Dear esteemed colleagues and development partners,

As expected, the second quarter of 2022 has been hectic. As it is our tradition, we are pleased to share a snapshot of what we have been doing with your valuable support journey of ending hunger in Rwanda. Your technical and financial support has allowed us to provide our modest contribution toward our shared goal of achieving Zero Hunger. I want to seize this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the government of Rwanda and all our development partners, and the One UN family in Rwanda for working tirelessly with us in achieving our shared goals.

To our farmers and communities working with us on various projects, we highly appreciate your trust, rich experience, and active participation. Together, we bring the change needed for “Better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life Leaving no One Behind.

The stories published in this Newsletter exemplify the commitment and hard work you put into revamping the agriculture sector in this country for the better. I thank my colleagues in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO, and One UN family. In this edition of the FAO Rwanda Newsletter, you will read, among other stories, what mountains mean for Vestine Mukamurenzi, an avid beekeeper in Northern Rwanda, and how Farmer Field School is helping farmers do farming as a business. More interestingly, you will read about a commitment of Rwandan kids who want to be Zero hunger food heroes.

There is also a story wishing a fond farewell to FAO Rwanda Representative Mr. Gualbert Gbehounou and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Donathille Mukabalisa. I take this opportunity to wish Mr. Gbehounou, now the FAO Representative in Guinea Conakry, success in his new endeavour. In the third quarter, we will welcome the new FAO representative, who will take the lead in advancing an already packed programme. FAO stands firm in support of the strategic direction of the country, the One UN system, and the strategic directions of FAO.

Enjoy reading this edition.

Orlando Sosa,
Officer-in-Charge/FAO Rwanda

HIGHLIGHTS

- Mountains are life says Vestine Mukamurenzi, an avid beekeeper
- Rwandan kids want to be #ZeroHunger heroes
- Farmers are taking lead through Farmer Field School
- Innovation is vital to keep the Small livestock sector afloat
- Rwanda study shows success of farmer-to-farmer learning system
Innovation is Vital to Keep the Small livestock sector afloat

The small livestock sector remains the first avenue for many Rwandans, especially the youth, who want to join farming in different parts of the country. Pig and poultry value chains are preferable partly due to the high rate of return in a relatively short period. The two value chains also take an important position in Rwanda’s Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation (PSTAA) and Livestock Master Plan. However, poultry and piggery farmers say the value chains’ contribution to accelerating agricultural growth continues to be minimal because of several issues, including the need for innovation, capacity development, and better coordination of farmers’ associations.

“We greatly need a new way of doing business in our industry. Many challenges like markets, high-cost animal feeds, and diseases can be easily addressed if all the clusters were better coordinated and capacitated to innovate and practice profitable and solution-based farming,” said Andrew Butare, the Chairperson of Rwanda Poultry Industry Association (RPIA).

Butare spoke during the capacity development planning workshop to set strategic priorities and action plans for piggery and poultry value chains organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The workshop was one of several activities under FAO’s Project: Developing capacities in agricultural innovation systems - scaling up the Tropical Agriculture Platform Framework (TAP-AIS). The European Union funds the Project. Members of the Rwanda Poultry Industry Association and Rwanda Pig Farmers Association were joined by a representative of the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB) and Belgium’s Development Agency (ENABEL), among other partners.

Collaboration and coordination

Both poultry and piggery value chains have different clusters that play a pivotal role in promoting the small livestock sector, from farm to table. Strong collaboration and coordination among clusters are critical to making poultry and piggery farming a more profitable and thriving business.

“We want to thank FAO very much for this innovative Project. We have all it takes to develop our sector, but everything is scattered, starting from our name. The name, "Rwanda Pig Farmers Association (RPFA)", automatically excludes other members from other clusters, like feed processors, meat processors, veterinarians, and other important actors.” said Jean Claude Shirimpumu, Chairman of RPFA. In a bid to develop the capacities of the association to organize, deliver, and network, FAO helped Shirimpumu and his fellow farmers develop an action plan and its implementation mechanisms. They also have agreed to change their name to reflect the inclusivity of members from other clusters in the value chain.

