Supporting family farmers to produce more food
2018 has been a productive year for FAO in terms of advancing the goal of ending hunger in Rwanda through various interventions. A number of projects were introduced including, “Support for enhancing the production and distribution of seeds and banana planting material”, “Support to the Government of Rwanda in sustainable control and management of Fall Armyworm”, “Support to passion fruit value chain in Rwanda” and “provision of technical support for the One Health platform in Rwanda”, among others.

FAO in collaboration with the government of Rwanda hosted national and regional workshops such as, “Youth Employment in Agriculture as a Solid Solution to ending Hunger and Poverty in Africa: Engaging through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Entrepreneurship from 20-21 August 2018”, a regional multi-stakeholder workshop to validate pesticide management guidelines and review the strategy on risk reduction of highly hazardous pesticides in the East African Community (EAC), among others.

The year was wrapped up with the launch of consultations on the formulation of the new Country Programming Framework (CPF) 2019-2023. In the last CPF (2013-2018), FAO Rwanda implemented 57 projects in four priority areas:

i) Improved food security and human nutrition among Rwandan Population;

ii) Agriculture and livestock productivity through sustainable natural resource management adapted to climate changes;

iii) Value chain development and private sector investment as a basis for boosting commercialized agricultural development;

iv) Institutional collaboration and knowledge sharing in addressing agricultural development, food security and poverty actions.

FAO presented its Internship, Volunteer and Fellows programmes during the Pan African Parliament (PAP) during which the organization’s efforts were commended for promoting creation of jobs especially for youth agriculture. The Parliamentarians met in Kigali, Rwanda, from 18 October to 3 November 2018, for the First Ordinary Session of the Fifth Pan African Parliament sitting, premised on the African Union theme of the year 2018: “Winning the fight against corruption: a sustainable path to Africa’s transformation.”

We thank our partners for supporting the zero hunger campaign and we look forward to working with you in years to come – leaving no one behind. We thank the FAO staff for the great work to improve nutrition. Our tribute to farmers for their efforts to feed the populations of the world.

All the best in 2019 as we strive for a hunger-free world in our lifetime!

Wish you good reading!

Gualbert Gbehounou
FAO Representative in Rwanda
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), on 20 December, distributed pheromone traps and lures to farmers from the six districts in Rwanda most affected by the Fall armyworm (FAW). The districts are; Nyamagabe, Nyanza, Muhanga, Rwamagana, Nyagatare and Kayonza located in Southern and Eastern Provinces.

Under the project “Support to the Government of Rwanda in sustainable control and management of Fall Armyworm”, FAO also gave farmers 60 mobile phones, fully installed with Fall Armyworm Monitoring and Early Warning System (FAMEWS) mobile application, to enable them detect and report the level of infestation in their farms. FAMEWS is a global platform to share experience about FAW and ecology, to know FAW situation and risk mapping.

The project is targeting to distribute 1,800 pheromone traps and 21,600 lures in all the six districts.

The new technologies are given to farmers as they prepare for the forthcoming planting Season B (February - June) 2019.

The pheromone traps and lures mostly target male moths because they are the ones responsible for reproduction through mating the female ones to produce larvae of Fall Armyworm.

- These traps will also serve as an early warning system for the timely actions of FAW management, to define FAW infested area, to track build-up of FAW population, to determine FAW movement patterns and identify area at high risk.
- Since the outbreak of the fall armyworm in Rwanda in 2017, many maize farmers particularly, have experienced reduced production and productivity and consequently incurring huge financial losses.
- Ntambara Geoffrey is maize farmers in Karangazi sector, Nyagatare district. He was supplying quality maize seeds to Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB) which were used in multiplication of seeds for farmers in the country. However, when the fall armyworm invaded his farm, the seeds lost quality and consequently lost his reliable market.
- “I used to harvest 28 tons of maize from my 10 hectare land. However, during the agriculture Season B (February - June) 2018, we found our maize eaten up by insects. I got only 4 tons losing over 6 million Rwandan francs (approximately (USD 7,000),” says Geoffrey.
- Ruhima Stephen, another farmer from the same district, lost production of 15 tons from 18 tons to 3 tons from his 12 hectare of maize.
Pan-African Parliament commends FAO on youth engagement in Agriculture

The Pan African Parliament (PAP) commended FAO’s efforts to stimulate youth into agriculture and creation of jobs. The Parliamentarians were meeting in Kigali, Rwanda, from 18 October to 3 November 2018, for the First Ordinary Session of the Fifth Pan African Parliament sitting, premised on the African Union theme of the year 2018: “Winning the fight against corruption: a sustainable path to Africa’s transformation.”

