

President Paul Kagame is currently in Beijing for the 2024 China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit. While there, he met with Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang on Tuesday to discuss deepening ties between Rwanda and China.

Kagame emphasized the strong partnership between the two countries and expressed Rwanda's willingness to strengthen its traditional friendship with China, as well as to promote mutually beneficial cooperation for the well-being of both populations.

Rwanda's development achievements have often been called the "China-style miracle of Africa," earning praise from the United Nations and the World Bank.

Under President Kagame's leadership, Rwanda has steadily advanced its food security and economic growth goals. Over the years, Kagame has forged a deep friendship with Chinese leaders.

His reforms have transformed Rwanda into one of Africa's fastest-growing economies and established it as a model for sustainable development.

"China is our closest friend and our most reliable partner. We are grateful for China's support and assistance, and we are willing to work with China to advance the Belt and Road Initiative, and build a community with a shared future for mankind." Kagame remarked regarding the relationship with China.

 President Kagame meeting the Chinese President Xi Jinping (Courtesy photo)

Xuexiang, also a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said China and Rwanda are good partners and good brothers with a shared vision.

He said that China will work with Rwanda to strengthen the alignment of development strategies, deepen cooperation in infrastructure, agriculture, education, science and technology, and elevate bilateral relations to a new level.

In Rwanda, agriculture is the backbone of the country's economy, employing over 70 per cent of the population; outdated techniques and low productivity have limited its potential. Modernization is crucial for the government to achieve food security and improve livelihoods.

At a symposium in June 2024, Rwanda's Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources, Dr Ildephonse Musafiri, said, "African countries have a shared wish of improving agricultural productivity and optimizing the labour structure."

He hoped China would increase its investment, deepen agricultural science and technology cooperation, and create more successes like the Juncao (mushroom grass) project to help Rwandan farmers live better lives.

One of the most visible contributions to Rwanda's agricultural modernization comes from Chinese experts stationed at the China-Rwanda Agriculture Technology Demonstration Center in southern Rwanda.

The experts have been working in the country since 2021, teaching local farmers techniques for rice transplanting, field management, and cultivating high-quality seedlings. This work has increased grain yields in several regions, providing a sustainable path toward food security.

They have also helped to introduce Juncao, a hybrid grass developed in China, as an innovative technology to local farmers.

Juncao is used for mushroom cultivation and has become a new source of income for thousands of Rwandan families. More than 35,000 farmers have received training in mushroom farming, significantly improving their livelihoods. Local farmers now refer to Juncao as the "grass of wealth" and the "grass of happiness," underscoring its impact on local communities.

The China-Rwanda agricultural partnership is a cornerstone of a broader relationship. Chinese companies have invested in Rwanda's multiple irrigation and water management projects, converting arid lands into fertile fields. These efforts, combined with the expertise of specialists, have helped Rwanda significantly boost its agricultural productivity.

Beyond agriculture, China's collaboration with Rwanda extends to trade and technology. The World Electronic Trade Platform (eWTP), co-built by Alibaba and Rwanda, has given Rwandan farmers direct access to global markets. In a notable example, Rwanda's ambassador to China helped sell 3,000 kilograms of Rwandan coffee in under a minute during a live-streamed e-commerce event. Such initiatives are helping small-scale Rwandan farmers access new revenue streams while strengthening the country's agricultural exports.

Additionally, China signed an updated e-commerce cooperation agreement with Rwanda this year, allowing 20 small- and medium-sized enterprises to join Alibaba's international platform. These efforts are enhancing Rwanda's digital transformation and improving its position in the global market.

As Rwanda continues to develop its agricultural sector and diversify its economy, the partnership with China offers a blueprint for success to Rwanda, the broader East Africa and African region as a whole. With continued cooperation, Rwanda's vision for a prosperous future – marked by agricultural innovation, economic growth, and digital transformation – seems increasingly within reach.