Demand for livestock products

Globally the demand for livestock is expected to grow by 50 per cent by 2050. Africa and southern Asia will drive this growth. According to the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA) Rwanda’s population has grown more than five times in the past 60 years. In July 2021, the population was 12.9 million, a 2.3 per cent increase from 2020. With this annual growth rate, Rwanda’s population could reach 25.8 million by 2050, with a gross density of around 1,000 p/km², the highest in Africa. To satisfy the demand for food in a rapidly growing population, farmers say a new and innovative way of farming to increase production and preserve biodiversity sustainably is greatly needed.

The role of FAO and its partners

For farmers to respond to the growing demand for pig meat, chicken meat, and eggs, they need continuous learning and improvement of their knowledge in marketing, communications, soft skills, and networking capacities. FAO’s TAP-AIS project, together with the EU as a critical partner, aims to help farmers mainstream innovation by providing all the functional skills to develop strategic plans for sustainable innovation in the small livestock sector.

“FAO recognizes that innovation is the backbone of smart, resilient, and shock responsive agriculture and food systems”, said Mr. Orlando Sosa, FAO Agricultural Officer at the Subregional Office for Eastern Africa (SFE). “Poor breeds, rampant disease outbreaks, high mortality rates of our small livestock, and other numerous challenges can all be defeated when the skills of farmers are improved,” he added.

At FAO, support to farmers to achieve sustainable small-scale livestock production to enhance the contribution of family farmers to achieving the SDGs and to FAO’s Four Betters strategic framework is a priority. The partnership of the FAO, the EU, and the government of Rwanda on the TAP-AIS project is an excellent example of commitment and functional cooperation for achieving these goals.
Mountains are life says Vestine Mukamurenzi, an avid beekeeper in the country of a thousand hills

Vestine Mukamurenzi, Rwandan beekeeper showing her products.

Vestine Mukamurenzi is 36 years old, a beekeeper, a honey producer and a mother of two. She is one of 8 women members of the Imbaraga Karambo Cooperative, located in the Gicumbi district of the Northern Province of Rwanda. She has been a beekeeper for the past eight years and counting.

“I always thank God that I was born in a mountainous country. I don’t know what I would do without mountains, without forests.” Said Mukamurenzi.

She added, “the money I get from selling honey helps me a lot to develop my household. I can provide good and enough food for the family, and I pay school fees for my children, everyone is well clothed, and our house is well maintained. I am sure without mountains, I could not achieve all that.”

Vestine’s cooperative produces 200 kilogrammes of honey every season. A kilogramme of honey sells for 5,000 Rwandan Francs or 5 US Dollars. Her cooperative is one of many operating in Rwanda, the land of a thousand hills. Thanks to mountains, those cooperatives generate income from different bee products, including honey, beeswax and propolis (used in medicines) and other products such as royal jelly, pollen, bee venom and bee brood.

The International Year of Mountain Development 2022

We met Vestine in Rwanda’s capital, Kigali, at an exhibition showcasing the quality of her cooperative’s products. The exhibition is part of the celebrations of the International Year of Sustainable Mountain Development 2022, where the “Enhancing agri-food value chains to increase the resilience of mountain communities Programme” was launched.

The Programme is a joint initiative between the GEF Small Grants Programme implemented by the United Nations Development Programme and the Mountain Partnership Secretariat (MPS) hosted in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This initiative aims at supporting Vestine and other farmers to achieve food security and increase the resilience of mountain communities.

Working together yields rewards for all

The GEF Small Grants Programme at the UNDP, the FAO-Mountain Partnership Secretariat and Slow Food International have been working together since 2020 to address the challenges mountains and the environment face through the initiative entitled “Enhancing agri-food value chains to increase the resilience of mountain communities.”

“I thank the United Nations and its Agencies, especially the UNDP and FAO, for the tremendous work helping us support farmers who live in the mountains. When they are supported to make their businesses thrive, it enhances the ownership of other biodiversity preservation initiatives,” said Juliet Kabera, Director General of the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA). “Through this partnership with the UNDP and Slow Food International, we have provided technical assistance, training and support to remote communities and farmers in Rwanda, ensuring that livelihoods are secured, and resilience is built and sustained.” Said Otto Vianney Muhinda, Assistant FAO Representative/Programme.

