

*By Jeje Muhinde;*

Emmanuel Gatete, a smallholder farmer from Gahini, Kayonza district in the Eastern Province of Rwanda depends on farming through cultivating maize, beans, and Irish potatoes on his small plot of land.

Gatete, 38, like many other agrarians in Gahini does what his forefathers did for generations to feed his relatively large family. Usually would buy seeds from an open market and save some of the seeds for the next planting season.

He relied on old farming techniques of replenishing the seeds while cultivating his land in order to increase soil fertility

However, Gatete's decades old technique changed after concluding one-week training in modern methods of farming conducted by Rwanda Rural Rehabilitation Initiative (RWARRI) when he realized he has been farming the wrong way.

The RWARRI program which is focused on the importance of cooperatives, seeks to empower farmers both in skill and practice through cooperatives to ensure food security.

During the training, farmers learnt good agricultural practices, spacing of crops in the garden, the benefits of improved seeds, and the application of fertilizer which would automatically increase yields.

Today, Gatete is practicing what he learnt, he buys improved seed varieties and fertilizers. In the colloquially known as 'A' season which runs between September and January, most farmers in Gahini got more than twice their usual harvest from.

During this season, Gatete harvested seven bags of quality maize compared to the usual two and half bags from the same plot of land.

Through RWARRI, he was also linked to One Acre Fund, a non-profit social enterprise that supplies financing and training to help smallholders grow their way out of hunger and build lasting pathways to prosperity.

All seems to be well for Gatete who is very happy about the available market which bought his maize. After selling the harvest surplus, he invested the proceeds in expanding by leasing land and was also able to buy small livestock – goats and rabbits.

From the training, he has learned about post-harvest handling which has enabled him minimize his loss; he is excited about the outcome of his harvest which has given him extra profit.

“I am glad to have taken part in the RWARRI program, today I just don’t buy seeds from anybody since I can identify improved varieties and those which are not. This has him to start making profit from farming” he explained.