Born in 1987 with a handful of members cultivating small plots, CO-DERVAM Cooperative in Nyagatare District has defied the odds.

Today, it boasts over 1,350 members tilling 400 hectares, a symbol of their unwavering spirit and strategic vision.

CO-DERVAM's journey wasn't always easy. Early years were marred by crippling debt, fueled by poor management and unprofitable investments.

Aisha Umurerwa, the Manager of CO-DERVAM recalls the dark days marked with disorganization and then came the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. These difficulties with meager harvests plunged the cooperative into deep waters, leaving a staggering Rwf.400 million debt in its wake.

Aisha Umurerwa, Manager of CO-DERVAM

Amidst the challenges, a lifeline emerged from government support. The allocation of additional land fueled a surge in production, while a dedicated network of management experts provided crucial guidance.

This potent combination empowered CO-DERVAM not only to survive but thrive, laying the groundwork for a future brimming with possibilities. Notably, debt relief eased financial pressure, allowing the cooperative to focus on growth.

Committee members during a meeting

Refusing to be cowed, members implemented a lean inventory system, slashing waste and increasing rice production. Regular community meetings fostered unity, culminating in successful debt-reduction initiatives. Shared burdens and unwavering purpose paved the path from despair to triumph.

As if that was not enough, financial recovery began with a crucial step: a six-month budget crafted in 2012. Identifying financial missteps, ineffective management, and the limitations of manual labor and unreliable irrigation as their Achilles' heels, they embarked on a comprehensive restructuring.

“Preserving the legacy of ‘CO-DERVAM’ became a rallying cry,” Umurerwa notes. Drawing strength from their past successes, they chartered a course towards financial stability and diversification.

She affirms that their collective efforts shine through exciting projects, members have pooled savings which now totals over Rwf.87 million.

Recognizing the importance of health, the cooperative pays health insurance for all members, ensuring access to medical care. Members are also extended support during difficult times when they loose a member or family members and also support with burial expenses.

Beyond that, in partnership with the Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB), the cooperative now produces basic rice seeds for other farmers, playing a vital role in the rice ecosystem.

With new investments, the cooperative has diversified and some of these include venturing into the business by building a gas station. This strategic move not only generates additional income but also strengthens local presence and plays a role in development of the area.

CO-DERVAM’s commitment extends beyond profit. They make high-quality rice accessible to community selling at Rwf.1,500 per kg, significantly this is lower than local market rates countrywide.

Community development is becoming part of this cooperative, by venturing into the agro-industry, focusing on fruit cultivation and other agricultural activities, these efforts are run through a partnership with the district.

And the future promises even greater strides. Working with a lower capacity processing facility in the past, CO-DERVAM is now poised for a significant leap forward with the construction of its own state-of-the-art rice factory.

Internally, the management operates efficiently with a core team of seven permanent employees supported by additional personnel. Centralized operations, including partnerships with financial institutions, ensure smooth payment processes for farmers.

Looking ahead, CO-DERVAM plans to further change its role as a community pillar. Initiatives like tackling teen pregnancies and constructing a hotel in the Nyagatare district showcase their dedication to holistic development.

Through determination the cooperative has written a new chapter. It has set an innovative approach, including planned separation of rice farming from other ventures for dedicated management, which promises to pave way for long-term success and inspire others to follow their resilient path.



The Manager credits this resilience to a culture of respect for the board’s decisions. “Our governance structure is transparent and democratic, where members’ voices are heard. As a result of this, trust is fostered and decisions are based on well informed choices.”

Planting the seeds of tomorrow, CO-DERVAM cultivates a legacy of resilience and togetherness, planting seeds of inspiration that will continue to blossom for generations to come.