“It is crystal clear that people who live in the mountains are doing well in small businesses; they are creating jobs. On our end, we are tasked to support them, to accompany them throughout their development journey. In so doing, we are supporting poverty eradication strategies and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals of the country,” said Maxwell Gomera, UNDP Resident Representative. Mountains provide and regulate up to 80 percent of global freshwater resources. Mountains matter more for Rwanda (symbolically called the “land of thousand hills”) and other mountainous countries; they support livelihoods through farming, grazing, tourism, and natural products. They are significant havens of rare and fragile biological diversity, with many species existing nowhere else.

Rwandan kids want to be #zerohunger heroes

Five fifth-grade pupils of the Green Hills Academy visited Rwanda’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) office, accompanied by a parent. On touring the office, they asked questions about the goal and mandate of FAO and what the staff is doing along with development partners and the government to help farmers produce better and preserve the environment for better nutrition and a better life for all. The visit was a part of their exhibition project assignment at school.
Kids' insights

"I have learned a lot of things in this presentation, and I want to help the FAO with their goal. I want to help reduce and possibly eradicate hunger in the world so that families can live a good and healthy life," said Tona Shalom.

"I feel good because I learned more about zero hunger, and I think it will help me in my studies and later in my life. So I think it was important and fun," said Yafet Kinfe Mamo.

"I feel good that I get to learn all about FAO's amazing work. I feel I learned a lot of things, and I would also like to help solve the world's hunger and learn more because this is amazing, and a big thank you to the director-general, Mr Qu Dongyu. This visit has been great and a big inspiration to me and others. Thank you, and I hope to come back and learn more," said Belinda Keza.

"I feel good because I learn new things, and I can tell people that Zero hunger is my Sustainable Development Goal." Nanah Sannoh said.

"I feel good because I have learned a lot of information that I did not know. This knowledge will help me in both my exhibition and my life." Tona Blessing said.

Involving kids in the quest for zero hunger

Efforts of food heroes worldwide to achieve zero hunger and ensure food security for all can only be sustainable if kids and the young become more involved early in their lives. They have energy, the skills in the latest technology, and the motivation to make life better for all.

"I would like to thank FAO Rwanda for hosting our kids and giving them information about Zero Hunger. The information will help the pupils with their exhibition project and has given them ideas on how they can contribute to resolving world hunger at their level. FAO's staff presented and answered questions in a form that the children can understand and in a way that they can remember throughout their life journey." Said Momona Belay Alemayehu, parent.

She added, "To let students see and practice in real-life and see the world they live in at this age (10-11 years old) will contribute a lot to solving the society’s problems. Thanks again to FAO for contributing to making the world a better place to live!"

At home

Kids can play a paramount role in their homes, including stopping food waste. The World Bank report titled "Rwanda Food Smart Country Diagnostic 2020" estimates that more than 40 Percent of food is wasted annually. The report further states that today 18.7 Percent of Rwandan households remain food insecure. Rwanda's food security index lies below the average for Sub-Saharan African countries. If educated on the impact of wasting food, kids can develop a culture and mindset of eating sufficient, necessary, and healthily. Also in their funny way, they can be zero hunger heroes by convincing their parents and other household members not to waste food.

At school

When kids participate in school-based food and nutrition education, they can help communities achieve lasting and tremendous milestones in the world's food security journey. FAO considers school gardens as one of the essential accessible models to use. School gardens have many benefits for children: Taste and learn about healthy food, learn how to grow vegetables and fruits, develop teamwork skills, promote better nutrition, and learn to value the work of those who grow our food.

"We were happy to host the pupils of the Green Hills Academy in our office. We thank the school and the parents for the initiative. We believe that it is important that children learn, at an early age, about the alarming food insecurity issues that we face as a country and globally," said Mr. Orlando Sosa, FAO Agricultural Officer at the Subregional Office for Eastern Africa (SFE).

He added, "We are proud that the children are interested in what FAO does to address global food insecurity and nutrition issues. Sharing information is at the core of our organization's mandate and sharing it with our youth in particular to motivate them is necessary and imperative!"

