Between celebrating our beneficiaries’ hard work and collaborating with partners for innovative agriculture solutions, 2017 is off to a busy start. Learn more about this quarter’s efforts and where we are headed.
2017 began on a good note building on the past achievements by FAO in Rwanda. Throughout this year, we shall remain committed and determined to increase efforts and partnership development towards the zero hunger and the sustainable food and agriculture agendas in the country.

As documented in this newsletter, at the start of the year, FAO Rwanda in partnership with the FAO IT Division in Rome (CIO) initiated and launched a new project on agricultural services & digital inclusion in Africa funded by the FAO Multipartner Programme Support Mechanism (FMM).

This ICT for agriculture project is being piloted by FAO in Rwanda (and Senegal) and includes the development and distribution of mobile applications that offer information, transactional and advisory services to farmers in the field. This will directly support the implementation of the Rwanda ICT for Agriculture Strategy (ICT4RAg - 2016-2020) and contribute in bringing technological solutions closer to the needs of small farmers. Needless to state that young graduates are expected to be key actors and drivers of this innovative project.

Other stories in this newsletter cover the streamlining of cross-border trade, skills development for youth in agribusiness, urban food security opportunities, and disaster risks reduction and management in response to 2016 flooding and landslides in Rwanda Northern Province (Gakenke).

We look forward to another busy and results full year and we count on the continued support and collaboration from FAO colleagues across the Organization. Yes, indeed we can be the zero hunger generation!

Enjoy the reading.

Attaher Maiga
FAO Representative in Rwanda
Mukampunga Laurence wears many hats, from dairy farmer to mother to employer. The widow and parent of six is a respected leader in her village in Gicumbi district and is one of many rising women stars in Gicumbi’s dairy sector. Mukampunga owns two Jersey cows which produce 30 liters of milk a day. After reserving some of the nutritious milk for home consumption, she contributes 22 liters to the district’s Milk Collection Center as a member of IAKIB Cooperative.

Mukampunga and her peers are excellent examples of how women can contribute economically and developmentally when empowered with business skills and access to formal organization. In February, Mukampunga and other Gicumbi women in the dairy sector participated in an FAO training workshop focusing on exactly that. At the “Gender equality in dairy farming, cooperative and enterprise development” workshop, participants learned how to increase productivity, add value to their milk, and develop entrepreneurial skills necessary for dairy commercialization.

According to Mukampunga, the training will help women build on their past successes. She has already been able to send her children to school and build a new house using her dairy farming income, but she plans to expand her herd and invest in milk transformation. On a more concrete level, prior to the training Mukampunga hired men to milk her cows since she lacked confidence and knowledge in the process. Post workshop? No longer the case. “I don’t have to wait for the herdsmen to milk my cows. When they are not on duty I do it myself,” she said with pride.

Beyond supporting her children, Mukampunga also employs eight permanent workers and provides intermittent opportunities to two casual labourers. She is only one woman, and like every individual she is unique. But Mukampunga is also irrefutable evidence that women in Gicumbi, and women across Rwanda, are a powerful force for economic growth and social good.
FAO works to streamline cross-border trade

Cross-border trade offers numerous opportunities for Rwandan women, from employment and empowerment to improved food security and education at the household level. Among the cross-border traders in the Great Lakes region, 74% are women who very often face a number of challenges, including lack of transparency on border procedures and regimes, illegal taxation and other forms of corruption, limited transport and market infrastructure, and sexual harassment.

In an effort to address some of these issues, FAO organized an open-door event at the Rwanda-Congo border in Bukavu where traders and custom officials discussed current cross-border challenges faced by small-scale cross-border traders, and particularly women. The event promoted communication and transparency between the parties, and encouraged and supported women to advocate for a more favorable and healthy environment for trading.

By the end of the dialogue, 19 officials, 15 civil society representatives, the Mayor of Bukavu, and 60 women traders from cooperatives in Rwanda and the DR. Congo agreed there is a pressing need for simplified cross-border trade nomenclature and improved communication regarding taxation, as well as improved market infrastructure and support services for traders crossing the border.

Maria Velazquez, FAO Value Chain Consultant, explained, “The open-door event gave women cross-border traders the opportunity to openly talk with local and custom authorities of Bukavu about challenges and barriers they face in daily basis”.

