

# RWANDA Dispatch

AN INSIGHT INTO RWANDA

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## AGRO-EXPORTS MAKE A TURNAROUND 2021/22 AS REVENUES RISE MORE THAN 7 TIMES

RESOURCES MISAPPROPRIATION IS HISTORY  
IN COOPERATIVES - RCA DIRECTOR GENERAL



Rwanda's mountain gorillas now have Instagram account | **PG5**  
EBOLA: Rwanda steps up vigilance at border points | **PG9**



# Best View Hotel



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## Publisher's Note

Since September 8, awash the media was the demise of Queen Elizabeth II, UK's longest-serving monarch. She died at Balmoral aged 96, after reigning for 70 years. She was succeeded by her eldest son Prince Charles. World leaders who described her as an icon of peace and unity, streamed into Westminster Abbey in UK to pay the last respect to the monarch and attend the state funeral of the Queen.

Kenya's elected President William Ruto in a tight election widely rated as peaceful and democratic despite criticism from the camp of the country's long-time opposition leader Raila Amolo Odinga. Ruto became the 5th President of Kenya since independence in 1963.

As the Russia-Ukraine crisis rages on, President Putin signed September 30 a decree for the annexation of four occupied Ukrainian territories of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson following a factious referendum, attracting widespread criticism from the international community. The Ukrainians, however, have intensified country

offensive aimed at recapturing the occupied territories with Russian army on the verge of collapse.

At home, President Paul Kagame toured the Southern Province to assess the progress of the National Strategy for Transformation (NSTI) five years down the road. Kagame visited development projects and hailed local leaders for the efforts into transforming livelihoods of citizenry.

This issue profoundly covers the cooperative movement in Rwanda with special focus on cooperatives in southern and western provinces. Apart from increasing productivity and quality of commodities, about 437 cooperatives continue generally to score high in the area of improving the welfare of their members now estimated at 5.3 million through initiatives such as Ejo Heza, Mutuelle de Sante, Savings and Solidarity funds.

## Editorial



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## said and Quoted



"Africa should not be struggling with food insecurity given our natural endowments. We can feed ourselves, and even feed others."

**PRESIDENT PAUL KAGAME**



"Now is the time for action. There is no future for our children or the planet if we continue with 'business as usual' when it comes to managing our land."

**IBRAHIM THIAW,**  
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY  
OF THE UNCCD



"Agriculture is the bedrock of the prosperity of many countries worldwide"

**WILLIAM SAMOEI RUTO,**  
PRESIDENT OF THE  
REPUBLIC OF KENYA



"On every climate front, the only solution is solidarity and decisive action"

**ANTÓNIO GUTERRES,**  
SECRETARY-GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS



## On the world scene

### BURKINA FASO

Before the close of September, Burkina Faso experienced the second coup d'état in less than nine months led by 34-year-old Captain Ibrahim Traore. Delivering statements on national television brandishing guns, ammunition belts, and masks, Captain Traore catapulted onto the world stage since he and a group of soldiers overthrew President Paul-Henri Damiba, the Lieutenant Colonel who had seized power in a coup in January this year.

## Numbers that speak volumes

**50**  
billion

AFRICAN AGRICULTURE IS UNDER THREAT WHERE IT'S ESTIMATED THAT AFRICAN ECONOMIES STOOD TO LOSE ABOUT USD 50 BILLION DUE TO THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE BY 2030, SOME 7% OF THE GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT (GDP). THE EFFECTS WILL BE MOST FELT IN AGRICULTURE WHERE CHANGES IN WEATHER PATTERNS WILL COMPROMISE FOOD PRODUCTION AND SECURITY AND PUT OVER 200 MILLION PEOPLE AT RISK OF HUNGER.

**18**  
billion

THIS IS THE TARGET FOR GLOBAL FUND THIS PLEDGING CYCLE, HOWEVER ONLY \$14.25 BILLION WAS PLEDGED IN THE MARGINS OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2022 WHERE 45 COUNTRIES INCLUDING 18 AFRICAN COUNTRIES MADE COMMITMENTS. HOWEVER, THERE ARE DIRE WARNINGS ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF MISSING THIS TARGET.

**530**  
million

A NATURAL GAS PLANT ON LAKE KIVU WORTHY \$530 MILLION WAS LAUNCHED BY RWANDA THROUGH A PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP WITH GASMETH ENERGY. THE PLANT COULD BE A GAME CHANGER FOR THE RWANDAN USERS OF GAS FOR COOKING OR OTHER RELATED ACTIVITIES LIKE POWERING HOUSEHOLDS AND EVEN FUELING CARS AND FACTORIES.

**10,876**  
members

TODAY, THERE ARE 10,876 LEGALLY REGISTERED COOPERATIVES IN RWANDA WITH 5.3 MILLION MEMBERS FROM ALL SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLASSES. AS THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT SPREADS, GROWTH IN MEMBERSHIP HAS MEANT CORRESPONDING INCREASE IN SHARE CAPITAL RATED AT RWF53 BILLION

# World leaders pay last respect to Queen Elizabeth II



Queen Elizabeth II, the UK's longest-serving monarch died this September at Balmoral aged 96, after reigning for 70 years. She ascended to the throne in 1952 and witnessed enormous social change.

Ruling for longer than any other Monarch in British history, she had become a much loved and respected figure across the globe. The Queen was a dedicated Head of the Commonwealth, linking more than two billion people worldwide.

Her son King Charles III said the death of his beloved mother was a "moment of great sadness" for him and his family and that her loss would be "deeply felt" around the world.

Kings and queens, presidents, prime ministers, celebrities and friends from across the globe were among the 2,000 guests at the Queen's funeral service at Westminster Abbey on September 19, 2022.

## ▼ Village boy' sworn in as Kenya's 5th President



**DR WILLIAM RUTO** popularly known as hustler sworn in as the fifth President of Kenya at an event attended by tens of Heads of State with all East African Community presidents and diplomats from across the world.

Ruto took the Oath on September 13 and also received the highest award in Kenya – Chief of the Order of the Golden Heart. His deputy, Rigathi Gachagua, was also sworn in shortly after him.

"A village boy has become the president of Kenya," Ruto said at the cheers of the crowd.

Hi inauguration came in a week after the Supreme Court rejected a challenge by his main political opponent, Raila Odinga.

Ruto replaced Uhuru Kenyatta, whom he served as deputy since 2013, and will have to tackle a surge in food and fuel prices, high unemployment and rising public debt used to finance development over the past 10 years under his predecessor.

# Rwanda's mountain gorillas now have Instagram account

**IN A WORLD'S FIRST**, visitors to Rwanda's Volcanoes National Park will be able to contribute to conservation efforts following the launch of an innovative use of technology to protect and conserve mountain gorillas.

Dubbed Gorilla Gram, visitors can use social media platform like Instagram and Facebook to help play an active role in gorilla conservation by sharing their own experiences and photos through the platforms.

Rwanda is home to over a third of the remaining populations of mountain gorillas in the world, and their protection has been a conservation success story in Rwanda. The country's efforts have grown the gorilla population to over 1,063 individuals, up from just 480 in 2010.

Michaella Rugwizangoga, the Chief Tourism Officer at Rwanda Development Board said it was a truly innovative approach to tourism and conservation as the sector recovers globally.





President Kagame and First Lady joined Kigali residents during Car-Free Day | Kigali, 4 September 2022



Kwita Izina Gala Night | Kigali, 4 September 2022



Funeral of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II | London, 18 September 2022



Kwita Izina  
Gala Night  
| Kigali, 4  
September  
2022



Majulah Lecture at Nanyang Technological University |  
Singapore, 30 September 2022



The 2022 Singapore Grand Prix | Singapore, 2 October 2022



Majulah Lecture at Nanyang Technological University | Singapore, 30 September 2022



7th Intergenerational Dialogue | Kigali, 25 June 2022

## ▼ Third World ▼ Coffee ▼ Producers to ▼ meet in 2023, ▼ Kigali



**AFTER TWO YEARS** of online gatherings, the World Coffee Producers Forum (WCPF) is returning to physical presence for 2023, with the event scheduled from February 13-14 in Kigali.

The Forum will bring together coffee producers from across the globe and provide a unique space to gather and discuss critical issues of common concern to growers, including sustainability, climate change, environment, and prosperity

This follows the previous ones in Medellín, Colombia in 2017, and in Campinas, Brazil in 2019.

According to Juan Esteban Orduz, the President of Colombian Coffee Federation and Chairperson of WCPF, coffee industry players should work together in seeking solutions for the sector's common problems.





## Tourism in Rwanda on recovery from Covid-19 effects

**RWANDA'S TOURISM** sector is heading to full recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world and had a major impact on the sector. After easing travel restrictions, the country is registering more than 80 per cent of the actors reporting a rebound.

The good news was revealed during the World Tourism Day 2022 on September 27 at Kigali Convention and Exhibition Village (KCEV), where different sector players convened.

The event was organized by Mastercard Foundation, Rwanda Development Board (RDB) and the Private Sector Tourism Chamber to share experiences.

According to Ariella Kageruka, Head of Tourism and Conservation at RDB, today more than 80% of the business in the sector which were affected by the pandemic are on a path to recovery- a development that gives a positive forecast for the industry.

