UN Women Rwanda and its implementing partner Rwanda Development Organization (RDO) recognized the importance of improving post-harvest handling to ensure quality products in rural areas by launching a project to streamline post-harvest handling procedures.

The project, which was titled *Buy from Women Project*, was funded by UN Women and implemented by RDO. It aimed at helping women access potential markets through a digital platform. The project was concluded in 2020 after benefiting women farmer cooperatives in Gatsibo, Muhanga, and Nyagatare Districts.

Diana Mugwaneza, Programme Officer at RDO, explains that the project intended to improve farmer's knowledge in raising production and ensuring quality products for rural women farmers. The project also availed equipment to help farmers in limiting loss or exposure of the harvest to aflatoxin, caused by poor handling. Farmers were also taught how to store crops and connect them to ready markets.

Women Farmers were trained about Good Agricultural Practices (GAP); how to prepare their gardens, plant in lines, use the right pesticides, applying fertilizers and use improved seeds.

The project facilitated partner women cooperatives to get different post-harvest handling equipment like tarpaulins, hermetic bags, and moisture meters. The women cooperatives also benefited from the construction of drying sheds. This equipment helped women farmers to improve on the quality of their products and therefore, meet buyer requirements.

The President of COOPCUMA stressed that the knowledge and equipment received, drastically cut post-harvest losses to less than 5% whereas before they were losing unimaginable products. She further stressed that the partnership during the project bore more fruits as they helped to uplift the cooperative.

Among the immediate benefits of the project, was the market linkage. The cooperative automatically got big buyers through the FtMA (Farm to Market Alliance) platform. This market proved to be very beneficial as most of the cooperatives that benefited from the project still sell their products through the platform.

When we joined the platform in 2015 we had a combined production of 62 tones, this significantly increased in the succeeding year to 182 tones that we sold through

FtMA. The increase was attributed to different factors including a good market but the trainings in good agricultural practices played an important part.

Today, COOPCUMA cooperative approximately collects about 300 tones and sells 200 while the rest is consumed by members in their homes. In season 2020 A we managed to sale 173.263MT and generated income of Rwf.52,999,000, according to the cooperative president.

KOPAIKA maize farming cooperative in Kageyo Sector, Gatsibo District has also witnessed a positive impact on their farming activities. The project supported the cooperative to train its members and was given post-harvest equipment to improve quality.

Specioza Mujejimana, a farmer promoter in KOPAIKA, highlights: “I vividly recall the UN Women project brought by RDO because it trained us on issues that have since improved my life as well as the cooperative in general. The training was very enriching to us”.

The cooperative was initially trained on gender equality. Women were taught to be confident, to start saving to be able to start income-generating activities. According to Mujejimana, the members of the cooperative were also trained on increasing productivity and upholding quality production through proper post-harvest handling. She emphasized that it has helped many of them, as the training was supplemented by post-handling equipment. The post-harvest equipment received included tarpaulins, hermetic bags, and moisture meters.

Abudansi Mugirayezu, the President of KOPAIKA explains that they learned to never harvest on the bare ground or on dirty baskets which used to be a common practice. They were taught that harvesting during the rainy period is very risky as production gets in contact with rainwater or humidity. They learned that poor harvest and storage practices led to severe grain loss and would counteract much of the hard work that went into planting.

Abudansi revealed that more than 20% of the expected harvest was always lost during post-harvest but after the training, they started implementing learned practices and they now lose less than 5% only because of unavoidable circumstances like spillage while moving the produce from one place to another or putting them in the storage bags.