Innovation in science and technology and applied to agriculture is crucial to solving the problem of global food insecurity and nutrition. FAO acknowledges that the youth is a vital element, in this regard, for success in achieving a world without hunger, leaving no one behind.

From our food to our cultures, environment and economies, we live in a globalized world. Climate change, conflict and inequality can often leave groups of people behind because of who they are or where they live. Building a better, more sustainable future for all means no one can be left behind. Five fifth-grade pupils of the Green Hills Academy said they understood What we eat, and how that food is produced, affects our health and the environment. Behind our food, there is always someone who produced, planted, harvested, fished or transported it. Food heroes help to make sure that everyone, everywhere has enough affordable, safe and nutritious food.
Rwanda study shows the success of farmer-to-farmer learning system

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets (PIM) have virtually launched the agriculture human capital investment case study carried out in Rwanda.

This case was part of a global study started in early 2020 aimed to provide governments, international financing institutions, the private sector and other partners with the evidence and analysis needed to make more and better investments in agriculture human capital.

“Today more than ever, farmers face profound changes – from climate change, labour shortages and global pandemics such as COVID-19, to an explosive rise in digital technologies, shifting diets and rigorous global and national food safety standards,” said John Preissing, the Deputy Director – FAO Investment Centre.

“Agricultural producers need the capacity to analyze, innovate and respond, to keep up with this rapidly changing environment to optimize their efforts. At the same time, they must manage their own businesses,” he added.

Strengthening skills and capacities

Agriculture is the backbone of economic growth in Rwanda and the main or only source of income for most rural households. The country’s farmers are also relatively young, with an average age of 44 years. Twigire Muhinzi – meaning ‘self-reliance in farming’ – is Rwanda’s homegrown, decentralized and farmer-oriented agricultural extension system.

By combining local farmer promoters and farmer field schools, the system is helping Rwandan farmers sharpen their skills and knowledge and become more empowered. This, in turn, is leading to greater uptake of technologies and practices that can improve farmers’ livelihoods and incomes. “Farmers and field school facilitators interviewed across four provinces have gained a range of technical, social and functional skills. These run from increased competencies in livestock management and cropping practices to cooperation and market analysis. Farmers were in a better position to plan their agricultural activities and negotiate higher prices for their produce,” said the lead author, Lucy Mwangi, Highland Centre for Leadership and Development, Rwanda.

Importance of investing in agriculture human capital

Agriculture plays an important role in feeding the country and other countries Rwanda exports to, and in generating income for those working in the food value chain. Investing in farmers – or agriculture human capital – is therefore crucial to addressing challenges in our agri-food systems. There is growing evidence that when you invest in farmers, their capacity and motivation to produce food profitably and sustainably increases. The global study showed that investments in developing the human capital of smallholder producers resulted in new technical, business capacities and empowered farmers with various useful skills. This led to increased incomes, yields and the inclusion of marginalized groups.

Human capital, as an economic term, refers to assets that improve individual productivity. These include skills development, training, and education, as well as public health and migration. They also include more abstract aspects such as self-esteem, empowerment, creativity, increased awareness, and mindsets. In addition to Kenya, Rwanda, the study also included cases from Cameroon, Chile, India, Indonesia, Peru, the United States of America, and West and Central Africa, along with the global report.

Financial Institutions renewed their commitment to agricultural financing schemes

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), through its technical assistance to SAIP (Sustainable Agricultural Intensification and Food Security Project), convened a roundtable discussion with members of financial institutions and insurance companies in Rwanda. The discussion was about charting a way forward to building a strong synergy that spurs, fosters, and improves the agricultural financing scheme for small-scale and rural agribusinesses. “We really need your support because you are the ones who know exactly how agribusinesses need to be tailored so you can finance them. Together we can stimulate investments and enhance the development of private investments in agribusiness and agroindustry and contribute to inclusiveness and poverty reduction.” Said Jean Claude Karemera, Senior Value Chain Development Specialist at Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB) -SAIP.
Many agribusiness proposals don’t get investments and revert to just being business ideas, and others, especially youth-owned, don’t celebrate an anniversary, they die simply because they were not well-conceived to be bankable and profitable.

