

Residents of Isangano village in Nyagatare District during a practical session on how to prepare a balanced and diversified diet

By Steven Nsamaz;

In Isangano village of Rwimiyaga in Nyagatare district, a group of women have converged in the evening together with a few men to prepare dinner, the aim is to train fellow villagers of how best to prepare food especially nutritional benefits through a programme dubbed “Igikoni cy’Umudugudu” literary meaning a village kitchen.

Everyone has contributed something small to cook, in the compound of one of the residents where they are making preparations is bustling with activity as women are supervising several saucepans of different types of food including cassava, sweet potatoes, beans, potatoes, silver fish and green vegetables among others.

Domina Uwamurera, a resident and head of Isangano village explains that they occasionally meet to prepare food as a way to train fellow villagers on how to improve nutrition and fight stunting.

“Since we trained on ways of improving nutrition in our homes we have never had a single case of stunting in the village,” observes the mother of five.

Domina Uwamurera, a resident and head of Isangano village

Uwamurera says that about 65 women and 11 men from Isangano village were trained by RDO (Rwanda Development Organisation) on how to prepare foods rich in nutrients and make kitchen gardens.

When the trainings were completed, Uwamurera together with four community health workers and two volunteers (Inshuti z’umuryango) started implementing what they had learned by sharing nutritional tips to the rest of the village especially those who had not attended the trainings.

“RDO trained us on how to prepare rich meals, educated us on kitchen gardens where we can grow vegetables for our homes, afterwards we felt the best way to carry on was to teach our colleagues in the village as way of fighting stunting,” she

says.

Kitchen garden

RDO as a local non-profit making organisation established by Rwandans that supports initiatives of Rwandese in social and economic development. Empowering communities including those vulnerable to improve their human capital, achieve food and nutrition security, and establish market linkages in a sustainable natural environment.

The Executive Secretary of RDO, Eugene Rwibasira notes that the organisation strives to raise resources to support communities based on the felt-needs and priorities of the beneficiaries.

The organisation empowers communities with required expertise and skills needed to identify and prioritise their needs in the planning, implementing and monitoring of activities. RDO is involved in different activities including agriculture, climate change, human security, health services and market linkages of agricultural produce.

Rwanda still faces a number of development challenges like high rate of poverty (39.1% below poverty line), food in security, high population pressure on the existing resources including water and land making the population prone to hazards of climate change and high vulnerability.

Rwanda Development Organisation as a local NGO places these development challenges among its focus area to be addressed in sustainable ways through collaboration with partners and stakeholders.

Whilst Rwanda has met or exceeded many of its development goals, chronic malnutrition or stunting remains a major impediment to achieve the set targets that can only be achieved by healthy citizens, living well, working hard and able to innovate.

With stunting levels still high at 38% in the country, RDO has made interventions in combating malnutrition. The organisation has been implementing a food and nutrition security programme which started as early as the organisation aimed at

increasing agricultural and livestock production.

Rwibasira notes that their efforts are directed towards sustainable agriculture to ensure food and nutrition security through empowerment of cooperatives and smallholder farmers. Residents in rural villages like Isangano are trained on how to grow food that can fight malnutrition and how to improve their nutrition.

Kitchen garden in Isangano

In Nyagatare district, food security and income has improved through increased adoption of more intensive market-oriented crop production and post-harvest handling by small holder farmers in eight sectors supporting 23 cooperatives with 1,657 men and 1,234 women members.

Among other projects that support rural communities include the Farm to Market Alliance (FtMA) project which supports smallholder farmers to increase on-farm productivity and market access. The project has already mobilized off-takers willing to offer forward delivery contracts to farmers and cooperatives, more than 60,000 farmers grouped into 207 cooperatives are targeted.

In collaboration with UN Women, RDO supports 11 cooperatives in Gatsibo, Nyagatare, Muhanga and Nyanza districts to increase gender responsiveness in cooperative through linking them to information, markets and financial services. The project called Buy from Women Platform targets to support about 5,000 farmers through land mapping and farmer profile, information on inputs provision, gender empowerment training, linkage to markets, financial services, and access to extension services.

Theoretical session for training on nutrition attended by Social affairs office and the civil registration officer in Rwimiyaga

Advocacy has also been part of the RDO efforts in trying to improve the well being of Rwandans. The organisation has worked with other civil society organisations under Voice for change Partnership (V4CP) project since May 2016 to advocate for

an enabling environment for fair food and nutrition policies to ensure low income and marginalized communities are taken into account by the different policy processes in the country.

With the global changes in temperature and precipitation that normally leads to devastating effects compounded by the factor that 75.3% of the population in Rwanda depend on rain fed agriculture, interventions have been directed in supporting the population to deal with the effects.

Interventions in the climate change has focused on resilience through enhanced policy engagement and networking. RDO established the Rwanda Climate Change and Development Network to engage with climate change related policies and campaigns nationally and internationally, build the capacity and skills of stakeholders and communities in climate change engagement and monitoring and network with other stakeholders nationally and internationally for collective engagement and lessons sharing.

Small scale farmers are being supported to acquire small scale solar irrigation systems that can significantly increase crop yields and improve food security. This project aims at connecting farmers, suppliers of solar-powered irrigation systems and financial Institutions for specialist financing facilities and other market development activities, such as product and technology awareness.

The Executive Secretary observes that with the organisation's overarching objective of sustainably developing the Rwandan communities it's critical for citizens to be part of their own development.

Therefore, a project to enhance participatory governance and accountability of local leaders and public institutions involving citizen's participation was designed. Organized to strengthen participation and accountability there are inclusive engagements between the target citizens especially women and youths, civil society organizations and the public authorities at local and national levels. The project also includes lobbying and advocacy activities around agricultural issues that affect most of the citizens.

RDO's grand plan is to direct more efforts towards sustainable agriculture to ensure food and nutrition security; empowerment of cooperatives; health especially sensitization, control and prevention of malaria, HIV and TB; gender equity and equality with specific focus on women empowerment and youth mobilisation and

empowerment.