With the sector recovering steadily, Kageruka said that there are many activities lined up ahead including hosting The Basketball Africa League (BAL) tournament again as well as the Veterans World Cup and UCI Road World Championships in 2025, all of which present a positive outlook for the sector.

## Rwanda trades under AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative



**RWANDA EXPORTED** its first consignment of goods under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement to Ghana on September 30, 2022.

The first consignment of coffee from Igire coffee, a women led coffee processing firm dealing in premium coffee. The consignment was flown to Accra by Rwandair, marking the formal start of trading under AfCFTA agreement.

“Today, the first AfCFTA Certificate of Origin for Rwanda was issued to Igire Coffee Products destined to Ghana as part of the AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative. This is the beginning of realizing increased intra-Africa Trade,” said the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Minicom).

Rwanda is among the selected eight countries to participate in the pilot phase of the AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative.

## First batch of Zimbabwean teachers set to jet in mid-October

**THE FIRST** batch of Zimbabwean educators are expected in Rwanda this mid-October. More than 200 Zimbabwean teachers completed the pre-departure training to come into the country.

The worker exchange agreement was signed between Rwanda and Zimbabwe last year which will see Zimbabweans cover the skills gap.

Zimbabwe's Permanent Secretary for Public Service, Labour, Simon Masanga said that successful candidates who completed the pre-departure training were to be airlifted to Kigali on October 17.

Masanga said that the recruitment process was still ongoing. The agreement is expected to recruit at least 477 Zimbabwean teachers.



# EBOLA: Rwanda steps up vigilance at border points

BY JEJJE MUHINDE

## THE RWANDA

**BIOMEDICAL** Centre (RBC) has stepped up vigilance at all border points, following weeks of outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in neighboring Uganda.

Uganda health authorities declared the outbreak of Ebola disease on September 20, caused by Sudan virus. Following laboratory confirmation of a patient from Mubende district, the epicenter in central Uganda.

So far, the disease has claimed seven lives including a Tanzanian doctor working in Uganda and 65 health workers.

This is the first Ebola disease outbreak caused by Sudan virus (SUDV) in Uganda since 2012, but Rwanda has not suffered a single Ebola case in the past.

According to Rwanda's Health Ministry through RBC, healthcare workers dressed in protective gear at Kagitumba and Gatuna border are measuring temperatures of travelers and noting down their passages and tracker drivers histories to prevent cross-border infections.

Passengers entering Rwanda from Uganda are undergoing a screening exercise at the different points of entry to prevent the spread of the disease.



RBC says that all passengers including track drivers are being screened at the border point of entry, taking their temperatures to prevent the disease from spreading in Rwanda.

Health workers at the Gatuna and Kagitumba borders are taking temperatures of travellers and taking down their travel histories as Kigali seeks to prevent cross-border infections.

According to RBC, when passengers arrive at the border, a health task force takes the temperature, in addition to other Ebola symptoms like diarrhea, headache, and vomiting, sore throat as well as eventually bleeding," RBC said.

In case a traveler's temperature is above 38. Degrees Celsius, he or she is put in a holding room at the border for some time before

the test process is repeated.

If the temperature remains the same after other measures, that passage is quarantined at the holding room before he or she is transferred to the hospital.

"We have special rooms at the border points with the required medical equipment and bed capacity to accommodate all the travelers on a day," RBC noted.

Rwanda has vaccinated over 200,000 people against Ebola, mostly in the Western Province according to data from the health ministry.

More than 200-300 travelers cross at border points from Uganda every day; RBC adds that they have the capacity to screen passengers. However, they noted that, if a passenger is coming from epic center Mubende, they are quarantined for 21 days

before they are allowed to proceed with their journey.

RBC further says, "All passengers have to fill a travelers surveillance form, which includes all details like passport and phone number, town of departure, length of stay as well as destination in Uganda"

Meanwhile other measures that Rwanda has put in place include sensitization and media awareness campaigns.

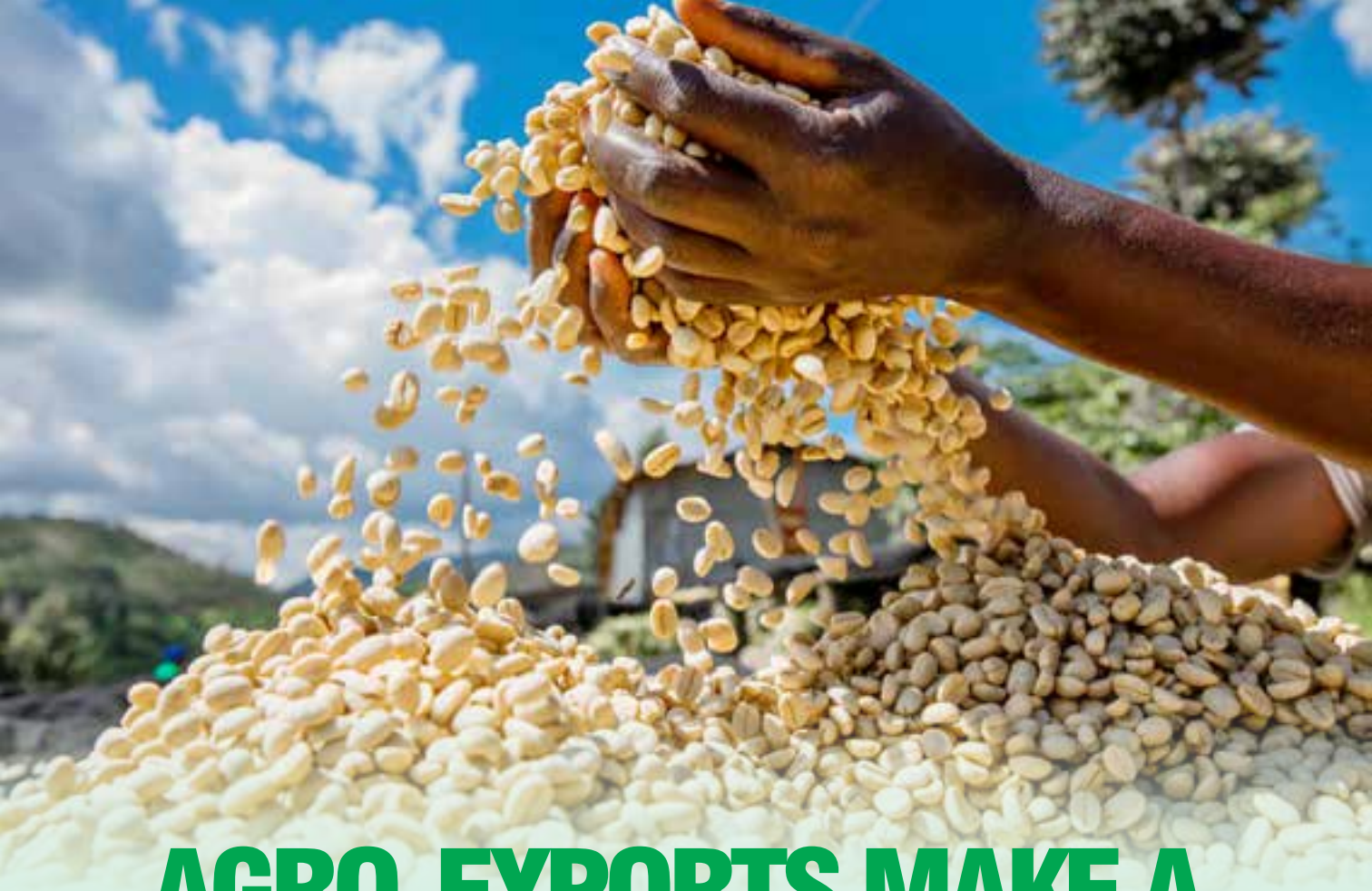
Some of the residents in Kayonza have urged relatives and friends going to Uganda to wait because the disease is spreading very fast.

"We hear that Ebola is affecting Ugandans, I believe it's not safe to travel there now. As a Rwandan, I don't know if the Ugandan government will take care of me incase am affected, it's not like here in Rwanda where we get all the medical requirements," said Seraphin Kayitesi.

Though Trinity Bus transport company manager at Kayonza district who prefers not to be named says that passengers are normally booking to travel to Uganda, there is no problem as long as they take precautionary measures while in Uganda."

Meanwhile, RBC through its statement is advising the public to be aware of anyone who is showing symptoms to inform authorities or call the RBC call centre which is toll free number 114.

Experts have also said that one of the problems faced when it comes to screening travelers is that of illegal border crossing.



# AGRO-EXPORTS MAKE A TURNAROUND 2021/22

## RWANDA'S AGRO-EXPORT REVENUES RISE MORE THAN 7 TIMES

BY GEORGE KALISA

**RWANDA'S AGRICULTURE** sector recorded a substantial increase in total export revenues that jumped from \$444,862,192 in the 2020/21FY to \$640,952,297 representing an increase of 44.08 per cent. Agro-export revenues have been on the upward trend two years in a row with a long jump happening this fiscal year from six (6) per cent last year.

The latest Agro-exports report indicates that the total export revenues registered growth of 45.07 per cent in June this year.

"During June 2022, total export revenues were \$66,866,753 compared to \$46,094,144 in 2021 the same period, representing an increase of 45.07 %," says a report released by the National Agricultural Export Development Board (NAEB) on September 12, 2022.

NAEB attributes the sector's excellent performance to mostly economic recovery measures and movement of goods and people in 2021-2022.