While presenting FAO’s Internship, Volunteer and Fellows programmes at the conference, Kazumi Ikeda-Larhed, former FAO Deputy Director, Partnerships and South-South Cooperation Division, said that engagement of African Youth is key to achieving zero hunger.

“Agriculture is at the center of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and zero hunger is FAO’s focus to ensure people have food. Youth are agents of change,” she said.

In the first half of 2018, 179 interns, 41 regular volunteers, 3 fellows and 10 UN volunteers were posted in various duty stations in FAO Member Nations.

The President of PAP, Roger Nkodo Dang, said that FAO has contributed to increase of youth participation in agriculture, urging PAP to be involved in initiatives by FAO.

“We will be having the third and fourth generation of agriculture thanks to FAO for that initiative carried out on behalf of African Union,” he said.

Partnerships between FAO and PAP

In 2016, FAO and PAP signed an agreement to achieve food security and nutrition for all in Africa.

“The framework aimed to ensure food security and to stem out migration. The continent has experienced a flight of manpower, we need to work with FAO to avoid this,” said Nkodo Dang.

In Africa, two thirds of the population are aged 35 and below. Due to lack of meaningful engagement opportunities, African youth continue to migrate from rural to urban and also cross-border.

Hon. Loide Kasingo, a Parliamentarian from Namibia commended FAO for technical assistance to youth in livestock in her country.

PAP members believe that if different production technologies such as ICTs are catalyzed, the next millionaires will be coming from those investing in agriculture.

A Banana project launched to increase the productivity of banana in Rwanda

FAO and the Government of Rwanda, launched a new project titled “Support for Enhancing the production and distribution of seeds and banana planting material” on November 27, 2018 in Kigali, to support the government’s efforts to improve farmers’ access to healthy and high yielding banana planting material.

Banana production in Rwanda is still facing several threats ranging from diseases and pests invasion, limited skills and knowledge of farmers to detect and manage these pests and diseases, to limited availability of high yielding and pest/disease tolerant varieties, poor soil fertility and poor banana husbandry practices.

The government initiated a banana improvement program to address the challenges in the banana industry, through which high yielding and disease/pest tolerant banana varieties were introduced, as well as improved integrated crop and disease management technologies.

FAO Country Representative to Rwanda, Gualbert Gbehounou, said his organization wants farmers to be competitive and, to achieve this, they need highly productive banana varieties.

“We hope that farmers who will benefit from these improved varieties will also pass on the suckers to other farmers, and probably the whole region, the whole community will be able to enjoy these improved varieties,” Gbehounou said.

The project will disseminate knowledge and skills in integrated crop and disease management technologies and facilitate the rehabilitation and revitalization of bananas farms.

The project will also contribute to the supply of other seeds (maize, beans, soybeans and vegetables). This intervention will target five districts, namely: Gisagara, Muhanga, Karongi, Rwamagana and Rubavu.
From 21-23 November 2018, FAO held the first international Symposium on Agricultural Innovation for Family Farmers in Rome, Italy, that brought together more than 500 people, including representatives from governments, farmer organizations, academic and research institutions, civil society and the private sector to come together to learn about what leads to successful innovation as well as opportunities to scale up agricultural innovation for family farmers.

Three young innovators from STES Group in Rwanda participated in the Symposium.

Upon their return to Kigali, they shared with us their conference experience and how much impact innovation can have on improved food systems.

Welcome back, how was the symposium?
It was a great learning platform. We shared our technology as well as getting to know how other innovators are tackling challenges in agriculture in their respective countries.

What application did you present and how will it help farmers to overcome their challenges?
We presented “Baza Farm” technology that helps farmers to know how much agricultural inputs (water and fertilizer) they have to apply to their farms. The solar powered internet of Things device is placed in the farm to collect data for their farmers. It triggers actions based on sensor data to switch water on and off, depending on irrigation needs.

What is agriculture innovation to you?
Innovation to us is any new idea that comes into life in form of a device, application or method that solves a given problem or improves the way things are done in a specific community of people.

What role is agriculture innovation playing in the development of the sector?
We live in the world where climate change poses a threats to the growth of crops. Innovation is playing a big role to tackle this issue and as well in the whole agricultural value chain.

What is your contribution to agriculture to overcome the challenges of the 21st century?
Our technology helps growers improve the efficiency and consistency of their yield by enabling water management to improve quality and quantity to feed the growing population. Data captured helps in making forecast based on a variety of conditions to meet crop needs.