The meeting also helped formulate an agenda of action to improve and strengthen the current situation and the professional linkages between custom officials and small traders in the border with DRC. “It was a very positive step forward” she noted.

Rwanda Youth in Agribusiness Forum builds skills with FAO

Youth employment and technology innovation are global hot topics of 2017. Young entrepreneurs can be a powerful force for economic growth and technological tools offer exciting opportunities for better business management.

In this vein, FAO collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources to organize a two day training for the Rwanda Youth in Agribusiness Forum (RYAF) on two tools: a “Business 2 Business portal (B2B)” and an online investment tool developed by FAO Rwanda. The B2B tool helps RYAF members set up, monitor, and financially manage their businesses, as well as link with possible investors. The online investment tool by FAO Rwanda is based on the FAO Ruralinvest software and helps entrepreneurs assess if their business idea is profitable.

During the training, the 69 members of RYAF’s General Assembly learned how to use the tool and promote it to RYAF members across the country. FAO technical officer Sanne Holtslag said, “The use of ICT in agribusinesses is rapidly increasing and youth in agribusiness are definitely the front-runners and pioneers when it comes to integrating ICT-based solutions into their agri-businesses. FAO is proud to work with the young and vibrant RYAF”.

By training them on ICT tools which are tailored to the exact needs of youth in agri-business in Rwanda, FAO contributes to improving youth employment, development of the agric sector and increased targeted use of ICT.
Mujyawamaria Jean D’Arc’s life changed dramatically when heavy rains mixed with strong winds destroyed her crops and house in May 2016.

The 49 year old Gakenke district resident earns a living and supports her three children primarily through farming. The flooding washed away two acres of her beans, as well as her Banana fields and other plots of crops.

The flooding and landslides that hit Gakenke district killed 34 community members; flooded 1,632 hectares of crops and forests; destroyed 58 km of road infrastructure; and left 4,317 families homeless.

Not only was the community reeling from the direct aftermath of the disaster; they were also afraid of how they would feed their families and recoup the investments they had made in seeds, fertilizers, and land.

In response to the disaster, five United Nations Agencies, including FAO-Rwanda, provided emergency support to the landslide victims through the Central Emergency Relief Fund (CERF).

FAO’s intervention included distributions of agri-inputs, as well as cash for work opportunities for 3,394 men and women. The scheme provided a reliable income for community members, as well as restored marshlands, rehabilitated forest, protected water canals, and reconstructed ditches that will prevent future flooding and soil erosion.

Mujyawamaria benefited from both components of FAO’s intervention. She planted her FAO-provided maize seeds on 8 acres and harvested 350 kilograms—enough to both feed her family and sell at the market. She is also paid every day for landslide and erosion-preventing terraces in her community.

“The first money I was paid from cash for work I used it to pay my debts and to pay for my children’s school fees. Through FAO, I now have food at my home and I have been able to start farming again thanks to the fertiliser I received”. Mujyawamaria now can breathe easy, knowing her children are cared for, and she has also started thinking about her next steps. She plans to buy a cow and additional land from the profit of this season’s bean harvest. Despite the horrible disaster in 2016, she and her community are moving forward.

Top left: Gakenke district beneficiaries dry and process their maize harvest. Top right: Community members construct terraces as part of the CERF project’s cash-for-work activity. Bottom right: These finished terraces will mitigate erosion and the threat of future landslides by slowing down the flow of water and improving absorption.
On March 28th, FAO launched the project Agricultural Services and Digital Inclusion (ICT4Ag) to help Rwanda accelerate the agriculture sector’s transformation from subsistence-based to market-oriented. The project will facilitate access to agricultural information and advisory services for more than 40,000 producers including thousands of rural youth and women.

One of the primary outputs of the project are four mobile applications including “Cure and feed your livestock”, “eNutrifood”, “Weather and Crop Calendar” and “AgriMarketplace”. The apps are jointly designed by FAO-HQ specialists and Rwandan software developers. They will be piloted in Rulindo district.

At the inception workshop at Lemigo Hotel, Representative Attaher Maiga said the initiative will strengthen and expand innovative programmes for ICT in agriculture, as well as contribute to the realization of multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“Bringing technological solutions closer to the needs of the poorest households in Africa, in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is FAO's direct contribution to poverty reduction, food security and nutrition,” he stated.

