

Farmer representatives from across Kayonza District in the Eastern Province on Friday, 16 April met with district officials under Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi project that is being implemented by Rwanda Development Organisation (RDO) where they held discussions on how to improve agriculture.

The farmers representing 10 different cooperatives met with officials in a one day training and discussion session held at the district offices which was organised by RDO.

Jean Claude Mulenzi, Kayonza District Mayor welcomed the initiative by RDO that comes to empower farmers through capacity building and raising the voice of smallholder farmers in the journey to uplift agriculture.

The Mayor underlined his district's openness to work with partners in development and in particular to agriculture which Kayonza attaches a lot of value as a rural district that depends on agriculture.

The Executive Secretary of RDO, Eugene Rwibasira said that the project comes to support smallholder farmers especially women and the youth to have a voice and engage local leaders through dialogue.

He applauded Kayonza District for the support they give to farmers underlining the need to involve them in local planning and budgeting processes.

The discussions centred on agricultural issues or services given to farmers that have been highlighted to be insufficient, the discussions also provided a platform for the farmer representatives to air out their problems to the concerned officials at the district.

John Mugabo, the in-charge of Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi at RDO revealed that the project which operates in Kayonza and Nyagatare came as a voice to smallholder farmers and was developed to know why farmers were not appreciative to some of the services they are given.

Mugabo promised support from RDO towards farmers through different categories or platforms and to continue engaging, provide advocacy and link farmers to other stakeholders.

Among the issues raised from the discussions included delivery of services to farmers, improved seeds, registration of cooperatives, storage, buying of

agricultural produce, post-harvest tools, application of pesticides, infrastructure and adaptation to the effects of climate change among others.

According to Steven Uwizeyimana, president of Twigire Rubyuruko, a youth cooperative that cultivates maize and Irish Potatoes in Nyamirama Sector of Kayonza District, they have not legally registered because of some requirements that as the youth haven't obtained.

He said that they have limited capacity and lacks where to work from, calling upon the district to support them while they build their capacity.

Uwizeyimana welcomed the discussions saying that as the youth this project provides an opportunity to have their problems addressed.

Cyprien Muhayimana, the Director of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the District noted down the issues raised by farmers and promised to forward them to the right authorities to address them.

Muhayimana noted that Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi project has come at the right time also supplementing other projects that have supported farmers. He promised a close collaboration between farmers as well as partners like RDO.

Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi Project is a one-year project funded by InterAction, it is being implemented in two districts of Kayonza and Nyagatare. The project aims at raising the voice of smallholder farmers especially women and youth through their active participation in local planning and budgeting processes and engaging local leaders through dialogue. It also facilitates data collection through use of Survey CTO application to obtain evidence based information for advocacy purpose.