“Let’s face it. We all know that Agricultural projects are risky and for bankers it’s something we don’t take lightly. We need to finance proposals that show that the agripreneurs understand risks, demonstrate the ability to mitigate them and make a profit, and in proposals, we need to see supporting documents showing there is extensive experience in doing what the agripreneur wants to do. If bank statements and tax clearance forms are available, we need to analyze them as well.” Said Jean-Paul Nzatumukuze, Acting Agriculture Portfolio Manager at Rwanda Development Bank (BRD).

Youth need accessible agricultural financial schemes

Youth in Rwandan agri-food systems represent a reservoir of employment opportunities for many young people, from both urban and rural areas. Youth are attracted to value chains that are profitable, have a ready market, require low starting capital, are agro-ecologically suitable, offer a short duration to reach maturity, and require less land. Interestingly, youth still see more opportunities around primary production, followed by trading and transportation of produce. Yet, even though they hold potential in agribusiness, they lack experience and resources to take up their business operations to market levels requirements in terms of both quantity and quality. An accessible financial scheme that not only gives youth financial assistance but also financial education on loans and investment would mean a great deal.

“Banks are in the business and we can see that many businesses in the future will be related to agriculture. Helping farmers craft bankable projects is actually a win-win situation for us. Good proposals are the blueprint of business implementation and it helps us be sure that we will not lose when we finance a project. To make everyone’s task easy I think during these gatherings we should provide a checklist of what makes a good bankable proposal” said Odile Mukayiranga Odile, Agribusiness Manager at Bank Populaire du Rwanda (BPR).

The role of Rural Invest

“Thanks to the RuralInvest toolkit, investments can be improved. The toolkit specifically has steps and areas of all needed information an entrepreneur has to include in his/her proposals. We have to scale up training on the toolkit so every farmer knows how to navigate it and be able to pitch agri projects that stand a good chance before financial institutions” said Hodari Ngerero, RuralInvest Master Trainer.

RuralInvest is a free toolkit designed to support entrepreneurs develop bankable, solid, and sustainable business proposals. The toolkit comprises user-friendly software, an e-learning course, tailored face-to-face training, user manuals, and a worldwide community of users.

The roundtable discussion with members of financial institutions and insurance companies left a number of recommendations that include the need to strengthen the synergy of FAO, Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board-SAIP, and other many more Financial Institutions and to enhance FAO’s efforts to advance and scale up its initiatives to promote shock-responsive and smart-agriculture.

Experts meet in Kigali for an FAO workshop on Aquaculture Co-management

At the invitation of the government of Rwanda, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) organized and conducted a hybrid workshop on Aquaculture Co-management from 8-10 June in Rwanda’s capital Kigali. The workshop brought together various national and international experts and aquaculture sector actors to chart a way forward in deploying a co-management approach to revitalize aquatic food systems. “Aquaculture Co-management could contribute to unleashing the potential of Rwandan farmers by providing the incentive for larger and more comprehensive investments along the value chain.

This means more gainful employment, better incomes, and thereby increased purchasing power for our population,” said Ms Chantal Ingabire, Director General of Planning in the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, while officially opening the workshop. Ms Ingabire also urged FAO experts and all participants to chart the way forward to leveraging already existing aquaculture management approaches and partnerships to address some of the challenges farmers still face.

“I would like to ask you to employ a co-management approach and develop recommendations that will help Rwanda and other countries tackle problems that prevent farmers from moving from subsistence to market-oriented
aquaculture. I believe that if we effectively tap on all opportunities embedded in Aquaculture co-management, we will undoubtedly sustainably transform the Aquaculture sector,” she added.

Highlighting FAO’s commitment to developing the aquaculture sector, Mr Orlando Sosa, Officer-in-Charge of Rwanda FAO Representation, stressed the industry is a vital element of the UN’s food systems transformation drive.

“Aquaculture is one of the most important priorities of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO and the entire United Nations. For example, the UN General Assembly declared 2022 a year of the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture. This is because small-scale fishers, fish farmers, and fish workers play a paramount role in food security and nutrition, poverty eradication, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.” said Mr Sosa.

