Following the implementation of the Land Husbandry Water Harvesting and Hillside Irrigation (LWH) Project which included terracing of fields over the past years, some farmers strongly came out to apply the benefits under this initiative in Rambura Sector of Nyabibu District in the Western Province of Rwanda.

Farmers in the area established KOABURA, known in full as Koperative Abesamihigo Mubuhinzi ba Rambura in 2015 to put into action what the project had taught them.

KOABURA fully registered as a cooperative under Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA) and the following year in 2016 received a certificate of operation as a fully functional farmer’s organization.



According to Alphonsine Nyirabarera, the president of KOABURA Cooperative, they started with 145 members only, a number that has grown to the current 784 members, of which women lead in number with 414 women and 370 men.

The cooperative continues to admit willing farmer to join them, starting with Rwf.5,000 requirement for entry, this amount has grown as the cooperative grows and today you are required to pay Rwf.30,000 which can be paid in installments.

To further improve their activities and decentralize the operations, they established 70 saving groups within 10 zones of Rambura sector. Every zone has seven saving groups where each zone has its own head to oversee the farming activities and wellbeing of the members.

Therefore, the cooperative is playing a crucial role in hunger and poverty alleviation, promotion of social harmony and ensures that they achieve a more equitable economic growth.

Smallholder farmers are now provided with an easy access to financial resources to improve crop production where many had previously lacked finances to access agricultural inputs like improved and proper seeds, fertilizers and pest-sides.



“The cooperative was established for various purposes, including economic and social development, empowering smallholder farmers, address market failures, purchase agricultural inputs at affordable prices, and advise farmers on better and sustainable agricultural practices,” observes Nyirabarera.

She explains that the major roles of the cooperative to the rural communities include poverty reduction, creation of employment, improved food security, women

empowerment and human capital development.

“KOABURA cooperative was formed out of Irish Potato farmers but later embraced wheat farming too. It was not easy at the start because when we harvested 16.5 tons of Irish potatoes, we lost all of them due to poor storage facilities that had been built for us, we then ventured into wheat and tamarillo farming but that too did yield any good results but we never gave up,” she notes.

However, with the persistence of the farmers in Rambura their investments would come to pay off and the entry of stakeholders guaranteed a more promising future.

The Cooperative managed to save up to 10 million francs and before long, the Single Project Implementation Unit (SPIU), under the government came to their aid which supported their endeavors to meet targets and goals.

SPIU has supported the cooperative access improved seeds and helped them procure three vans used in transportation of the produce from collection sites in different zones to the market. The project has also provided trainings in post-harvest handling, building infrastructure like the cooperative’s new meeting hall and market linkages among others.

After building capacity, the cooperative is now in good position; has built structures and created jobs in the area.

There are five permanent workers employed by the cooperative, while 15 casual workers help in the fields, some help in the supervision and collection of produce from the zones using vans.

The head of the cooperative revealed that the cooperative is now on an upward trend where its earning some good returns from their agricultural activities every season.

Working together is already fruitful for the farmers in Rambura, livelihoods have been improved where members are able to cater for their families, pay school fees for their children, pay community based health insurance and make savings in Ejo Heza for the future.

As a region known for having suffered from malnutrition, the cooperative has worked with partners to set-up village kitchens as per zones to cook for children while educating mothers about healthy meals and how to maintain good hygiene in

household.

Non-members of the cooperative have also been able to benefit through trainings and the terracing program, these are normally implemented by the cooperative in partnership with SPIU for community development

KOABURA is involved in community responsibilities to cater for the vulnerable people where they provide food and other items like chickens (Layers) for eggs, fruit seedlings and other farming initiatives depending on the needs of the vulnerable groups.



Nyirabarera says they have plans to expand their humanitarian activities going to other areas when they don’t operate from like the sectors of Bigogwe and Shyira, to continue giving chicken and fruit seedlings to the needy.

The manager of the cooperative, Jean Pierre Tuyigene says that they provide training sessions to all sorts of farmers in the area sot they acquire good agricultural practices and improve their farming activities.

These activities have helped increase production of the produce, from Irish potatoes, wheat, fruits and vegetables for the farmers in Rambura sector.

Tuyigene notes that the trainings help all farmers in the area because when one farmer gains skills, he/she automatically shares with the neighbor which increase productivity in the area and this has a positive impact to the cooperative and the citizens in general.

Nonetheless, the cooperative still faces with a limited number of skilled agricultural technicians to find farmers in their localities and advise them.

Post-harvest losses due to inappropriate post-harvest management and facilities, and failure to use modern farming techniques are other major impediments to the cooperative as the president mentions.

A poor condition of the road network during the rainy season is another challenge in some parts where the cooperative operates from. Nyirabarera calls on the concerned authorities to look into some of those challenges to ensure better operations.