Restrictions on the movement of people and goods were one of the measures imposed in the previous year by pretty

much all nations to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. And, the travel bans affected many sectors of the economy including Agriculture, the reason why it recorded a slight increase of six per cent.

NAEB officials, also, blamed last year's poor performance of the sector on price fluctuations and climate change on which traditional export commodities such as tea and coffee largely depend.

"Imposed lockdowns around the world dictated many closures of tea and coffee consumer companies – this made coffee export volumes reduce by 14.41



in 2020-2021 fiscal year,” said Joshua Rugema, Ag Chairman of the board of directors at NAEB while explaining causes of an average performance of the sub-sector.

“(…) traditional export commodities – tea, coffee and pyrethrum did not perform as expected due to international price fluctuations and climate change that affected production,” added Rugema.

## FACTORS BEHIND THE GOOD PERFORMANCE

NAEB officials told this reporter during a visit to the Board’s Head Offices that winter season overseas, nature of clients and increase in Agricultural commodities were other factors responsible for such an amazing performance.

“This increase in term of revenues is justified by economic recovery measures and movement of goods and people in 2021-2022 compared to 2020-2021, where cross borders movements were affected by coronavirus pandemic emerged in the country in mid-March 2020 with related consequences” states the report in part.

NAEB, also, attributes the increase which is more than seven times higher than that of last year to movement of people and goods following a lift of travel bans by most countries.

Non-traditional export commodities, in the lead, fetched \$455,509,464 in the fiscal year 2021/2022 translating to an increase of 58 per cent whereas traditional export commodities increased by 18 per cent. Cereals and grains’ export revenues increased by 44%, accounting for 20.8% of total agro-export revenues.

“In comparison to the fiscal year 2020/2021, horticulture commodities accounted for 6.7% of total agro-export



“This increase in term of revenues is justified by economic recovery measures and movement of goods and people in 2021-2022 compared to 2020-2021, where cross borders movements were affected by coronavirus pandemic emerged in the country in mid-March 2020 with related consequences” states the report in part.

revenues with an increase of vegetable and fruit export values of 63% and 87%, respectively”.

NAEB blamed the ongoing Russia and Ukraine crisis for the poor performance of flowers that recorded a decline in both quantities and revenues - “flower export quantities and revenues have decreased (5% and 13%, respectively) as a result of the ongoing political crisis between Russia and Ukraine, both of which are major importers of flowers”.

Of the three traditional export commodities coffee topped with an increment of 23 per cent.

“Coffee export revenues increased by 23% while tea export revenues increased by 15% and pyrethrum export revenues increased by 12%,” adds a statement from NAEB.

“For the mentioned period, traditional export commodities increased by 18 per cent while non-traditional export commodities increased by 58.35%,” said the report.

The report further revealed that both export and re-export increments are related to the current economic recovery where most economic activities resumed with more movement of people and goods in the region and abroad.

“Transport of people to Europe and other destinations became regular, which is allowing to trade with Europe and the rest of the world. Tea, Coffee, unit prices also are showing positive trends thus influencing the realized good export performance compared to the same period of 2020-2021”.

## EXPORT VOLUMES ON THE RISE

Apart from the good prices at the international market increased quantities of nearly all the agricultural export commodities. Both traditional export and nontraditional export commodities shot up.

## LEAD STORY

Though the high quality of Rwanda's exports outweighs other factors in attracting competitive prices, the swelling of amounts of each export item supplied on the international market is a constant determinant of the revenues any country can fetch from exports.

More amounts of vegetables and fruits were exported in 2021-22 than in the previous fiscal year.

Rwanda exported 25,221,596Kg of vegetables and 16,207,439Kgs of fruits earning \$21,383,939 and \$14,623,733 recording a significant increase of 87.5 per cent and 63.3 per cent.

Coffee registered a bigger increment than tea though the country exported more volumes of the latter at 22.87 per cent compared with 15 per cent respectively.

The report indicates that 35,404,742Kgs of tea up from 34,394,268Kgs were exported and gained \$103,499,994 against 15,184,566Kgs of coffee from 16,880,926 that brought \$75,571,428 into the country.

The average price for coffee is \$4.98 compared with \$2.92 of tea. Last fiscal year Rwanda exported 16,880,926Kgs of coffee and hence it recorded a slight fall in the amount of coffee exported in 2021-2022.

Concerning flowers exports, the country exported 1,130,243Kgs and generated \$6,854,822.

### COFFEE PRICE RISE EXCITES PLAYERS IN SUB-SECTOR

Happy times for key players in the coffee sector including exporters and ordinary coffee farmers that started three years ago have stretched into 2022 despite a temporary slight price setback. The price has now shot up after a short-lived price fall between June and July.



Statistics obtained from NAEB indicate that Rwanda exported 299.56 tonnes of coffee worth US\$2,000,650 within just one week during August. The price of Rwandan coffee on the international market jumped to a record high of US\$6.6 per kilogramme (approx. Rwf.6,600) representing 34.7 per cent increase.

This implies that at least 400,000 Rwandan coffee farmers have valid reasons to celebrate and invest more efforts in the upcoming local growing season that starts around September. This follows the good news that coffee prices for the Rwandan coffee is likely to maintain a record high of US\$6.6 at the international market

Generally, the coffee sector at both the domestic and foreign market has maintained a steadfast growth three years in a row as a result of a

substantial rise in coffee prices at the international market.

Before the unprecedented coffee price rise for Rwandan coffee, one kilogramme cost \$4.9 (approx. Rwf.5,000) up from \$3.1 (approx. Rwf3,000) before 2019 translating to 36.7 per cent increase.

Oreste Baragahorana, Vice Chairman for Coffee Exporters and Processors Association of Rwanda (CEPAR) told local media late August this year that despite of a slight fall in coffee price in July, the price had started picking up – reviving hopes among farmers for attractive revenues at the end of the season.

Rwanda's coffee season starts off in September up to March when harvesting starts. CEPAR is non-political and non-profit membership umbrella organization of coffee farmers in Rwanda.

Baragahorana confirmed that since the beginning of 2022 coffee prices have been on the upward trend.

"The sector started recording a rise in prices at the beginning of this year into June," Baragahorana disclosed.

The impressive performance of the sector has impacted on the Gross

Generally, the coffee sector at both the domestic and foreign market has maintained a steadfast growth three years in a row as a result of a substantial rise in coffee prices at the international market.





Local farmers told Rwanda Dispatch that cooperative farming has variously changed their livelihoods, and the government is supportive.

“Even before harvest season and bad seasons, they access money for school fees, health insurance and for meeting other essentials of life,” said Jean Paul Mutimura, the President of Bahuzamugambi ba Kawa ba Maraba Cooperative.

“The SACCO, also, gives them loans to buy more land to expand their coffee farms and meet other day-to-day demands,” observed Mutimura.

For Simon Mutangana, President of UNICOOPAGI in Nyamagabe District observes that they have been able to support members improve production through 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 wheat and commercialize activities.”

The unexpected rise in agricultural export revenues is a valid reason for the Rwandan farmers and government at large to celebrate. It is a source of more optimism for a better price and a hope which is a catalyst to farmers at the onset of the farming season.

Notably, the high quality specialty coffee has made Rwanda gain more leverage on the international market.

Now, experts say the sector’s performance will improve leading to a substantial increase in the economic growth rate - a prediction based on its current glaring performance.

This is one of the indicators that Rwanda’s massive efforts in effecting economic recovery have started paying off.

Domestic Product (GDP) of the East African nation.

Notably, much as the coffee export revenues trends are impressive, they are still far below the national target of \$95 million by 2024.

Commenting on the annual performance, NAEB’s CEO, Claude BIZIMANA said: “We are pleased that, in addition to other opportunities, the agro-export sector contributes significantly to job retention and creation. We will build on this year’s strong performance by looking for new and innovative ways to keep Rwanda’s agribusiness environment adaptable and competitive while drawing in the interest of international markets.”

## GOV’T INVESTS IN AGRICULTURE TO FAST TRACK RECOVERY

Rwanda’s economy is struggling to recover from shocks hugely blamed on the COVID-19 pandemic that left many economies globally on their knees. With many now struggling to pursue economic recovery measures and strategies, and notably Rwanda is

**“This increase in term of revenues is justified by economic recovery measures and movement of goods and people in 2021-2022 compared to 2020-2021, where cross borders movements were affected by coronavirus pandemic emerged in the country in mid-March 2020 with related consequences” states the report in part.**

already on the right track to recovery with a tinge hope for a breakthrough.

It’s against this backdrop that Rwanda massively invested in recovery strategies and undertook measures, especially by financially supporting key sectors of her economy including Agriculture.

The government of Rwanda gave substantial financial support through NAEB to help the sector stand on its feet again. Over 70 per cent of the Rwandan population directly or indirectly depends on Agriculture for a living.



# 5YRS INTO PRESIDENT KAGAME'S THIRD TERM

- SYMBOL OF STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT
- STELLAR MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC



BY GONZAGA MUGANWA

ON 18TH AUGUST 2022 marked exactly five years since President Paul Kagame was sworn to office for a third seven year term that came after a popular movement demanded for the amendment of the Constitution to allow him run again. The Constitution was tinkered with in such a way that term limits were not removed but exception made for the incumbent to be in office possibly up to 2034.

