for my hard earned money while she stays at home. I'd ask her if she had worked for it. When she said any other word back a conflict would arise. I thought since she found me with my property they remained mine, and she had no say on them," said Jean of Nyabihu district. After attending gender equality sessions, he now has a different perspective of how

couples should manage their finances and property regardless who wins bread.

They call us names

Thanks to the cultural and societal stereotypes that are still much alive, men who have embraced gender equality have been often taunted as bewitched, and diverted from culture.

“After attending sessions on gender equality, my husband started helping me to cook, fetching water, and we would do nearly all things together. One day he came home and said people and his fellow men were saying I had bewitched him, and had called him “Inganzwa (husband subjected to the authority of the woman)”. From that time he stopped helping me and has since become violent toward me,” said Utaria, who lives in Ngororero district.



Women work in agriculture maintain the food systems.

“I am okay now with helping my wife with some work at home, because I realized women work for long hours, and juggle many responsibilities than men. I cook, wash clothes for the family and any other task. I have been many times teased by people that my wife controls me, but I don’t care anymore. The most important thing is that it has brought more peace at home,” said Faustin.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), through the project aimed to provide emergency agriculture support to communities affected by floods and landslides in Rwanda implemented with the financial support from UN Central Emergency Response Fund, is creating awareness on gender-based violence (GBV) and Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) among communities affected by floods and landslides, specifically in the districts of Nyabihu, Gakenke and Ngororero.

Joseph Rwandege, a farmer facilitator since attending the sessions has sensitized farmers' groups in his sector, Ngororero, against GBV. He says gender-based violence wastes efforts of the family, production and income, thus depriving it of social and economic development.

Giving children a voice

“I never ate on the same table with my two children. During meals I would send them in the next room. After the sessions, I went back home and told my children how I loved them and started eating with them. I was surprised when our 20-year-old daughter told me that they thought I hated them, and that they were happy to share a meal with me and my husband,” said Samila of Nyabihu district.

FAO believes eliminating gender-based violence (GBV) is crucial, not only because it violates human rights but also because it reinforces many contributing factors such as the household vicious cycle of poverty and jeopardizing agricultural productivity, food security and nutrition.

FAO increases Rwanda’s vigilance on Rift Valley fever potential occurrence

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), on 30 September 2020, issued an alert to countries in the Eastern Africa region of increased risks of Rift Valley fever (RVF) both in animals and humans, either due to favorable environmental conditions or through animal movement.

In Rwanda, the last RVF outbreak happened in 2018 in cattle in three districts of Eastern Province (Ngoma, Kirehe, and Kayonza), during which cows died and others aborted. No human cases were reported.

In a move aimed to assess and harmonize capacities and readiness of the country to pre-empt the disease, the Rwanda One Health Multi-Sectoral Coordination Mechanism (OH-MCM) led a two-day table-top simulation exercise aimed to assess and further enhance the level of multi-sectoral outbreak preparedness and response in Rwanda as well as identifying strengths, weaknesses, and the necessary corrective actions.



Professionals conduct the table top simulation exercise.

The exercise was co-facilitated by FAO and the World Health Organization, with funds from the USAID. It was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Health,

RAB, Rwanda Food and Drugs Authority (Rwanda FDA), Rwanda Biomedical Center, Rwanda Council of Veterinary Doctors (RCVD), Rwanda Development Board, University of Rwanda, and students in Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program.

The team assessed functionality capabilities of existing emergency systems to be able to prevent and respond to RVF health emergencies. The gaps in information sharing among sectors were identified, while the need to enhance collaboration and Coordination among sectors for better preparedness and response was accentuated.

Meanwhile, RAB has started vaccination and vector control in risk areas.

The FAO Representative, Gualbert Gbehounou, referring to FAO's Global Mandate and its One Health Strategic Action Plan, pointed out that the Organization is a hub of technical knowledge that embraces One Health across its various areas of expertise by managing animal health, natural resources, fisheries and forestry; promoting access to safe, nourishing food; adapting to climate change and mitigating its effects; formulating policies for sustainable agricultural production, and advocating for gender equality.

