

Farmers from Nyamagabe, Nyaruguru and Huye districts who cultivate various crops most especially wheat and maize, are proud of the yields they get, thanks to the initiative of Union des Cooperatives Agricoles Intégrées (UNICOOPAGI) projects that have helped elevate ways of living.

UNICOOPAGI, a Union of Agricultural Cooperatives headquartered at Nyamugali Cell, Gasaka sector of Nyamagabe District in the Southern Province was established to foster community development by empowering people to build a better and sustainable development.

Simon Mutangana, the President of the Union said, “UNICOOPAGI started operations in 1991 with six cooperatives and was known as Union des Cooperatives Agricoles de Gikongoro. Following the general assembly on November, 11th 2009, its members agreed to change the name to Union des Coopératives Agricoles Intégrées and today is composed of 36 cooperatives with 2,602 members.”



When the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi happened, some members were killed, many fled while others were displaced. The union of cooperatives became non-operational because most of its assets were destroyed.

To rebuild as the rest of the country was doing in the aftermath, in 1996 the Union started reorganizing commencing with 16 cooperatives and a year later were able to get partners to support them.

Partners who have supported this union of cooperatives include TROCAIRE, who have supported UNICOOPAGI from the time it relaunched activities, others like USAID and CIP have also stood by the union.

UNICOOPAGI is run through the General Assembly composed by delegates from cooperatives where each is represented by three delegates and meets twice a year while the Board of Directors has five persons with a mandate of three years renewable once.

Another arm is the Audit committee responsible for controlling asset management of the union and is composed of three persons, while the coordination team deals with the daily management of the union. Currently the management of UNICOOPAGI is run by 24 permanent staff.



The Union has since been supportive of farmers in various means through the reinforcement of their cooperatives to ensure food security and boost farmer's incomes in order to improve their livelihoods.

"We have been able to support cooperative members to improve agricultural production by providing multiplication of improved seeds of wheat variety generating high and preferred production, availing post-harvest equipment, helping farmers access markets while encouraging them to increase the quality of wheat and cultivate wheat professionally and commercializing their activities," observes Mutangana.

Continuous training of farmers on updated technological post-harvest systems has also be given the farmers in the three districts through Integrated Soil Fertility Management (ISFM) technology to improve agricultural production while also

supplying of agricultural inputs like lime, mineral fertilizers, pesticides and the Vegetable seeds through their cooperatives.

The head of the union revealed that they assist cooperatives to get legal personality, administration and management while encouraging sensitization on cooperative society vision, mission, legal framework in order to protect the interests of the members by providing other information deemed necessary.

UNICOOPAGI has been able to provide livestock to some of its members especially those who live near Nyugwe National Park to discourage them from poach in the forest for wildlife, training of farmers in Agroforestry and protection of the environment.

To improve livelihoods and community relations, UNICOOPAGI with support from partners have undertaken trainings on gender balance as well as promotion and protection of rural vulnerable Women's rights for access to land.

"Our farmers are encouraged to carry out Wheat and Maize cultivation and are facilitated to get trashing & winnowing equipment while we conduct market linkages for their produce," Mutangana said.

The creation of a Saving and Credit cooperative called COOPEC TWIZIGAMIRE with more than 8,000 members has benefited especially farmers in this region. The Microfinance helps members through trainings on the benefits of making savings.

As many have developed a savings culture, development has come easily where farmers are able to build houses, pay school fees, health insurance, join Ejo Heza pension scheme and meeting other domestic expenses.

However, some wheat farmers from this region are facing a challenge of low quantity and quality of wheat produced where some fail to meet the requirements set by UNICOOPAGI due to inadequate use of input, unfavorable conducive climate and high loss in post-harvest activities. About 14.5% of production is lost in threshing, winnowing and drying because they still practice the traditional practices.

The cooperatives have not fully grown their capacities to be able to collect all the wheat produced by farmers and this sometimes pose a challenge to the union during bumper harvests. This can sometimes bring third parties in the equation who

want to profit over farmers by cheating them.

UNICOOPAGI is however trying to develop this capacity that every wheat produced can be collected, processed and taken to the market to ease up the burden on member farmers.



“Other challenges we have faced include; cultivating acidic soils, lack of sufficient organic inputs, sufficient and updated post-harvest materials and technologies, sufficient improved wheat seed varieties with high productivity and preferred production by Agro industries, Fraud in selling of wheat on black-market, High production cost and Lack of sufficient transport infrastructure.” commented Mutangana.

The changing climatic conditions are also affecting farmers where those in high mountains experience landslides in the wet season where their farms are swept away while those cultivating in the marshlands experience floods.

UNICOOPAGI has been able to improve livelihoods for farmers, gradually built capacity with assets like an office block and has bigger plans for the future.

The union of cooperative wants to build hospitality centers like a hotel to host travelers to the areas or at least in each of the district it works from.

Another important investment that UNICOOPAGI wants to undertake is a training

centre for farmers so that they are equipped with best agricultural practices. Such a centre will help farmers with relevant skills on a regular basis to improve agriculture.