An analysis shows that President Kagame has in the last five years largely lived up to the

expectations of those who urged him to remain in office. He has remained a steady guarantor of national peace, stability, continued economic growth, and more significantly a source of hope for a better future.

## HIGHLIGHTS

The demand that Mr. Kagame continue in office was informed by his record in stabilizing the country, a degree of unity and delivering public goods and services. Investors saw in his continued management a guarantee of their continued success.

The biggest highlight of the last five years was the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic which slowed economic growth and delayed implementation of many programs. What is obvious is the way Mr. Kagame managed the pandemic which was stellar, not politicized and followed science as he promised during a brief speech at the beginning of the first lockdown in March

2020. The population largely cooperated with the measures health experts introduced.

True to his foresight, Mr. Kagame anticipated that the pandemic would reach Rwanda when other officials thought it would remain in China. At a government retreat weeks before, he grilled the then health minister, unimpressed he soon replaced her and prepared early for the shock. The health care system was quickly equipped and when vaccines became available, Rwanda was one of the most ready countries to roll out and thereafter delivered one of the quickest and competent vaccinations programs in Africa. For long term goals, Mr. Kagame's government has worked with partners to make sure Africa builds capability to manufacture vaccines and other important medicines on the continent.

## CHOGM WAS A FINE HOUR

The successful hosting of the

Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) this year, twice delayed because of the pandemic was a fine hour for Mr. Kagame. Rwanda has structured itself as centre for conferences and tourism and built services and infrastructure around that. CHOGM was the biggest and most prominent of the many gatherings that have happened. It was a prestigious moment for the leader.

The completion of the Kigali Arena in record time improved hosting capability with Basketball Africa League being launched in Kigali, other sports and entertainment events followed, a boon for the growing affluent middle class. Other sports infrastructure completed include the stadia at Bugesera, Nyagatare, Ngoma and rapid improvements are ongoing at Amahoro and Huye stadiums.

The big service infrastructure so far is increased access to electricity from 35% to 73% of households, with the target of achieving 100% access looking realistic in a few years. There is also considerable increase in access to safe water, street lighting, paved roads and model villages.

Another significant achievement is that the education policy seems to be finally being properly organized. During this term a dramatic building of classrooms and toilets in public schools was carried out, an engaging education policy paper review is underway. Education reforms have culminated in increase of teachers' salaries and benefits beginning with this financial year.

## TENSE REGIONAL RELATIONS

During the last five years Rwanda has enjoyed both good and bad relations with neighbors particularly relations with DR Congo, Uganda and Burundi remaining thorny.

Mr. Kagame, at first, enjoyed good working relations with DR Congo's Felix Tshisekedi which



have since collapsed following the resumption of M23 rebellion in North Kivu. The presence in Eastern Congo of armed groups including various factions of FDLR remains a salient issue for Rwanda.

The relations with Uganda, the most important of all, were for the most part of the five years very tense with borders closed for three years over accusations of supporting dissidents bent on destabilizing Rwanda. Since relations have improved and the border is open though the flow of goods remains limited. Burundi relations remain work in progress after some engagements by top officials from both sides.

## DYNAMIC FOREIGN POLICY

The deployment of troops in Mozambique and Central Africa Republic when the situations looked bleak, not only proved that Mr. Kagame leads well trained and agile security forces, but also improved Rwanda's diplomatic standing, strategic maneuver, future economic dividends and of course the prestige and influence of the president.

Practicing non-ideological but pragmatic relations with countries both big and middle powers; Rwanda enjoys good ties with middle east powers like Turkey, Qatar, Israel, UAE even when amongst themselves they have disputes.

During this term, Mr. Kagame hosted French President Emmanuel Macron, Prime Minister Nirendra Modi of India, President Xi Jinping of China, the Emir of Qatar and met Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin at various times. Many African leaders including Samia Suruhu of Tanzania visited.

Mr. Kagame oversaw African Union reforms, a well thought through package of actionable steps however implementation after the first phase and results remain tricky largely owing to the personnel in-charge in Addis

**During this term, Mr. Kagame hosted French President Emmanuel Macron, Prime Minister Nirendra Modi of India, President Xi Jinping of China, the Emir of Qatar and met Tayyip Erdogan and Vladimir Putin at various times. Many African leaders including Samia Suruhu of Tanzania visited.**

Ababa and their lack of gravitas.

Mr. Kagame was African Union chairperson in 2018 presiding over one of the most successful and consequential leaderships on the continental body in recent years. Defining unity as his starting point, Mr. Kagame worked for a more assertive and visible Africa. The signing of the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement during a summit hosted at the glittering Kigali Convention Centre in March 2018 was a major highlight.

However Mr. Kagame's AU chairmanship was not successful on all subjects, for example an attempt he led to mediate after President Joseph Kabila fudged presidential elections in DRC and handed over power to Felix Tshisekedi in an underhand deal collapsed after the Trump administration recognised the declared winner and major African countries like South Africa followed suit all keen to protect their business and strategic interests.

## CONTROVERSIAL BUT HUGELY POPULAR

The lead up to the 2017 polls was interesting as Mr. Kagame has repeatedly said he would not be seeking to remain in office past his second term. At one time he made it clear before the ruling party RPF- Inkotanyi gathering that it would be a

failure on his part if he failed to organize a succession. It soon became change, continuity and stability mantra that led to inevitable change of constitution though without controversy. While Mr. Kagame faced no outright challenge within the dominant Rwandan Patriotic Front, it was not all smooth as some senior cadres had started laying groundwork to be in pole position in case he didn't run.

However this was soon brought to a halt with the firing of then Justice Minister and Attorney General Tharciss Karugarama. This followed the minister's interview with UK Guardian Newspaper in which he insisted that the Constitution would be followed as it was. Mr. Karugarama's firing was an indicator to all cadres what the line was.

## POPULAR DEMAND

What is undisputed is that there was popular demand from many citizens whether organized or spontaneous to demand for amendment of the Constitution. As reported by parliament, more than three million voters signed petitions demanding legislators take action and this followed swiftly.

Significantly those opposed to amending the Constitution had no organized platform apart from a few radio and TV talk-shows. The referendum was announced and held within a week with the document citizens voting on unpublished, no campaigns for or against were held.

However facing off with minor opponents, Mr. Kagame campaigned throughout July 2017 greeted by hundreds of thousands at triumphant rallies across the country. The emotions with which the masses welcomed him some having to wait for hours and walk tens of kilometers indicated that they were solidly invested in his leadership. On voting day it was a clear landslide.

## KAGAME INEVITABLE IN 2024

Throughout the last five years, the content of the political opposition has not changed much, the internal official opposition remains weak with just four seats out of 80 in Chamber of Deputies. Longtime oppositionist and ex-convict, Victoire Ingabire Umehoza was given conditional presidential pardon and hasn't managed to generate momentum despite founding another party. The story of Paul Rusesabagina and his improbable arrival in Kigali, court case and international media attention and lobbying by some Western politicians remains significant. Mr. Rusesabagina of the Hotel Rwanda movie fame was charged related to his association with a rebel group MRCD-FLN based in Congo and Burundi which severally attacked civilians around Nyungwe forest, clear terrorist acts since they avoided attacking military targets.

The exiled opposition willingness to take to armed rebellion seemed to be about to bare results when some officials in Uganda government allegedly provided support. An attack by an FDLR faction RUD-Urunana left several dead but was quickly beaten back by security forces. Cutting off the support and collaboration from elements in Uganda and Burundi was a significant diplomatic step and undermined the opposition factions standing significantly.

With this weak, less organized opposition and no emerging charismatic challenger, Mr. Kagame seems on course to be elected for a fourth term in August 2024, unless he surprises the world and not seek nomination again. What remains to watch is if a new opposition could emerge internally and what the increasingly restless young educated people will decide to do and how much accommodation exists for them in the system.

# RESOURCES MISAPPROPRIATION IS HISTORY IN COOPERATIVES - RCA DIRECTOR GENERAL

**Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA) approves elected cooperative leaders before they assume office and the agency upholds integrity as irrefutable value. Prof. Dr. Jean Bosco Harelimana, Director General of RCA talked to Rwanda Dispatch's George Kalisa in a one-on-one interview late September. Prof. Harelimana elaborates why mismanagement is fast becoming history. Excerpts below:**



**Q: Professor, could you please give us a brief background of cooperatives and RCA?**

**A:** RCA is a public institution established in 2007 to promote, register and regulate cooperatives. RCA started with about 200 cooperatives having at least 300,000 members, thereafter were empowered through capacity development.

Today, cooperatives total 10, 876 with 5.3million from all socio-economic classes. We proudly reiterate that we're number one employer of the economy because all cooperative members are active and working together to progress - currently with huge gains that are beyond anyone's expectation.

Growth in membership has meant corresponding increase in share capital rated at Rwf53 billion today. There are financial and non-commercial cooperatives.

**Q: RCA's core mandate is to promote cooperatives and capacity building. Any successes recorded so far?**

**A:** Since RCA's inception, we promoted the spirit of working together encouraging Rwandans to join cooperatives. From 200 members to 5.3 million representing 72 per cent of active population is a milestone worth celebrating. In brief, the great efforts directed towards mobilization of Rwandan farmers have taken the cooperative movement to greater heights. In 2019, Rwanda hosted the International Cooperatives Alliance (ICA) summit that attracted over 10,000 people globally which was a great opportunity to exchange best practices and lessons in regard to building cooperative movements.