"About 70 percent of the diseases in humans have origins in animals. The One Health approach is effective in addressing zoonotic disease outbreak like the Rift valley fever and other public health threats. Therefore, we need each other to mitigate emerging and reemerging zoonosis. Joint training as this exercise enables us to have a common understanding of the challenge before us and to communicate a similar message across the sectors," said Charles Karangwa, Coordinator of the Rwanda OH-MCM.

"Successful public health interventions require the cooperation of human, animal, and environmental health partners as well as other relevant sectors. No one person, organization, or sector can address issues at the animal-human-environment interface alone. The one health multi-sectoral coordination mechanism (OH-MCM) therefore provides a platform for enhancing coordination, communication and collaboration among the key players. The WHO commits to supporting the One Health agenda in Rwanda in collaboration with FAO and other partners," said Kasonde Mwinga, WHO Representative in Rwanda.

FAO delivers Rulindo district's first solar-powered irrigation system

FAO through the project "Knowing water better: towards a fairer and more sustainable access to natural resources - KnowWat", delivered three ENOS/Sunlight solar pumps and accessories to the farmers under the Yanze Horticulture Production Cooperative (YAHOPROC) of vegetable growers in the Yanze catchment, Rulindo district.

Apart from increasing productivity of the crops, the technology will reduce the heavy work load related to irrigation for farmers especially women.

"We're excited to use the sunlight solar pumps. The natural solar energy used is easy to generate from the sun. Secondly, unlike other irrigation equipment like motorized pumps, farmers don't have to incur expenses to buy fuel to run the solar irrigation system," said Olive Uwizeyimana, a vegetable farmer.



Farmers in Rulindo irrigating their vegetables using solar-powered system.

"Using treadle pumps that require at least three people to peddle and irrigate. This has been a challenge for women to peddle the treadles as it requires a lot of energy. Sometimes you have to wait for a man to help you peddle to be able to irrigate. The solar-powered irrigation is easy to use, you just turn it on and start irrigating. I can even irrigate my crops without the help of the man," said Marie Chantal Akingeneye.

Solar-powered irrigation is reliable, affordable and climate-friendly as the energy is produced from the renewable source. The system also caters for water productivity. The farmers were given basic training on using this technology.

FAO, IFAD launch project to increase water productivity for sustainable nutrition-sensitive agriculture

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in partnership with the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and the Government of Rwanda unveiled a new project aimed to increase water productivity, improve food and nutrition security and sustaining water resources.

The 3-year project titled "Increasing Water Productivity for Sustainable Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture Production and Improved Food Security", will strengthen capacities of smallholder farmers for the adoption of sustainable water management and nutrition-sensitive agriculture practices that will in-turn increase their yields, incomes and nutritional outcomes.

The project will promote a more integrated approach of “more nutrients and better economic prospects per drop”, through the development of a tool and guidelines to estimate how the choice of crops, water management and best farm practices can be modified to ensure the production of high nutrient density crops and crop diversification.

Global statistics show that agriculture is the biggest water user, accounting for approximately 70 percent of total fresh water withdrawals globally. With increasing water scarcity amplified by the growing inter-sectoral competition, climate change, rapid population growth and changes in food habits that are associated with a high prevalence of the triple malnutrition, there is a need for concerted efforts to address the issue of efficiency and productivity of agricultural production with a nutrition lens.

Therefore, the project, will address the issue of efficiency on the use of scarce resources in agriculture production by linking water use efficiency in agriculture production and nutrition. It will explore both rainfed and irrigated agriculture as rainfed agriculture represents the bulk of agriculture in the piloted countries.

Aside Rwanda, this pilot project will also be implemented in five countries; Mozambique, Benin, Niger, Egypt, and Jordan, financed to a tune of USD 2 million.



Productivity hinges on coordinated and timely management of water and other inputs.

Joining FAO during COVID-19

Rwanda announced a complete country lockdown in late March this year following the report of the first case of the COVID-19 disease. No movements were allowed with exception of farmers, medics and other personnel working in those fields.

