In a bid to overcome challenges and raise agricultural productivity, farmers from Nyagatare District in the Eastern Province in a meeting at the district on Wednesday said they need to always have the right information from suppliers of agricultural inputs.

These concerns were made during a discussion session organized by Rwanda Development Organisation (RDO) through Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi project where officials from the district met with farmer representatives of 16 cooperatives from 6 different sectors in Nyagatare.

The discussions focused on challenges affecting farmers in the district that were raised by farmers themselves as well as unappreciated services that are given to farmers by relevant institutions.

The Mayor of Nyagatare District, David Claudian Mushabe agreed with the organisers that its imperative for farmers to be happy while doing their respective work as the only way to improve productivity.



The Mayor of Nyagatare District, David Claudian Mushabe together with RDO Programs Officer, Diana Mugwaneza during the opening of discussions

He said farmers need to be empowered and given services as they require them, cautioning heads or representatives of the cooperatives to practise good governance principles as a way to improve farmers' welfare.

The Mayor lauded Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi project as an important initiative that provides a platform to ponder challenging issues faced by farmers where leaders can come in to solve those problems in time.

John Mugabo, who coordinates Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi initiative 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 of some of the services they are given.

Mugabo said that they developed the project after a study by Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), the 2019 Citizen Report Card which found that across the country 41.8% of farmers were unsatisfied with agricultural services provided to them, only 55.0% appreciate.

He said this shows that a big number of farmers are not happy about the services hence a need to improve this situation where farmers can be happy and appreciate services provided to them by the relevant institutions.

For Nyagatare in particular, RDO through the use of Survey CTO application managed to collect data on challenges in the area for advocacy purposes which were also discussed during the meeting.

Among the issues that farmers raised include delivery of services to farmers, improved seeds, drying and storage of produce, post-harvest handling, application of pesticides, market for agricultural produce, infrastructural challenges like poor roads, bridges, electricity and the effects of climate change among others.

Dativa Uzamukunda, a farmer from COAMN cooperative said it was important for agro-dealers to be knowledgeable on how to apply the agricultural inputs they are selling and be equipped with the right information to advise farmers.

Her concern was voiced by colleagues explaining that farmers need constant advise and updates on issues like improved seeds needed before every start of the season, how to apply pesticides as well as other agricultural inputs. Some farmers just buy any seeds they find on market which can lead to losses.

The meeting heard farmers' request the district to improve infrastructures especially road networks and bridges mostly those that have been destroyed by heavy rains, this will facilitate transport of agricultural produce to markets.

Post-harvest handling was also discussed, farmers say they have made some progress on this issue but find problems in drying their maize during the wet season while other still lack enough storage facilities.

The issue of insurance was also raised during discussions where some are sceptical on insurance because they made claims but have to wait endlessly and now are seeking the intervention of the authorities or advocacy through this platform.

Mugabo promised farmers that through Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi they will continue to do whatever possible to advocate for farmers regarding their challenges.

Diana Mugwaneza, the Programs Office at RDO underlined her organisation's will to support smallholder farmers increase productivity. She said Ijwi ry'Umuhinzi project was designed to give a voice to farmers as well as engage local leaders through

dialogue.

She underlined that in order to own and appreciates what is done for farmers; they needed to be involved in the planning and budgeting processes. “Farmers need to be involved in local planning processes.”

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.