When young people like you come into agriculture, what should the world expect from you?
As young people join the agriculture sector, it is expected that novel and innovative methods are used to improve the sector. The world should expect a community fighting for zero hunger. The world should expect the transfer of knowledge and new technologies to the community of farmers.

Any new approach to doing agriculture?
Our approach in doing agriculture is through a data driven decision making approach, which means an optimum use of resources and an eagerness to adapt new ways to solving challenges the farmers are facing to grow healthy crops to serve the growing population.

What should be done to bring more youth to get involved in agriculture?
First, empower the community of young farmers through training on best practices. Secondly, support brilliant ideas to grow and create exemplary individuals. Provision of seed funding to startups that are working in the sector so that they grow and reach a point of creating many jobs.

Are there business opportunities in agriculture?
The population is growing fast and we expect 1.7 billion people in sub-Saharan Africa by 2050, which needs to be fed and this makes agriculture a potential sector that has huge business opportunities.
Every October over 150 countries commemorate the founding of the FAO through the celebration of World Food Day. Since it was founded in 1945, the FAO has worked to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition around the globe. World Food Day is an opportunity to celebrate achievements and bring awareness to the millions who still suffer from hunger. On 26 October in Kirehe District, FAO-Rwanda, partners, and community members rallied around the global message “A Zero hunger world by 2030 is still possible.”

Above: FAO Country Representative, Gualbert Gbehounou (in front) and Rwanda’s Minister of Agriculture, Gerardine Mukeshimana (right) plant maize seeds during the WFD event.

Above: WFP Rwanda Representative & Country Director, Edith Heines (right), plants a tree during the WFD event.

Right: European Union Ambassador to Rwanda, Nicola Bellomo, hands over a back pack pressure sprayer to one of the farmers who received cows.

Above: Cooperatives exhibited their farm outputs during the event. 

Below: FAO Representative delivering a keynote address on the occasion of the WFD.
Private Dukundimana in November this year joined FAO Rwanda as a professional intern.

The 25 year-old’s search for practical skills led him to apply for an internship position at FAO. He’s a graduate from the University of Rwanda, with a major in Agricultural Economics and Rural Development.

Private was offered internship under FAO’s Internship, Volunteer and Fellows programmes which targets citizens of FAO Member Nations, especially from the Global South, to contribute to ending hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity.

Welcome to FAO Rwanda, how’s it been so far?

Thank you. It’s been great. I was pleased by the warm welcome of the team. I’m grateful.

Alright, tell us, why did you choose FAO?

I had known FAO during my university days but I wasn’t so much exposed to its mandate. When I completed my studies, I kept the institution at heart, later, I acquainted myself with its mandate, then I was convinced that this is where I needed to be to learn all about food and agriculture. Additionally, during my varsity I enjoyed the agriculture studies because I figured out that my talents lay in this domain.

What do you expect to learn from FAO?

For me joining a leading specialized agency like FAO that is fighting global hunger, is a lifetime opportunity. I expect to learn new skills like project designing and implementation. Also, working closely with very good technical team of FAO Rwanda will expose me to their expertise as I enrich myself with new knowledge of the field.

Any skills you can contribute to FAO in its journey to ensure a hunger-free world?

I could make a contribution in agricultural value chains related projects as I did a course “Developing Gender-Sensitive Agricultural Value Chain” and conducted a research project on “Tomato value chain analysis.” Wherever possible these skills can be applied.

What food waste practice do you normally see?

Fruits are of high nutritional value, yet they suffer the most losses. They suffer a great loss because of their perishable nature. The practice that I normally see, is when people choose fruits according to their sizes or look, ignoring the fact that even those ‘physically ugly’ fruits can be eaten. At the end they make a big part of the garbage.

What would be the impact if we had many youth in agriculture?

Youth are key in agriculture, from farm to fork; if youth are part of this value chain, there is no doubt there will be a turnaround in agriculture. We bank on the youth’s diligence, capacity to easily adapt to new technologies, and their ability to come up with innovative ideas. All we need is to empower them and expose them to agricultural opportunities.

What life lesson have you learnt so far?

African families expect so much from their firstborns which is not bad, because, most of the times this helps them to be more responsible at an early age. May the firstborn’s springs (pockets) never dry up. [laughs]

How do you relax?

Watching a football match on the screen, or even a video game on the sport. I enjoy cooking as well.

What is your favorite food?

Potatoes, anytime! Whether fried or boiled.