



**Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations**



**RWANDA**

## **Strengthening linkages between small actors and buyers in the roots and tubers sector in Africa**

**R**wanda is the sixth largest producer of potatoes in Africa, and the Irish potato is one of the most important crop in the country. Small scale farmers and food enterprises though strong contenders for regional and domestic market opportunities, have difficulties entering the value chain. To unleash their potential, the African Roots and Tubers project sought to: (i) increase and intensify sustainable market-led production and (ii) strengthen farmers' cooperatives; (iii) improve access to climate change risk management tools and access to finance; and (iv) develop business models throughout the value chain in which farmers and enterprises play a key role.

### **WHAT WAS ACHIEVED**

Since the first harvest record from September to December 2016, productivity has doubled to 60 000 tonnes (September–December 2017) from 30 000 tonnes, with 13 000 tonnes of total improved seed varieties planted and harvested (April–December 2017). In some cases, cooperatives increased average production by 340 percent, as in the example of the Cooperative of Kopanyatwigire, whose production increased from 75 kg to 330 kg per season. Overall productivity of Irish potato in Rwanda has increased to 23.1 tonnes from 11.5 tonnes.

Despite these important achievements in terms of production, the cooperatives located in north-western Rwanda have encountered floods and landslides, with agricultural losses ranging from 37 to 70 percent. To prevent such losses, vulnerable farmers are now receiving information on market prices, climate and weather forecasts, allowing for the reduction of production losses by acting preventively on the basis of the live information received.

In accessing finance, farmers, cooperatives and traders have collectively secured from microfinance providers and commercial banks, a total of USD 430 000 from 375 small loans. One successful case is the one of the Koabiki Cooperative, which has been able to access both individual and group loans, allowing

for business to scale-up. Likewise, the Bunyenyeri Cooperative used its savings to tap into agricultural investments for land and agricultural products. Besides the provision of loans, increased access to finance is indicated by the new 76 new bank accounts that have been opened by farmers and processors.

The financial services providers in turn reported a 100 percent loan repayment rate. To date, 248 contract farming agreements have been signed with the Seed Potato Fund, a private company, and through these agreements, farmers have supplied 9 400 tonnes of improved seed varieties.

### **HOW IT WAS ACHIEVED**

Tapping into the existing Farmer Field School (FFS) network across potato production zones, the project provided an integrated package of on-farm and off-farm solutions to promote the commercialization of small farm production. A total of 2 745 potato farmers attended 110 FFSs that were set up and 60 (40 men, 20 women) new FFS facilitators identified as cooperative leaders were trained by original FFS facilitators. This enabled the dissemination of best practices and strong features of capacity building, with 40 (farmers, traders and leaders of potato collection centres) people trained in harvesting and handling, and post-harvest management practices that minimize post-harvest loss, as well as improve food quality and safety, resulting in higher productivity and better prices.

To understand the vulnerability level of the potato subsector, the project partnered with the National Meteorological Agency of Rwanda to analyze the impact of climate variability on production and price fluctuations. Recognizing the threat of climate change as a shared challenge, World Food Programme the project held a regional workshop for both potato and cassava value chains on Climate Risk Management. Core to FAO's corporate strategy of leveraging synergies across its work, the project's cooperation with another FAO project on agricultural services and digital inclusion enabled the

development of the information system that is now providing climate, weather forecasts and related services.

A variety of buyer and supplier business models emerged from a diagnostic mapping of the potato value chain were assessed and the most appropriate ones selected. Twenty-four managers of potato collection centres and buyers meeting for the first time resulted in the exchange of best practices, opportunities and challenges on business development and solutions and recommended actions developed. Subsequently the training of 25 cooperative leaders and managers of potato collection centres and 15 urban-based traders benefited from marketing and contract negotiations. Cooperatives and collection centres were provided knowledge on agribusiness skills and were

supported in the development of viable five-year business plans of which that included financial and marketing strategies. Additional activities covered operational and legal aspects of contract farming.

To sensitize the commercial financial sector to the investment opportunities to be had in developing the potato sector by including small-sale farmers and enterprises, the project convened a number of commercial banks and financial service providers and representatives. The meeting included a training in adapting financial products to suit the specifics of the potato sector and small-scale farmers. Many of those who attended agreed to grant adjusted payment periods to farmers based on harvest profit margins.

Woman member of the “Kopanyatwigire Cooperative” who is now receiving regular climate information after severe floods destroyed her farm, Rwanda



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#### AFRICAN ROOTS AND TUBERS PROJECT

Agricultural Development Economics Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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