Korea FAO Sustainable and Innovative Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme in Rwanda

In 2020, FAO, with the support of the Ministry of the Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea and the Korea Maritime Institute, launched a project (Smart Fisheries Co-management) focusing on the design and implementation of contextualized fisheries co-management systems at the national and local level. Recognizing the relevance of co-management as a mechanism for power-sharing, institution building, trust and social capital enhancing, problem-solving, knowledge-sharing, social learning, and encouraging collaborative opportunities and collective action, the intent now is to strengthen Rwandan aquaculture systems through this approach.

Aquaculture co-management (ACM)

ACM is a new concept explored through the just concluded FAO expert workshop in Kigali. If implemented well, ACM can consolidate cohesively a range of existing approaches that are either already in practice or being developed. ACM is a central principle of the Ecosystem-Based Approach to Aquaculture. ACM may also offer a bridge to the growing range of private-sector attempts to guide beyond farm sustainability, including jurisdictional approaches that bring producers together with buyers, financiers and states to promote regional scale sustainability improvements.

DeSIRA project actors convene to formulate a research methodology for analyzing Rwandan farming systems

Under the auspices of the EU-funded project entitled "Development Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture (DeSIRA),” several national and international experts discussed research methodologies to guide the diagnosis of farming systems of target value chains in six districts of Rwanda. At the same time, the research team trained on field data collection methods used to facilitate the diagnosis and analysis of farming systems. Participants discussed and agreed on a field plan for the data collection exercise expected to be undertaken in the next fortnight.

The expert meeting was held from the 24th to the 27th of May 2022 at La Palisse Hotel in Bugesera. It brought together representatives from four partner organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Rwanda Agricultural Board (RAB). Also in attendance at the workshop were four master’s students from the Ecole Supérieure D’agro-Développement International (ISTOM) and the University of Rwanda. The desired project leader, Mr. Placide Kanyabujinja, underscored the importance of the workshop in enabling all key actors to be on the same page concerning the implementation of the project.

“T must say that this workshop has been a success. We made sure it was as participatory as possible to allow participants to have an equal opportunity to share their insights and knowledge. We gathered here to deliberate and agree on the methodology and data collection tools for a comprehensive and sound diagnosis of farming systems of target value chains, and this objective has been realized. I can say that we now have the methodology and tools ready. A field plan has been prepared, and our next activity is moving to the field for the data collection exercise.”, Placide noted.

DeSIRA is a four-year project funded by the European Union. The project’s main objective is to reduce poverty and ensure food and nutrition security through improved capacities for climate-smart innovations among actors engaged in local
innovation partnerships in Burera, Rutsiro, Gatsibo, Nyagatare Bugesera, and Ruhango.

The project applies a multi-sector and interdisciplinary approach to improve capacities for climate-smart innovation both at the local and the national level. Thematically, the project focuses on three areas of intervention: diversification of livestock and crop systems; effective management of irrigated areas; and crop intensification and diversification in drought-prone regions. The DeSIRA Project is aligned with Rwanda’s National Strategy for Transformation (NST-1). Throughout its implementation, DeSIRA will contribute to promoting research and development as a critical element in fast-tracking Rwanda’s economic transformation.

Speaker Mukabalisa commends FAO’s work to achieve food security

The Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies in Rwanda said that the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) continues to be a pivotal partner in the country’s quest to end hunger and promote food security for all. She made the remarks while hosting in the audience the outgoing FAO Representative in Rwanda, Mr. Gualbert Gbehounou. The Speaker also bid farewell to him after a successful four-year stay in the country.

“We appreciated first of all the good collaboration, good cooperation, and good partnership of FAO Rwanda and the government of Rwanda. We commended his leadership in successfully implementing different projects and programmes that contributed a lot to promoting the agriculture sector in our country” Speaker Donathille Mukabalisa, said.

Conducive Agricultural environment

The agriculture sector accounts for about a third of Rwanda’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and it employs more than 70 percent of the country’s workforce. The country’s efforts to make the sector a business that changes the lives of farmers recently saw the launch of a $350 million agriculture financing facility. The facility will help farmers get affordable loans at less than a 10 percent interest rate. The outgoing FAO Representative in Rwanda applauded different sound policies and the overall conducive environment that makes FAO’s work doable.