Jean Claude KAYISINGA, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources said the ICT4AG project will enhance the Government’s existing platforms such as the Market Price Information System (eSoko).

“This project support our efforts to better link farmers to the market and make them more competitive. They will be better informed about feeding and controlling animal diseases, using meteorological data to plan planting and harvesting properly, preserving the nutritional value of their crops,” Kayisinga said.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources has recognized that the implementation of the ICT4Ag Strategy will enable Rwanda to achieve rural development and reduce poverty to less than 30%.
Today, 29 percent of Rwandans live in urban centers. However, that number is expected to swell to 35 percent by 2020 leading to increased pressure on food systems. The majority of urbanites rely on food grown and purchased in rural areas, so this shift will require new strategic measures to increase production, decrease food waste, and improve distribution.

The growing urban population and its effect on food security was the subject of a European Union (EU) organized February panel called “Feeding the Cities”. One of the panel members was FAO Representative Attaher Maiga, who emphasized that Rwanda can draw best practises from other global policies that have worked to improve food systems to strengthen rural-urban linkages.

“There is disconnect between local, national and global policies in agriculture and environment. Urban planning should correspond with the new policies the government is making,” he said. Maiga also proposed a number of best practises that can be adopted by Rwanda’s cities, including improving market access for small scale farmers, encouraging youth to enter the agriculture sector with a business approach, and using appropriate technologies to streamline agricultural value chains.

Makiko Taguchi, an FAO Agriculture Officer, added that FAO has a wealth of good practices to share with interested cities since launching a multidisciplinary initiative called “Food for the Cities” in 2001. While a growing urban population can be challenging, it also presents opportunities to build more inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and nutritious food systems.

In early March, Rwanda’s Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources, Geraldine Mukeshimana, met the FAO Director General, José Graziano da Silva at FAO HQ in Rome. According to Minister Mukeshimana, the two discussed various initiatives of FAO-Rwanda in partnership with the Government of Rwanda, including stunting reduction and prevention, the promotion of aquaculture as a business, and development of MINAGRI’s Livestock Masterplan.

“It was a very good meeting. We talked about how ICT can improve the efficiency and speed of our work, as well as help us attract the younger generation to the sector. We also discussed malnutrition. Reducing and preventing malnutrition, ending hunger- these are high priorities for the Government of Rwanda,” explained Minister Mukeshimana.

She also commended FAO’s continuous support to the Government of Rwanda and the Rwanda people. “FAO has always been a close partner. We appreciate the great support.”

FAO’s current support to Rwanda is outlined and guided by its 2013 to 2018 Country Programming Framework (CPF). The framework outlines FAO’s work to improve food security and nutrition among the Rwandan population, enhance agriculture and livestock productivity, develop sustainable value chains, and strengthen institutional collaboration and knowledge sharing.
Angelique UWIMANA is an FAO consultant supporting implementation of the ICT4AG policy and strategy through the “Agricultural Services and Digital Inclusion in Africa” project. Angelique has her Bachelor’s degree in Computer Engineering and Information Technology (CEIT), a Master’s in Information Systems from Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST), and multiple certifications in ICT4AG related topics. With more than eight years of experience in ICT, FAO-Rwanda is lucky to have her on the team!

What have you taken away from working with FAO thus far?
I’ve only been at FAO for three months, but I am very happy to be part of this organization and I appreciate the team I’ve met here. FAO is really a good space to meet and exchange with people from different backgrounds, different countries with a variety of knowledge, experience and culture. I’m happy to share my ICT knowledge and learn from people’s experiences worldwide!!

How do you approach challenges in your work?
Whatever I do, I do it with passion and enthusiasm knowing that not only am I serving the organization but also God has given me a mission to work hard and effectively. Any time I meet a challenge, I focus on trying to succeed personally and encouraging other people.

If you had not joined the ICT field, what profession would you have explored?
I like serving people, so I think I would be a medical doctor. That way I could save peoples’ lives.

What is your favorite dessert?
I love apples and bananas so much!

Upcoming Calendar of Events

- **April 7**: Commemoration of the Genocide Against the Tutsis of Rwanda
- **April 18**: Official launch of the Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture in Rwanda (PSTA4)
- **May 16-17**: Forest Landscape Investment Forum
- **June 5**: World Environment Day