Agriculture plays a vital role in Africa’s economic development, supporting rural livelihoods, creating jobs and sustaining food security. Yet, farmers and agricultural businesses continue to face challenges ranging from limited market access and investment to climate-related disasters that can undo years of progress. Addressing these issues requires sound economic policies, stronger regional partnerships and practical solutions that help communities grow and withstand uncertainty.

At the centre of this work is Ngabitsinze Jean Chrysostome, Director General of African Risk Capacity (ARC) Group, whose experience spans applied economics, agricultural research and public policymaking. His professional journey has been shaped by a clear understanding of how agricultural productivity, market opportunities and economic resilience influence people’s lives. Through his academic work, he has explored ways to improve production efficiency, strengthen agricultural value chains and expand market access for smallholder farmers, with the wider aim of supporting rural development and food security.

His experience in government has further shaped his approach to economic development. Working across agriculture and trade, he has supported policies aimed at attracting investment, expanding exports and reducing dependence on imports. He also recognises the importance of private sector participation and regional value chains in creating stronger, more resilient economies. His engagement with continental and international platforms, including the Commonwealth Trade Ministers’ Meeting and initiatives aligned with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), reflects his belief that cooperation is essential to unlocking Africa’s economic potential.

Today, at ARC, he brings these experiences together to advance disaster preparedness, strengthen financial protection and help African countries safeguard the livelihoods and development gains of their people.

A Career Shaped by Economic Development

Ngabitsinze has built his professional journey around this connection between economic development and resilience. His background in applied economics, agricultural research and policymaking has given him a practical understanding of the challenges facing farmers and rural economies.

His experience in Rwanda showed him how closely agricultural productivity, market access and household security are linked. It also revealed how quickly climate shocks can reverse years of development. These experiences shaped his commitment to policies that protect livelihoods while creating opportunities for lasting economic progress. At ARC, he brings this perspective to the challenge of helping African countries prepare for disasters and respond before their effects become more severe.

Strengthening Disaster Preparedness Across Africa

As Director General, Ngabitsinze is focused on expanding country participation in ARC, strengthening preparedness and improving access to affordable disaster risk financing. His priority is to ensure that the institution’s work translates into timely assistance for vulnerable communities.

He also recognises that effective disaster management depends on strong institutional relationships. Transparent decision-making, accountability and constructive dialogue among ARC’s governing bodies, member states and partners are essential to building trust. In his view, institutional credibility is not simply an administrative matter. It is fundamental to delivering meaningful results.

Turning Climate Warnings into Action

Climate-related disasters can affect entire agricultural systems, disrupting production, reducing household incomes and placing pressure on food supplies. Ngabitsinze believes countries must connect early warning systems with practical plans and financing that can be accessed before a crisis escalates.

Reliable climate information is important, but it must lead to action. Investments in resilient farming, water management, livestock protection and functioning food markets can help communities prepare for changing conditions. Farmers, pastoralists and fishers should also have a voice in shaping preparedness plans so that support reflects the risks they face in their daily lives.

The objective is to help countries act earlier, reducing losses before they become more difficult and expensive to address.

Making Disaster Financing More Effective

When a disaster strikes, governments must provide immediate assistance while protecting resources needed for long-term development. Arranging funds only after an emergency can delay relief and place additional pressure on public budgets.

Pre-arranged financing offers a more practical approach. Ngabitsinze sees parametric insurance as a useful mechanism because it can release funds when agreed thresholds are met, allowing governments to respond more quickly. However, insurance works best as part of a wider strategy that includes reserves, contingency credit and social protection.

The real measure of success is whether financial support reaches affected communities in time to protect lives and livelihoods. Financing should help governments manage emergencies without sacrificing essential development priorities.

Addressing the Challenges Facing Smallholder Farmers

Smallholder farmers often face several barriers at once, including limited access to finance, unreliable agricultural inputs, inadequate infrastructure, weak extension services and uncertain markets. Women and young farmers may face additional difficulties accessing land and productive assets.

Ngabitsinze believes these challenges require coordinated solutions. Better access to finance and inputs must go hand in hand with stronger agricultural advisory services, reliable infrastructure and policies that allow farmers to plan ahead. Producer organisations can also help farmers improve their bargaining power and reach wider markets.

