Across Rwanda, Trócaire and its civil society partners are helping vulnerable farming communities produce more food, improve nutrition, access markets and build livelihoods that can withstand climate shocks. At the heart of this work is an agroecological approach that connects sustainable farming practices with climate resilience, healthy soils, biodiversity and local knowledge, helping farmers work with nature while strengthening their livelihoods.

For farmers who depend on small plots of land, these practices are more relevant than ever, as they are increasingly helping them adapt to a changing climate, keep their soils productive and sustain their farms for generations to come. Ultimately, this makes the difference between a family having enough food, selling a surplus or struggling through the dry season.

In many parts of Rwanda where Trócaire's intervention programmes have been rolled out, the difference is now more visible than ever. Manwari Cell in Mbazi Sector, Nyamagabe District, offers a compelling example. The link between improved harvests, increased agricultural productivity and climate resilience is becoming increasingly evident with Trócaire's agroecological approach. By helping communities strengthen their capacity to produce and withstand climate-related shocks, these interventions are contributing to higher household incomes while helping address nutrition challenges among surrounding communities.

Farmers who once carried watering cans, basins and plates to keep crops alive can now rely on gravity- fed and solar-powered irrigation system that allows them to cultivate throughout the year.

For Marleen Masclee, Country Director of Trócaire Rwanda, this is at the heart of the organisation's approach: agriculture cannot be separated from climate resilience, household income, nutrition and environmental protection.

"Everything we do is very much linked at the intersection of agriculture and environment," Marleen says. The objective is not simply for farmers to produce enough food today, but to farm in ways that keep soils healthy so that future generations can continue producing.

From Emergency Response to Long-Term Resilience

Trócaire began working in Rwanda in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide against

the Tutsi, initially supporting lifesaving and reconstruction efforts before progressively moving into livelihoods and development.

Its current Rwanda programme focuses strongly on climate resilience, agriculture and livelihoods, women's empowerment, humanitarian response when necessary, and localisation through partnerships with national and community organisations.

This partnership model is particularly visible in the Climate Just Communities (CJC) Programme, supported by the Scottish Government. Working with DUHAMIC- ADRI, Duterimbere, the National Union of Disability Organisations in Rwanda (NUDOR) and Rwanda Climate Change and Development Network (RCCDN). The programme targets vulnerable communities in Karongi, Ngororero and Gisagara.

These organisations were not simply implementing agencies. They provided the local knowledge, community relationships and technical support needed to turn climate and agricultural interventions into practical household-level change.

Marleen specifically credits DUHAMIC-ADRI and DUTERIMBERE with supporting farmers and households, through irrigation and large-scale terracing. She says hundreds of hectares have been terraced and brought into agricultural use. UNICOPAGI, a farmers' cooperative in the Southern Province, has also played an important role in organising and supporting farmers, while CCOAIB has contributed to national advocacy and helped farmers and citizens understand agricultural policies and their rights and responsibilities.

This civil-society infrastructure is important because the interventions are intended to remain with communities after individual projects end.

When Water Become Food

One of Trócaire's most practical contributions to agriculture has been improving access to water. Through local partners and collaboration with districts and cooperatives, Trócaire has supported rainwater harvesting and irrigation systems that allow households to continue producing vegetables and crops during dry periods. The systems vary according to local conditions, with communities and cooperatives taking responsibility for their management.

The Manwari irrigation initiative illustrates what this means for farmers. Before the intervention, Valentine Mukagashugi says farmers could cultivate only small areas because there was no reliable irrigation. They improvised with watering cans, basins and plates, but water was insufficient.

“Water was insufficient, and so the harvest was poor,” she recalls. The consequences extended beyond production: families had less food and local markets had fewer vegetables.

Today, irrigation allows farmers to cultivate during all seasons and supply produce to the market.

According to Emmanuel Ntakirutimana, a member of the irrigation committee, farmers now receive water on time and have increased production and food security. Just as importantly, farmers regard themselves as the first beneficiaries and owners of the system and have committed to maintaining it.

More Production, Better Nutrition and Stronger Livelihoods

The impact extends beyond irrigation infrastructure.

The independent endline evaluation of the CJC programme found that the proportion of participating farmers able to produce crops or vegetables throughout the year increased from 27% at baseline to 60% at endline.

Marleen reports a comparable improvement across Trócaire’s wider programme funded by Irish Aid and the Irish public, saying that the proportion of people reached who can now grow vegetables and crops throughout the year has risen from about 20% to at least 60%. She links the progress to an integrated approach combining agricultural production, climate resilience and diversification of household income through livestock and off-farm activities.

For nutrition, this matters because regular access to vegetables can improve the diversity and reliability of household diets.

The CJC evaluation found that almost 80% of participants reported being self-sufficient in vegetables from kitchen gardens, compared with only 11% at baseline. Livestock ownership also increased substantially, from 50% to 86%, with 82% of

livestock owners attributing their livestock ownership to the programme.

Yet the evidence also shows why resilience remains a long-term task. Sixty-four percent of CJC participants still reported experiencing food shortages although this was down from 79% at baseline. The evaluation therefore concludes that important gains have been made, but food insecurity remains a significant challenge.

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