Gatsibo rice farmers, whose harvests have suffered from water shortages, are now looking ahead to improved yields and incomes following the launch of a new initiative focused on climate resilience, mitigation, and green job creation.

The Agricultural Climate Resilience and Green Jobs Creation for Youth in Rural Communities (CRCSP) project launched this March 27, in Gatsibo District.

The $17,165,000 project sits on 500 hectares of land and aimed at boosting rice, maize, beans, and vegetables growing in Kabarore and Gitoki sectors that has been severely affected by long draughts, shortage of rains resulting to low harvest.

Funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), the Government of Rwanda, and the World Food Programme (WFP), the project will focus on the development and rehabilitation of the Mishenyi marshland.

It also includes the construction of a large dam and modern irrigation systems to support year-round farming, post- harvest facilities, market and training of women and youth among others.

The benefiting area cooperative, Kabeza rice cooperative (KARIDECO) president Leopold Munyambibi, said that the project is a new opportunity for farmers who have long struggled with climate challenges and low productivity experienced in the past and every dry season in July.

With the 500ha of rice fields they produce 5-6tons per hectare dependin on reliable rains or availability of water in the streams and this can get worse when there is a shortage.

For instance, Munyambibi showed that the worst experience was in 2023 they faced harsh drought which led to loss of half of their harvest geeting 90tons instead 380tons, creating a major loss and many farmers had to literally survive on food handouts from the government.

Munyambibi also showed that in the current state of the marshland, the farmers depend on two water streams making it very had for a large part of the wetland (100ha) operating without water and thus not able to harvest in one of the two rice seasons.

“Today, with the coming of this project, there is strong confidence in availability of water through the years and our production will increase significantly and transform livelihoods across the community,” Munyambibi said.

This four-year initiative (2026–2029) aims to boost agricultural productivity, strengthen climate resilience, and create green jobs, particularly for youth and women.

The project is expected to directly benefit over 6,250 households.

Mayor of Gatsibo, Gasana Richard said that the plan is to increase this marshland cultivable land to 700 ha, and grow more than rice but also food crops.

“The budget is almost half the district budget – this project will build water ways, irrigation channels, terraces to grow more food crops along to improve welfares,” Gasana said.

“From the current 5-6 tons, we want to reach 8 tons of rice per hectare to enable us to earn Rwf2.8billion annually,” he said.

This new development in Mishenyi marshland will enable the area rice cooperative-Kabeza rice cooperative (KARIDECO) to join the big ranks of developed rice Ntende and , Bugarama in Rusizi, Mukunguri in the south, Muvumba rice cooperative, Agasasa cooperative in Nyanza, Cyiri, and Rwasave in Huye and Gisagara district.

The Mishenyi rehabilitation project will also add to the already existing over 100 marshland out of the 300 remaining marshlands that government and partners have invested in to improve climate resilence, productivity for rice and maize farmers.

Andrea Bagnoli, World Food Programme (WFP) Country Representative said that their partnership with KOICA and the government of Rwanda in previous projects has delivered results benefited over 68,000 farmers with every dollar invested producing $2.8 in return and facilities well maintained, according to the 2022 and 2025 assesments.

“This reflects strong local ownership and long term planning. With this experience, WFP is committed to ensure that the new CRCSP project delivers real and long lasting benefits,” Bagnoli said.

KOICA Rwanda Country Director Kim Jinhwa invoked a Korean proverb, noting that “the hope of a farmer is written in the soil, but it cannot be realized without the touch of water and human hands.”

Through the CRCSP project, Korea is reaffirming its 10-year partnership with Rwanda, working hand-in-hand to support farmers on a shared journey of growth and transformation.

She highlighted that over the past decade, particularly during the first and second phases of cooperation, efforts have focused on developing hillside terraces, rehabilitating marshlands, and training farmers to adopt advanced agricultural practices tailored to Rwanda’s needs.

Now, in its third phase, the project marks a new chapter—one centered on integrated development and alignment with Rwanda’s Second National Strategy for Transformation (NST2) and the Fifth Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation.

“This third stage of our partnership signals a new journey, where we aim to further improve livelihoods by adapting successful Korean development models to the Rwandan context,” she said.

She cited the example of blending Saemaul Undong with Rwanda’s Umuganda to empower cooperatives, strengthen entrepreneurship, and create decent jobs, particularly for youth and women.

“We hope the Gatsibo-KOICA marshland success story becomes a model that can be replicated across Rwanda, inspiring resilient growth nationwide,” she added.

Kim emphasized that the project will be implemented through close collaboration between Rwandan stakeholders and Korean technical teams. She also urged beneficiaries to make the Gatsibo initiative a benchmark for success—not only for Rwanda, but for the wider region.