Rwanda gained a lot from this summit and the gains include - the decision to have



the East Africa Community (EAC) Head Office of Cooperatives here, negotiations are underway in reference to modalities.

To build capacity, Boards of Directors and Supervisory Committees for more than 2,000 cooperatives receive trainings annually. The government of Rwanda fulfills this mandate through RCA. The choice of the cooperatives to undergo training is incumbent on the inspection and audit conducted by RCA.

Training is part of RCA's mandate and in this, we've some success stories like Abahuzamugambi ba Kawa ba Maraba, Gisovu - Muko Tea Growers Cooperative known as COOTHEGIM, Cooperative for the Promotion of Rice Cultivation -Ntende and Kiyaga cooperative whose members have already been trained.

On regulation, we always design and have formulated laws on different value chains. Currently, we have a new cooperative law but RCA has created awareness to ensure that all members understand, before it came into force.

According to this law, it's obligatory for a cooperative operate a savings fund -*Ejo heza, Community Based Health Insurance, Solidarity*. In case of a member encounters basic financial problems say school fees the cooperative uses the solidarity fund.

Equally important is the Training fund because a cooperative takes the role of a University in rural areas where members mostly the uneducated can access new technologies and acquire new skills. Hence, it becomes easier to promote ICT in a bid to facilitate cooperatives efficiently manage resources. RCA is working with the Ministry of ICT and Innovation and other partners.

**Q: It's nearly 2 years since RCA launched a 5-year strategic plan.**

**Training is part of RCA's mandate and in this, we've some success stories like Abahuzamugambi ba Kawa ba Maraba, Gisovu - Muko Tea Growers Cooperative known as COOTHEGIM, Cooperative for the Promotion of Rice Cultivation -Ntende and Kiyaga cooperative whose members have already been trained.**

**What are its tangible uptake so far?**

**A:** This is an interesting question. The 5-year strategic plan spells out increasing productivity in the cooperative movement as a key priority. There's documented evidence in agriculture and agribusiness sectors about the increasing productivity, and these trends are attributed to efforts by RCA, RAB, MINAGRI, NAEB and other partners. Tea, coffee, maize, rice, horticulture and services sub-sectors are good examples of increased productivity as you may have seen.

Gains have translated into improvement of farmers' livelihoods. Relatedly, linkages between farmers and financial institutions have eased their ability to meet day-to-day financial needs, and this has been buttressed by a direct linkage between financial cooperatives and non-financial cooperatives.

*Agakiriro ka Gisozi*, a new market formed by cooperatives, hosts stalls that have increased traders' convenience in doing business due to vantage location. These are some of the achievements that have followed the implementation of the ongoing strategic plan, which aligns with National Strategy for transformation (NSTI) – We are on the right path.

A good example of increased ICT uptakes is in Irish potatoes cooperatives, where farmers use smartphones with simple softwares not only to facilitate knowing the quantity produced or prices but also the historic background to help

them deal directly with banks and Financial Institutions. Hitherto, farmers were not financed because there was missing data, a problem ICT has solved.

**Q: Usually people involved in Agriculture are prey to middlemen who offer the lowest price. How are you handling this issue?**

**A:** Currently, we have 18 staff in the northern and western Rwanda working with farmers in Rubavu, Nyabihu, Musanze, Gicumbi and Burera to eliminate middlemen whose presence may translate to failure of cooperatives. That is, when cooperatives operate well, middlemen will be completely eliminated. We're working with other institutions to ensure success on this.

**Q: Ten years or so, cooperatives in Rwanda were neutralized by massive corruption and misappropriation of funds. How did you deal with this?**

**A:** The GoR through RCA developed and implemented different strategies to ascertain that no single coin is mismanaged by cooperatives' leadership. After the election of board of directors and supervisory committees we offer mandatory training to equip them with managerial and financial skills to help deliver on their roles.

Based on a new law under force, government reserves a right to suspend any suspected of fraud to allow investigations and ensure return of allegedly embezzled funds. After election, RCA approves leaders before they assume duties and the agency upholds integrity as irrefutable value.

That's why mismanagement is fast becoming history, and our stance on accountability and transparency is uncontested. The government protects public funds - no one can now touch them, and it has restored public trust in the cooperative movement.

**Equally important is the Training fund because a cooperative takes the role of a University in rural areas where members mostly the uneducated can access new technologies and acquire new skills.**



# COOPRORIZ:

## Boosting rice production in Kamonyi

**F**or many years, rice farmers in Kamonyi District were unorganized and without a processing mill for their produce. Farmers would grow, harvest and winnow rice using traditional and rudimentary methods. Today, COOPRORIZ-Abahuzabikorwa have upped the

rice value chains increasing the quality and quantity of rice.

COOPRORIZ-Abahuzabikorwa is a cooperative of 2,198 rice growers in Mukunguri wetland found in Nyamiyaga Sector between Kamonyi and Ruhango districts. The cooperative was established



**Ignace Mugenzi, the President of  
COOPRORIZ-Abahuzabikorwa**

in 2006 by over 500 members to improve rice production.





and each grouping has its own leadership structure like that of the cooperative. The leadership structure of the cooperative has a committee of five members, technical committee composed of staff who are the manager, accountant and agronomists.

### **Reducing costs through enhancing rice processing and increasing incomes**

Following the improvement of productivity, now the cooperative faced a problem of processing the produce. From the rudimentary processing ways before the formation of the cooperative they started transporting rice to a small plant provided by Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI).

This nearest available plant where they would process their rice was Kabuye Rice Mill in Kigali which was tens of kms away. Transportation costs were high affecting farmer's profits and farmers could not get a chance to consume their own produce because it would automatically be sold in Kigali.

Realizing the big potential of rice production from Mukunguri they decided to put more efforts in undertaking processing themselves targeting both quantity and quality improvement which called for a processing plant in the area.

Ignace Mugenzi, the President of the cooperative observes that they chose rice growing because its an exceptional crop that fights hunger, fetches a good income and members love the crop.

Mugenzi underlines that before they formed the cooperative, their production was low and poor because they lacked agricultural inputs like improved seeds, fertilizers and everyone did as they pleased without any research.

At the time productivity stood at 2 tonnes per hectare which has

been improved to 5.5 or 7 tonnes per hectare. This transformation happened as members become commercial farmers and apply modern farming.

Reaching at this productivity has been a journey where the cooperative has invested starting with the changing of farmers mindset to be organized in different zones, conducted research like testing the soils to know what inputs are required that is fertilizers and seeds.

Cultivation is organized in 13 zones





In 2011, together with stakeholders like Kamonyi District, the cooperative sought for investors starting with those they were working with closely and presented them with a business plan to establish a modern rice plant.

From their limited means, the cooperative started with shareholding of 38% which had a share value of Rwf57.9 million. The rest of the shares went to investors while emphasizing an independent management for efficient and effective operations of the factory.

According to the president of the cooperative, the rice mill came as a solution to rice farmers improving rice production, processing, storage and marketing. Farmers enhanced their rice by value addition and creation of employment in the area.

The new factory, Mukunguri Rice Mill started operations in 2013 and it helped cut losses, increased farmers incomes and boosted the economic activities of the area through creation of employment.

Farmers say, the existence of Mukunguri Rice Mill tremendously improved both quality of their produce and cut costs they incurred during production from other factories.

Mugenzi explains that, farmers had been producing low yields because of the rudimentary production methods and transport all the way to Kabuye Rice Mill which was too expensive and time consuming.

He underlined that the cooperative as well as farmers could end up with little or no profit at the end of the season. In addition to this, they produced poor quality rice that could not favorably compete on the market.

The rice factory has also created employment to residents where a good number of residents are employed on a permanent basis and during the harvesting period more casual workers are engaged.

The establishment of COOPRORIZ-Abahuzabikorwa

led to more developments like electricity and water supply in Nyamiyaga sector which has benefited all residents. A new trading centre was also developed as a result of the boosting activities and attracted financial as well as other commercial institutions to the area.

As the factory work moved on smoothly, they soon realized that there was a lot of rice hulls or husks that could be used to produce other products. With proper techniques, rice hulls are made into briquette used as fuel.

These briquettes are becoming a very good alternative to using trees as a source of fuel which normally would lead to destroying the environment. COOPRORIZ-Abahuzabikorwa makes these briquette and their primary customers are prison facilities.







The president of the cooperative observes that they continue to look for more income generating activities to benefit members, the cooperative became involved in supplying agricultural inputs as agro dealers.

Operating as agro-dealers providing all kinds of inputs earned them more ideas and the latest investment is a maize factory. The new factory target maize farmers in both Kamonyi and Ruhango districts.

Mugenzi revealed that there are also plans to start another factory which will produce animal feeds. With already two factories for rice and maize, the cooperative is planning to utilize the byproducts to get nutritious animal feeds.

### Improving farmers' livelihoods

The cooperative started with minority shares in Mukunguri Rice Mill but with time it kept investing and today has the majority shareholding at 71% which is a big advantage to members because they can now get dividends.

To farmers, the factory ensured a stable market and they would also get quality rice to feed their families. This increased farmers' incomes, improved households' food security and livelihoods.

Farmers under the cooperative receive between 20% to 30% from own production for home

consumption. The cooperative ensures that the rice given to farmers is processed where they receive quality rice.