Higher productivity is important, but it must translate into better incomes and more secure livelihoods. Farmers need commercial opportunities alongside the resources and support required to manage risk.

Creating Greater Value Across Agricultural Supply Chains

Opportunities to strengthen African agriculture extend beyond the farm. Poor

storage, limited processing facilities andweak market connections can reduce the value farmers receive from their produce.

Ngabitsinze sees considerable potential in reducing post-harvest losses, expanding storage and cold-chain facilities, supporting local processing and improving access to markets. These investments can increase farmers' earnings while creating employment and business opportunities in rural areas.

Their success depends on supporting infrastructure, including reliable energy, transport, quality standards and accessible finance. Agricultural value chains should ultimately be judged by how much value they create for farmers and rural communities, not simply by the volume of produce entering the market.



Connecting Research with Practical Results

Research in agricultural economics can help identify ways to improve productivity, use resources more efficiently and expand market access. Its value, however, depends on whether findings lead to practical improvements.

Ngabitsinze believes researchers, policymakers, extension services and farmers should work together to identify problems, test solutions and assess their results. Progress should be measured through changes in farm incomes, productivity, resilience and market participation.

He also supports adjusting programmes when evidence shows they are not working as intended. This willingness to learn and adapt helps ensure that public resources are directed towards interventions that deliver real benefits to farmers and local economies.

The Importance of Regional Cooperation

Climate risks and food markets cross national borders, making cooperation essential to Africa's long-term food security. Countries can share forecasting capabilities, strengthen risk models and coordinate disaster preparedness rather than working in isolation.

Regional risk pooling can help participating countries spread exposure, while

predictable trade can improve the movement of food from areas with available supplies to those experiencing shortages.

Ngabitsinze believes regional institutions must turn cooperation into practical services that countries can rely on and sustain. Stronger partnerships can help African nations manage shared risks while improving their ability to protect agricultural production and food supplies.

Balancing Emergency Relief with Long-Term Resilience

During a disaster, protecting lives and preventing immediate losses must come first. Yet, timely assistance can also determine whether families retain the resources needed to rebuild their lives.

Without support, households may be forced to sell livestock, use their savings or abandon their livelihoods. Ngabitsinze believes relief efforts should help families meet urgent needs while protecting their productive assets.

Recovery should then focus on rebuilding stronger agricultural systems and infrastructure. Connecting emergency response with long-term planning allows governments to move beyond immediate relief and reduce vulnerability to future disasters.

Using Innovation to Anticipate Climate Risks

Satellite observations, improved forecasting, digital payments and more accurate risk models offer new ways to strengthen disaster preparedness. These tools can help governments understand potential losses, improve decisions and deliver assistance more efficiently.

Ngabitsinze stresses that innovation must be supported by reliable local data, accessible services and trusted institutions. He also highlights basis risk, which occurs when an insurance payout does not adequately reflect the losses people experience. Improving data quality and insurance design is therefore essential to ensuring that financial protection works as intended.

Technology should ultimately be judged by its ability to improve decisions and provide better protection for vulnerable communities.

Integrating Agriculture, Finance and Climate Policy

Ngabitsinze believes African countries need stronger coordination among finance, agriculture, environment and disaster-management institutions. Climate risks should inform public investment, agricultural policy and national budgeting rather than being treated as separate concerns.

Capable public institutions, effective extension services, transparent financing and dependable social protection are important to this effort. Development partners can contribute by supporting nationally led strategies with predictable funding and clear accountability.

When resilience becomes part of everyday policy and investment decisions, countries are better positioned to protect development gains and prepare for future challenges.

A Lasting Commitment to Africa’s Future

Ngabitsinze’s ambition is to help build institutions that enable African countries to anticipate crises, protect development progress and create opportunities for their people. He sees success in practical terms: farmers investing with greater confidence, governments responding earlier and communities recovering with dignity.

His experience in agricultural economics, research and public service has reinforced his belief that development must improve people’s lives. As climate risks continue to challenge Africa’s food systems and economies, his work at ARC reflects a wider goal of making resilience an integral part of the continent’s development. The lasting impact will be measured by how well countries protect their people and preserve the progress they have worked hard to achieve.