Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB) in collaboration with HarvestPlus have agreed to work together to address challenges of malnutrition and well being of farmers through enhanced bean seed production and improving market availability of High Iron Beans (HIB).

In a meeting held in Kigali this week to deliberate about the future of bean farming and scaling up in the region, Telesphore Ndabamenye, the Director General of the RAB, and Govindaraj, a Senior Scientist in Crop Development at HarvestPlus agreed to collaborate specifically in the context of biofortified beans.

Ndabamenye, recognizing the important role of HarvestPlus, requested support for enhanced bean seed production and improving market availability and accessibility of High Iron Beans (HIB) to combat malnutrition and income insecurity.

According to USAID, 38 percent of children under 5 years are stunted and 2 percent suffer from acute malnutrition (wasting or low weight-for-height). Stunting increases with the age of the child up until 23 months, rising from 18 percent among children 6–8 months to a peak of 49 percent among children 18–23 months.

The two leaders agreed to work together to scale operations, including branding and processing opportunities, and to address identified research and development gaps in the coming years.

For more than a decade, HarvestPlus had been actively supporting research in this area, leading to the release of 18 biofortified bean varieties by 2021, and several in the pipeline, and testing.

In 2019, HarvestPlus concluded its Rwanda program, when iron beans achieved a critical mass in the market sufficient for sustainable growth under country-led and local efforts. Nonetheless,

HarvestPlus has continued to collaborate with partners to work towards new product development and continued scaling.

Ndabamenye assured of an enabling working and collaborative environment, promptly instructed the Bean program lead, Dr. Edouard Rurangwa to integrate the HarvestPlus team into the national nutrition product mainstreaming strategy and working committee—signaling a continued partnership.

Govindaraj expressed eagerness to strengthen linkages between bean value chain

actors, emphasizing HarvestPlus' commitment to supporting biofortified beans.

Low productivity due to poor source seed quality and dissemination were cited as the most critical challenges at the community level stressing the need for improved bean varieties.

In addition, RAB Director urged the sharing of successful models from HarvestPlus' experiences in other countries, emphasizing "The importance of customization to suit Rwanda's unique conditions for a sustainable seed system and a vibrant bean value chain"

The leaders recognized the necessity of working even more closely, aligning efforts across different centers and organizations, including CGIAR such as International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) and Pan Africa Beans Research Alliance (PABRA).

They also discussed the potential for synergy with ongoing projects, including those supported by Accelerated Innovation Delivery Initiative and school feeding programs, to further amplify the impact of biofortified beans in East Africa.

The collaboration between HarvestPlus and RAB held the promise of not only addressing nutritional challenges but also contributing to the economic well-being of farmers, marking the beginning of a new chapter in East Africa's agricultural development.