"Farmers also have a ready market for all rice produced and we keep increasing our production since there are bigger opportunities," notes Mugenzi.

The benefits to farmers are immense, the primary objective of the cooperative was to make sure that farmers can improve their farming activities so that they can benefit financially and be food secure.

Today, the cooperative provides its members with all the required agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and post-harvest tools. The cooperative ensures that their farmers have all that is required to have enhanced productivity, this is done at no cost until production is sold and the cooperative deducts off what it gave to farmers during payment.

Mugenzi explains that, members have been encouraged to form and undertake other activities. They started with sharing of small livestock between members until everyone had at least a goat. The cooperative also established farms for pigs and gave some to members, they have now advanced into girinka, where at least 241 members have received and shared cows among themselves.

The girinka program is implemented among zones, this is also intended to build trust and unity among members working in the same area.

As cooperative members continue to form and involve in different economic activities, they have been encouraged to utilize financial services and do savings. Today, every member of the cooperative has a bank account which also ensures access to finance and the cooperative is a guarantor to every member.

Since the establishment of COOPRORIZ-Abahuzabikorwa much has been achieved to improve rice production and the welfare of people in the area. The inception of Mukunguri Rice Mill further catalyzed development in Kamonyi. The quality of rice has considerably improved and now competes countrywide.

The only challenge the area still faces is the unpaved road leading to Nyamiyaga that still presents the area as semi-remote which makes transport of people and production to the area longer and expensive.

The president of the cooperative emphasizes that they have been at the centre of development in the area and appreciates what government has done for them through the development of Mukunguri marshland and their contribution is seen by everyone.

COOPRORIZ-Abahuzabikorwa is grateful to HE President Paul Kagame for his leadership as well as all public institutions who have supported its growth and to their partners that have been critical in the successes that the cooperative has achieved.



# COOPRORIZ RUSULI RWAMUGINGA CYARUBARE: Paving way for members' wellbeing

until 2004 that they got their first provisional registration certificate, becoming a fully-fledged cooperative in 2013.

With 908 members, 393 are women and 515 men who cultivate 177 hectares, mostly growing rice on 120 hectares of the land while other crops including maize and vegetables are grown on 57 hectares.

Initially, farmers in the area were never united under the same cause as everyone grew whatever they preferred like sweet potatoes or cassava but many remained poor until they agreed to work together in a cooperative.

**L**ocal farming development potentialities in Huye District are currently either fully or partially utilized, agricultural policy emphasizes on the strategy of Rice farmers working together to enhance productivity as different stakeholder will be able to help them.

A great deal of better rice

farming potential lies in Cooproriz Rusuli Rwamuginga Cyarubare, as it covers Ruhashya, Rwaniro and Rusatira sectors in Huye district, southern province presenting good opportunities for members.

According to Pierre Singirankabo, the president of the cooperative, Rusuli rice growers began working together in 2000, but it wasn't






## RICE FARMING

Participatory development process encourages partnership arrangements between the main private and public stakeholders which enables joint design and implementation of a common farming strategy, by making use of the local resources and competitive advantage in the district context, with the final objective of creating decent jobs and stimulating local economic activity.

In the early years of the cooperative it also faced challenges of mismanagement that slowed the progress of Cooproriz Rusuli Rwamungu Cyarubare, but these mischiefs came to pass by at least 2015.

"Before 2015, our annual production was very low at less than 100 tons on the same 120 hectares we farm today, this has increased to over 500 tons the cooperative supplies to the factory not counting the rice retained by farmers for their own consumption." Iyamuremye observes.

Iyamuremye revealed that about 400 tons is not supplied to the factory as farmers prefer to retain part of their produce but they planing to process all production at the factory in the near future.



**Cooproriz Rusuli Rwamungu Cyarubare has been able to create jobs thus curbing down youth unemployment to alleviate poverty while promoting economic transformation and reducing the population share in subsistence agriculture as well as increasing income levels.**

Eric Iyamuremye, the manager of Cooproriz Rusuli Rwamungu Cyarubare notes that, things started to change in 2005 with the introduction of communal farming system that encouraged farmers to work together focusing on one crop. This attracted partners like the Catholic Relief Service (CRS) who came to support in developing the marshlands for the cooperative to cultivate.

The Catholic Relief Service also helped in organizing farmers into saving groups that later saw members increase from the initial 203 farmers to the current membership status.





bad and good times.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, when many were affected by movement restrictions, the cooperative supported its members ensuring that everyone had food and other basic needs.

Supplied produce is later marketed and sold by the factory and the money is paid through the cooperative. Member farmers are thereafter paid through Impamba, a Microfinance that works with the cooperative which also ensures that members have access to finance.

Working with the Microfinance helps members acquire loans without any security because the cooperative provides surety for its members. This access to finance has helped many start income generating projects to improve their wellbeing.

Cooprroz Rusuli Rwamuginga Cyarubare has been able to create jobs thus curbing down youth unemployment to alleviate poverty while promoting economic transformation and reducing the population share in subsistence agriculture as well as increasing income levels.

"Our farmers are now able to afford needs like health insurance, Ejo Heza pension scheme, access to finance,



build houses, buy motorcycles, and easily afford school fees for their children." Iyamuremye underscores.

The Cooperative has been able to introduce Girinka program where they have so far been able to give out cows to at least 30 members but with hope of every member to own some livestock.

Singirankabo observes that, members of the cooperative benefits from different programs that have been established, these include economic as well as social support they extend in

Innocent Bizimana, a member and also the ice President of the cooperative explains that there are many advantages of being a member of the cooperative compared to other residents of the area because members can easily access all social necessities and improve their lives.

Bizimana explains that basic necessities like health insurance is no longer an issue for members of the cooperative and their welfare if guaranteed as compared to other members of the community.

The factory owned by ICM Rwanda at Gikonko also gives members of the cooperative with quality processed rice at the wholesale price for home consumption.

Where other farmers are struggling to access agricultural inputs, at Cooprroz Rusuli Rwamuginga Cyarubare members are given the inputs during the planting season and the cost is only deducted later





when they are receiving their payments.

"Members of the cooperative have been able to get some trainings through capacity building to enhance their skills and learn good agricultural practices which they can also pass on to other farmers," notes the president of the cooperative.

Through the support of The United States African Development Foundation (USADF), the cooperative has been able to acquire a vehicle to easy transportation. Rusuri cooperative was also able to buy land and built premises for their secretariat.

The manager of the cooperative revealed that they have acquired more land which will be used to expand their activities like office, drying and storage facilities as they anticipate increase in productivity.

More investments have been made and others are envisaged in the near future. The cooperative has built a big conference halls that hosts events like meetings, weddings and other gatherings.

The presence of the cooperative in the area has also been very beneficial to residents with the extension of electricity to area

with the cooperative's partial contribution and now everyone is enjoying this development infrastructure.

The president of the cooperative attributes all the achievements to farmers working together but says there are certain developments that need the intervention of government and development partners.

"We wish to increase cultivable land of the marshland, develop good storage facilities as what we have are getting old, enhance processing and packaging units and build a maize factory to supplement what we have," Singirankabo said.

He calls on the support of government and different stakeholders who have always helped them.

Singirankabo urges partners to help them in the fight against some people who smuggle their produce before its taken to the

factory. These people sometimes trick farmers into giving them their produce.

The president of the cooperatives says that they will work with local authorities to curb down such malpractices.

Given the importance of agriculture in Rwanda, and the potentialities for developing agro processing and production of agricultural products, Cooproriz Rusuli Rwamuginga Cyarubare has a potential and key role to play in facilitating the improvement of agricultural outcomes, including productivity and agro-processing.





# CORIRU Coperative reaps big for Huye rice farmers

**O**ne way that farmers can improve their incomes and livelihoods is to transition from subsistence farming to market-driven, commercial agriculture in which output is sold through cooperatives or into value chains.

The Government of Rwanda recognizes the central role that cooperatives have to play in promoting inclusive, sustainable development and economic transformation. Cooperatives are a unique form of self-help group, pooling members' resources to achieve economies of scope and scale.

Cooperatives have a great poverty reduction potential by pooling resources together in and keeping strong links to their local environments, where members stand to benefit significantly.

The story of Coriru, a



Cooperative of rice farmers located in Akanyana in Ruhashya sector, Huye district which was formed in 2009 under a tree who united and pooled at least Rwf 1,000 each is a great testament where today has 656 members.

Before Coriru was formed, farmers cultivated wide expanses of land to grow mainly domestic food, but this did not produce either enough for home consumption or for the market.

Through government intervention, farmers were later

.....  
**Uniting under one cause was a turning point, farmers embraced the call to work as a cooperative, little by little, they learned how to grow and increase rice production.**  
 .....



Janvier Nsanzimana, the head of the Coriru

encouraged to come together and form cooperatives to improve their wellbeing as they had limited skills for both production and processing. In addition, they did not even speak to each other because of lingering mistrust left by the genocide against the Tutsi.

Janvier Nsanzimana, the head of the Coriru observes that, uniting under one cause was a turning point, farmers embraced the call to work as a cooperative, little by little, they learned how to grow and increase rice production and above all how to manage a cooperative.

Working together also helped them overcome any internal divisions which also attracted partners offering support like





procured nine winnowing machines to avoid post-harvest losses and computers for the office management.