“Rwanda has a conducive legislative environment that facilitates and makes our work quite easy. FAO as an Organisation of the United Nations is very much supporting agriculture as a business which means that farmers like any other business person should be able to become rich from their agriculture activities and we have in Rwanda a conducive environment for that.” said Gualbert Gbehounou, FAO Country Representative in Rwanda

Youth in Agribusiness

Young people in Rwanda constitute more than 40 percent of the entire population. Generally, Rwanda’s population has grown more than five times in the past 60 years. In July 2021, the population was 12.9 million, a 2.3 percent increase from 2020. With this annual growth rate, Rwanda’s population could reach 25.8 million by 2050, with a gross density of around 1,000 p/km², the highest in Africa.

To mitigate climate change challenges and other shocks the agriculture sector faces and to meet the food demand for this growing population will require moving from subsistence agriculture to technology-driven agriculture and to achieve this goal, more young farmers need to be brought on board. Youth will undoubtedly find their own way of having climate-smart agriculture with resilience capacities, preventive, anticipative, and adaptive capacities. Mr. Gbehounou says that as he leaves, he is content that enticing more youth to become agrientrepreneurs is one of the gains FAO and Rwanda is greatly registering.

“many of the activities conducted by the FAO in Rwanda are in line with attracting youth into agribusiness. For example, we have developed a platform that we call ICT for Agriculture, where farmers can go and look for information on the weather that tells them when they can start planting their crops, information on livestock that teaches them to take good care of livestock, when and which food to feed them to avoid any disease that can come and reduce production, the platform also provides market information as well as information on nutrition. Furthermore, FAO in Rwanda has provided support on e-commerce strategy.” He said.

Integrated Crop, livestock, and aquaculture production

As Mr. Gualbert Gbehounou leaves Rwanda, he says in order to keep up the pace for strengthening the food system, farmers need to embrace integrated farming of fish, crops, and livestock wherever possible. He explained “it means that farmers that are growing let’s say vegetables, if possible, they would add to that livestock production, and wherever water is available, that will be complemented with aquaculture, that is fish farming in the Rwandan context. We had a very successful pilot in Rulindo district, with farmers who are in the Yanze river basin”
The importance of this model is that it is sustainable at the three levels (1) Environmental, Economic, and Social sustainability. In the environment, when farmers are integrating crop production with livestock, with fish farming, they are careful about the use of pesticides because too many pesticides would harm their livestock or even kill their fish. The model is economically sustainable because if for one reason or another other prices collapse, in the crop sector, or in the livestock sector, or the aquaculture sector, farmers who have been integrating all the three sectors still have one or two sectors to sustain themselves with, so their earning potential becomes resilient.

“In addition, the integrated crop, livestock, and fish farming model promotes good nutrition as farmers eat from what they produce. So for a farmer who is only focusing on crop production, the immediately available food is from the crop production, and when he integrates crops, livestock, and fish farming, he has crop proteins, he has livestock proteins and he has fish proteins so he is able to have a balanced diet, for his household,” Mr. Gbehounou said.

South-south cooperation

The outgoing FAO Representative in Rwanda is leaving for Guinea-Conakry, where he is going to continue his service to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as the Country Representative.

“I have learned a lot about how Rwanda defied all odds to be where it is today on its development journey, and they are undoubtedly many lessons I think other countries should learn from Rwanda. As far as promoting agriculture is concerned, this is not the end of the road, through South-south cooperation I believe we will be able to do a lot together in knowledge sharing and other tangible joint activities” said Mr. Gbehounou.

With the concurrence of the Government of the Republic of Rwanda, Gualbert Gbehounou was appointed FAO Representative in Rwanda, effective 21 June 2018. He came to Rwanda from FAO headquarters, Rome, where he served as Agricultural Officer in the Agriculture and Consumer Protection Division (AGP) being also part of the Sustainable Agriculture Programme Management Team (SP2). FAO Representation in Rwanda is a fully-fledged office since 11 July 1985.