

Farmers in the Nasho Farmers' Cooperative (NAICO) have praised the Rwandan government and its partners for a solar-powered irrigation project they say has transformed their livelihoods.

The farmers shared their gratitude Friday, Aug. 8, as Prime Minister Justin Nsengiyumva began a two-day visit to the Eastern Province.

The project, launched in 2020, uses solar energy to power irrigation systems aimed at increasing productivity and improving the use of land, water and fertilizers. Farmers told Nsengiyumva that harvests have grown significantly since the system was introduced.



“Before irrigation, the best maize harvest was about 1.5 tons per hectare,” said Shyaka Dierry, an irrigation project worker. “Now, farmers are averaging 6.2 tons, with some reaching 9 or even 10 tons.”

The \$54 million project is a partnership between the Rwandan government and U.S. philanthropist Howard G. Buffett, supporting more than 2,090 smallholder farmers. It uses 3.3 megawatts of solar power to run pivot irrigation technology.

In addition to the irrigation system, the project built a model village of 144 modern, eco-friendly houses for vulnerable families.

During his visit, Nsengiyumva urged farmers to make full use of the technology to increase production and encouraged young people to take agriculture seriously.

President Paul Kagame and Buffett inaugurated the project in March 2020, describing it as a model that combines agriculture with environmental protection.



The project also upgraded 24 kilometers of feeder roads and constructed another 10 kilometers to make it easier for farmers to transport goods.

NAICO, which manages the irrigation system, has more than 2,100 members. Current maize yields range from 5.5 to 10 tons per hectare, beans average 1.5 tons, and soybeans about 1.3 tons per hectare.

Other sites on Nsengiyumva's itinerary include the Nyagatare powdered milk factory and the Gabiro Agribusiness Hub in Gatsibo District.