Coriru's bottom-up set-up shows that under the circumstances it is also possible to develop a sustainable cooperative, this is happening mainly because of committed and visionary leaders who managed to rebuild trust and motivate farmers, but also thanks to the good support of stakeholders who provided effective training.

The role of training has had an important role to support them in their process of self-development and in their active participation in the cooperative. Within, they have their own commission where they discuss themes of specific interest like building a houses, buying a vehicles and others.

Investing responsibly to provide demand-driven services to members has been crucial for the development of the cooperative. Their story has showed how a cooperative is capable of generating investment through share capital and loans. Moreover, by creating financial viability and providing effective services to members, they managed to increase the willingness of members to reinvest in the cooperative itself, generating a virtuous circle of responsible investment and sustainable development.

Coriru Cooperative has generally improved the livelihood of its members through provision of health insurance, food security, afford education for their children and be able to secure loans.

trainings and fund, among partners were the Ministry of Agriculture, Rwanda Cooperatives Agency (RCA) and NGOs.

The president of the cooperative revealed that, "Things were difficult at first because we didn't even have where to work from other than under a tree but managed to rent an office for three years until 2013 when we built our own near the marshland."

In 2014, through the support of the United States African Development Foundation (USADF) the cooperative constructed a new office.

One of the achievements of the cooperative has been the dynamic investments to improve services required by members like financial services, health insurance, pension schemes, skills development and enhance their business model.

They have setup a farmers shop run by the cooperative which is primarily to help members as well others in their community and additional investments are under way to also further cater for the members' welfare.

"This shop is helping us members to buy necessities for our homes at cheap prices compared to other shops," observes Nsanzimana.

Another important moment for the story of the cooperative was when its members secured a contract with a national buyer, which assured them a profitable access to the market for rice production.

Coriru's journey ensured a reap in production from a mere 20 - 40 tons to 140 tons produced today, this is crucial as it not only means that the level of services assured to members is not affected in case of a bad harvest, but also that the cooperative can meet emerging needs.

To cater for increased productivity, the cooperative



**The president of the cooperative revealed that, "Things were difficult at first because we didn't even have where to work from other than under a tree but managed to rent an office for three years until 2013 when we built our own near the marshland."**



# COTHEGAB Cooperative

strives to uplift standards  
of members and residents



members, with the help of PDCRE project that now turned PRICE (Project for Rural Income through Exports), a partner of National Agriculture Export Development Board (NAEB) and the ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI).

According to Jean Baptiste Habanabakize, the President of the cooperative, they have grown in size and expanded the land they cultivate. Today, the cooperative has 1,500 members and cultivates the plant leaf on 630 hectares in three sectors.

The cooperative helps farmer members grow tea, maintain their plantations and collectively market the produce. Tea is a widely produced crop in this province and has generated revenue for many families in the area.

“For us, tea is more than just leaves and hot water. It’s the smiles on the faces of families we meet, and the inspiration we take from our dedicated partners.” Says Habanabakize

With an annual total production of over 2 million kilograms of green leaves, COTHEGAB’s goal is to increase production by implementing agricultural best practices, so that total annual production per hectare reaches 8 to 9 tons.



**E**veryone loves a hot cup of tea. Maybe some milk, a little honey. Perhaps you are bundled up on a chilly morning, soaking in the warmth of the exotic flavour.

But do you know the farmers who ensure that you enjoy that delicious cup of tea? Well, Rwandan tea farmers are among those as their produce remains on top, sought after by tea

buyers at international markets due to its superior quality.

One Tea Growers’ Cooperative of Gatare and Buruhukiro (COTHEGAB) which is located in Nyamagabe District, Southern Province works in three sectors of Gatare, Nkomane and Buruhukiro, producing a premium tea from Rwanda’s high mountains.

COTHEGAB formed in September, 2009 with 550

**“For us, tea is more than just leaves and hot water. It’s the smiles on the faces of families we meet, and the inspiration we take from our dedicated partners.”**



## TEA GROWERS

improving members' families' livelihoods through various types of productivity.

Members have been able to change their ways of living in homes with some having installed electricity while others bought solar panels, they are able to pay health insurance, school fees for their children, Ejo Heza pension scheme and savings in banks among others.

Habanabakize revealed that, COOTHEGAB has established an Early Childhood Development center (ECD) in Gatere Sector known as Ikirezi in collaboration with UNICEF and NAEB, this is located within walking distance of the tea plantation.

The ECD center was established to improve the health and well-being of tea pluckers' children, allowing the cooperative and pluckers to increase productivity as a result. While the focus is on work in the tea plantation and children are cared for without concern for their safety, the ECD center provides enormous benefit.



**“We (farmers) are able to earn on monthly basis, so the members started depositing their monies every month in micro-finances, which is having good returns for many,” observes the president of the cooperative.**

Reaching where they are was not easy, farmers' lifestyles were in poor state in this region and when HE President Paul Kagame proposed that the local embrace tea growing, life has changed for many.

“We (farmers) are able to earn on monthly basis, so the members started depositing their monies every month in micro-finances, which is having good returns for many,” observes the president of the cooperative.

Tea farmers under this cooperative earns at least Rwf 35,000 to Rwf 700,000 per month which has seen economic status of the members and non-members change.

Rwanda Tea Industry is one of the leading foreign exchange earners for the country and is also a source of regular income to direct and indirect growers. Establishment of operational tea factories and cooperatives has contributed to rural wealth distribution and employment creation and infrastructure development in rural areas.

The Cooperative is fully committed to collaborating closely with its members in order to achieve success by providing guidance, advice, and training on good agricultural practices to increase production while strengthening and





Significant infrastructure has been noted in the area as a factory was set up, roads were paved, electricity connected and supply of clean water meaning the area is on an economic path of development that has enabled others who shied tea growing to embrace it and are applying to join the cooperative.

"Previously, our villages had poor roads where residents had problems linking from home, plantations and factory or markets, it would take long hours which affected mostly the tea leaves that sometimes would be rejected. Building the factory in the area helped farmers and the quality of tea was improved," notes Habanabakize.

COTHEGAB's presence has boosted the economic activities in the area, created jobs including 31 on a permanent basis and about 700-800 casual jobs in plucking tea.

As part of the cooperatives' corporate social responsibility, COTHEGAB intends to build houses for the vulnerable persons or families from the three sectors and support vulnerable members of this community to pay for health insurance starting with 33 families in this financial year.

In order to ease up transport problems to reduce post-harvest losses, the cooperative has been able to get two Hino trucks to transport the tea leaves to the factory, a tractor, four motorcycles for the administrators and agronomists.

With a few vehicles the cooperative has been able to transport the produce even



**Significant infrastructure has been noted in the area as a factory was set up, roads were paved, electricity connected and supply of clean water meaning the area is on an economic path of development that has enabled others who shied tea growing to embrace it and are applying to join the cooperative.**

with still some poor roads, but the district promised to upgrade one of the strategic roads of about 22kms that remains a challenge to some farmers.

COTHEGAB's close collaboration with Mushubi Tea Company (MTC) has resulted in improved and sustainable green leaf production and the cooperative begun a 280-hectare tea plantation expansion project in Musebeya and Gatara sectors, with nursery preparations currently underway.

COTHEGAB Cooperative members also own 15% shares in Mushubi Tea company where they supply their produce.

COTHEGAB has benefited greatly from Mushubi Tea Company as a partner, including good agricultural practices, fertilizer supply, buying leaf at a fair price, collection and timely delivery of high-quality green leaf, and several other projects.

The cooperative in a bid to expand their activities upon more farmers applying to join, by October this year they will have bought and acquired 100 of the 1,400 hectares they intend to have by the next three years to come.

Tea growers and the locals from Nyamagabe have commended the government efforts in streamlining tea industry; saying it has enabled them to improve their lives significantly in the district though some challenges still linger in the area.





## UNICOOPAGI ENHANCE FIRM-FARM RELATIONSHIP IN WHEAT PRODUCTION

**F**armers 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 been 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.







## FOR THE LOVE OF COFFEE: KOAKAKA'S JOURNEY FOR ADVANCING THE SPECIALITY CROP

*Coffee production in Rwanda has grown in recent years. The prospects of a better income motivate farmers to produce high quality specialty coffee, slowly turning into commercial farmers while they farm other crops for family consumption.*

**FARMERS** in the present day Cyanika Sector (Karaba) had been growing coffee for years, in the early days most never specialized to farm any

particular crop which meant they remained as subsistence farmers, poor and would hardly meet most of their basic needs.

Farmers did not have the means to wash and process their coffee beans which resulted into low quality and low prices for their produce keeping farmers in a vicious cycle of poverty.

Through government interventions and encouragement, farmers started organizing to work together and established KOAKAKA Cooperative, known in its full name as Koperative y'Abahinzi ba Kawa ba Karaba.

Sosthène Dusabemungu, the president of KOAKAKA explains that the idea to form a union was instigated by low production while there was demand for the crop following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi where many farmers had been killed.

Today, the cooperative brings together farmers from different sectors of three districts in the southern province. In Huye District they are in three sectors of Kamegeri, Kigoma and Maraba, in Nyamagabe they grow coffee from four sectors of Cyanika, Gasaka, Kibilizi and Mbazi. In Nyanza District member farmers are from Nyagisozi sector.



## COFFEE FARMING

For the last 19 years, farmers have been mastering coffee production with the help of the cooperative and this has turned their lives around. Before, many used to grow coffee like all other crops, incautiously while intercropping with other plants and not giving coffee the care it deserves which yielded low harvests with poor quality.