The global pandemic outbreak has changed the nature of work, most organizations adopted teleworking as a ‘new working normal’. FAO-Rwanda staff have been working from home since then.

Joseph Higiho joined FAO-Rwanda when the office was teleworking during COVID-19 period. He is the new office’s “Farmer Field School Specialist”, working on the project “Technical Assistance to Sustainable Agricultural Intensification Food Security Project (TA-SAIP)”.

Joseph talks to us about the new career and how he’s working to create impact on food security and zero hunger.



Joseph says orientation is crucial to know the ‘whats’ and ‘hows’ of an Organization.

What do you do in your current position?

Providing awareness and capacities of farmers’ cooperatives in the application of innovative approaches and best practices through a ‘learning by doing’ approach called Farmer Field School (FFS).

How do you decide to change careers in the context of the pandemic?

You need to be convinced why you really have to change your current job. I was persuaded it was the right decision. When the opportunity from FAO came through I didn’t have a second thought...I moved.

What’s been the hardest part of starting a new job during a pandemic?

The first challenge you face is to know what procedures to follow. People are working from their homes, and initially, you don’t know who to contact, thankfully, the FAO system is built in a way that it allows people to stay connected and adapted progressively and easily.

What can organizations do to support new employees during this time?

Orientation is important for people joining the organization for the first time.

What are you doing to stay connected with the organization’s goals and mission while you’re away from the physical workplace?

Whenever I need help, I don't hesitate to contact colleagues directly via phone or emails and I get feedback in short time.

FAO-Rwanda has facilitated its staff to have a conducive working environment from home, with the installation of stable internet, will soon provide office furniture at their homes, and the management has been close to the staff; checking on them often to know how they are doing through digital group channels.

Congrats to our very own Jeanne d'Arc!



Jeanne d'Arc speaking to farmers in Gakenke district during the implementation of one of the FAO projects.

Jeanne d'Arc Matuje Mukamwiza, was one of the 200 individuals and 10 teams given special recognition for their contribution to the Organization's mandate to achieve zero hunger in our lifetime. The awards were given this year in December.

Jeanne d'Arc has been with FAO-Rwanda for now 20 years serving as the Programmes Assistant, supporting on operations matters, drafting project proposals and also as a gender focal point, among other tasks.

Sending her congratulatory messages, colleagues at the office highlighted her dedication and hard work. It was almost impossible to include all the messages here, but we have a few.

Anelique Uwimana, a Project Manager, has been working with Jeanne d'Arc for about four years. "What I know and have seen about Jeanne d'Arc is her dedication to work. Be sure she won't tire until she achieves the targeted results of the projects. She has a rich experience in FAO work, you always learn something whenever you listen to her."

Gilbert Kayitare: "She is an active, dedicated, and results-oriented staff, with immense experience in FAO operations both in field and systems. Her ability to support colleagues (teamwork) and effective coordination (and leadership) of numerous tasks was felt within FAO-Rwanda office."

Teopista Mutesi: "Jeanne d'Arc is one self-driven personality at work. Outside the office matters, she's warm hearted and loving. Great to have worked with such a soul at FAO. I thank FAO leadership for recognizing her efforts."

At this year's 'Employee Recognition Awards' celebration held virtually, FAO Director-General, Qu Dongyu, recognized 200 colleagues - 100 young and 100 young at heart - from all streams and offices.

In his message, the Director-General thanked FAO staff for the "remarkable performance under extraordinary circumstances in an exceptional year". He proclaimed that, "A new FAO is emerging with contribution and cooperation of all employees...a place for hard working, healthy mood and happy life" and added "your integrity, agility and diligence are reshaping this Organization, making it deliver better and with more impact."

This year marks the second edition of the 'Employee Recognition Awards'. The annual initiative was launched by the Director-General. Going a step further, this year, for the first time, the Director-General also celebrated the collective efforts of 10 cross-cutting organizational teams, who have demonstrated exceptional performance, commitment and collaboration in extraordinary circumstances in 2020.

FAO-Rwanda Team (January 2020)



FAO-Rwanda staff members pose for a family photo.



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