Another challenge that farmers used to face was access to market, they would just take their produce to the nearest market or town in hope of selling to whoever offered cash, today all the produce is sold through the cooperative to known buyers.

The President of the cooperative says that most of the challenges farmers were faced back in the day have been solved and the cooperative is moving even higher by producing specialty coffee that fetches premium rates on the market.

He says that they are now aiming at expanding further while introducing other services. In future, instead of exporting green coffee beans, the cooperative wants to start exporting coffee ready to drink by undertaking all processes in the value chain.

When the cooperative had just been born, they were only able to produce 1/2 a container (160 bags) of green coffee bean. Gradually KOAKAKA

In 2003 when the cooperative was launched, KOAKAKA had 867 members and their numbers have kept growing to the current 1,316 members including 297 women.

Dusabemungu notes that they kicked-off activities with the construction of a coffee washing station to process their coffee and established a network to sale both on the local market as well as export to international markets.

Processing is an important factor that raised the quality of coffee at Koakaka, when the cooperative commenced with modern processing farmers were hence able to take coffee cherries at their own factory, cutting down on long and expensive transport to other washing stations.

Today, Koakaka owns a couple of washing stations with Karambi washing station in Huye District as the first, Muganza and Mbazi in Nyamagabe District as well as Gasaka Coffee Dry Mill.

The cooperative now buys all the coffee from its member farmers at good prices which are set by state institutions in charge and members of the cooperative earn dividends from the proceeds of value addition services.

Members are now experienced coffee farmers and supply cherries to the cooperative washing stations. Coffee cherries supplied are required to be fully ripe with greater consistency which results in wonderful flavor.

The coffee washing stations are strict on wet processing chain where careful removal of undesirable cherries is done at the reception through two consecutive process first by hand



picking and sorting, then through wet immersion of cherries and removal of floating cherries. After the de-pulping and cleaning, a second selection is done followed by a progressive sun drying to end up with one of the best coffee.

Bonaventure Safari, the Manager of KOAKAKA observes that their growth is based at empowering farmers through trainings so they can gain more knowledge on how to handle coffee better because quality coffee starts at the plantation.

**Before, many used to grow coffee like all other crops, incautiously while intercropping with other plants and not giving coffee the care it deserves which yielded low harvests with poor quality.**







was able to increase production to at least three containers and from 2011 production skyrocketed to 40 containers for export only.

Starting with Sustainable harvest as the only buyer, the market for KOAKAKA's specialty coffee has grown to at least seven big buyers not counting coffee sold on the local market.

The cooperative was also among the first to introduce women coffee, this was a gender promotion drive to encourage more women to join coffee farming and their numbers are increasing.

Safari explains that they are committed to support women coffee which is produced and processed by women separately from the rest while ensuring the highest quality and this coffee has its own customers in the USA and Australia.

The youth has also been thought about and youth coffee is already produced but is yet to be branded and traded separately. This innovation which is already approved by the cooperative is to attract the youth to join coffee farming because they are the future that will inherit this noble profession.

KOAKAKA has had many initiatives to benefit members like increasing farmer's agricultural production, providing farmers with livestock like cows, goats & pigs, seedlings for trees, access to finance and other income



generating ventures to support them in income earning alternatives.

Furthermore, the cooperative ensures that farmers get the basic necessities in life like paying for their health insurance and giving soft loans to any member who requires to take children to school.

The cooperative has also grown assets by building coffee washing stations nearer to farmer members, they bought vehicles to transport the produce and secured land to also grow coffee as they demonstrate good agricultural practices.

The achievements of KOAKAKA keeps on growing every year and many notable institutions have recognized the cooperative with awards and certificates. The cooperative's products have been certified by Fair Trade, Organic Coffee and Rainforest Alliance Certified Coffees.

Growing coffee is labor intensive but an important source of revenue that keeps smallholder farmers growing and bettering their lives. The crop can ensure that growers keep earning continuously while the country's economy grows at the same time.



**The cooperative was also among the first to introduce women coffee, this was a gender promotion drive to encourage more women to join coffee farming and their numbers are increasing.**



A wide-angle photograph of a tea plantation in Rwanda. The foreground is filled with rows of vibrant green tea bushes. In the middle ground, several people are visible working in the fields. The background shows rolling hills under a clear sky, with a tall metal tower on the right side.

# KOBACYAMU

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## Enhancing standards of Tea growers

**TEA GROWING** was introduced in Rwanda in the 1950s and the cash crop later became one of the country's major export commodities, for instance it generated over US\$90 million in export revenues for 2020 - 2021.

Communities from the south particularly the present day Nyamagabe District joined farming in later years as many were regarded as craft makers spending much of their time looking for raw materials from Nyungwe forest and carried out farming on a subsistence level.





In the past, this hilly Southern region was synonymous with famine, its poor soils coupled with poor farming methods combined to make the area one of the most unproductive parts of the country.

Currently its fast becoming an example of what a stable and committed leadership can do to provide a turnaround in the lives of communities through some working solution initiatives like Kobacyamu Tea Cooperative from Kagano Cell in Kitabi Sector, Nyamagabe District.

Agriculture is currently the main economic activity where poor soils that were a major setback to the growth of the sector have been countered through land consolidation and selecting the right crops for cultivation like tea which has become the major source of income besides other crops like coffee, wheat, and Irish potatoes among others.

According to Marthe Mukanzirabantinya, the President of Kobacyamu (Koperative y'Abahinzi b'Icyayi ba Mudasmwa), which works in four sectors of Kitabi, Tare, Uwinkingi and Kibirizi in Nyamagabe District, Southern Province was formed in 1980 in a region characterized by high lands of the Crete Congo Nile.

The Cooperative is composed of 5,154 members including over 3,500 men as well as close to 2,000 women and the cooperative employees permanent workers and

casual tea pluckers estimated at more than 5,000 workers.

“Our plantations cover more than 790 hectares in the four sectors on hillsides and well drained marshes at a high altitude between 1,550 m and 2,500 m. Our growers farm tea which is rich, bold and full of flavour, thanks to the high altitude,” observes M. Nzirabantinya.

Farming and Production has increased steadily over the years, however in 1994, during the genocide against the Tutsi, tea

**Currently its fast becoming an example of what a stable and committed leadership can do to provide a turnaround in the lives of communities through some working solution initiatives like Kobacyamu Tea Cooperative from Kagano Cell in Kitabi Sector, Nyamagabe District.**





plantations and factories were abandoned and tea production decreased. Since then, more efforts were made to rehabilitate the tea industry and production picked up.

Black CTC tea is the predominant type produced in Rwanda, but other types like Orthodox tea, Green Tea and White tea are also processed.

The management of Nyamagabe district has lauded Kobacyamu for being a good partner in development programs aimed at enhancing better livelihoods of residents.

The president of the cooperative says that they enhance good collaboration with tea farmers and stakeholders like the National Agricultural Export Development Board (NAEB), support them in professional farming and avail development activities.

"We avail many services to our members. Primarily to train them on how to grow good tea, increase seed beds while facilitating farmers to extend arable land, the next is to make sure they are paid well on time guided by prices set by government and realize the



importance of planting tea," she said.

Today, Kobacyamu through its administrative system has been able to make a follow-up of its members where they have been encouraged to open up accounts with Saccos, banks and embrace the use of mobile phones where their payments are channeled.

According to M. Nzirabantinya, "once our client which is Kitabi Factory transfers the money, we also pay the members promptly every month through their accounts receiving notifications on individual mobile telephones to lessen the hustle of wasting time lining in their respective financial institution."

This initiative has been helpful to the farmers where they continue with their daily farm activities unhindered.

"Our members are now able carry on with respective activities comfortably without worries of health insurance Mutuelle de santé which we pay for them and Ejo Heza Pension saving scheme, we negotiated for them to get solar systems in their homes and pay in installments, many have completed paying and enjoying the benefits," she underlined.

Members are also able to benefit from social programs like assistance







in times of mishap like sickness or loss of life, the cooperative supports the family of its member.

The cooperative has established canteens and shops found in all the six zones of operations in the four sectors so that members are able to access basic supplies cheaply and on credit, they normally pay for them once they receive their payments.

Theogene Ndayizeye, the Manager of the cooperative observes that farmers now prefer growing tea instead of any other crop in the four sectors because of its benefits. "When you have a tea plantation you are assured of a monthly income which you can't say for others."

The manager revealed that, some tea growers at Kobacyamu are earning as much as one million francs per month. Productivity has also increased significantly where it is between 7,000-7,200kg of tea leaf harvest per hectare.

The Cooperative has been able to



**Assets for Kobacyamu are adding up gradually, they own commercial buildings for rent in Kitabi town and have also built a modern filling gas station for the neighboring community. They are also contributing to the development of Nyamagabe where they intend to support the construction of a modern market through shares worthy 30 million francs.**



encourage its members to invest in other activities like the youth to buy motorcycles and livestock for their families of which they have responded positively.

Assets for Kobacyamu are adding up gradually, they own commercial buildings for rent in Kitabi town and have also built a modern filling gas station for the neighboring community. They are also contributing to the development of Nyamagabe where they intend to support the construction of a modern market through shares worthy 30 million francs.

The funds to invest in these shares is part of profits received from Kitabi Tea Factory to which Kobacyamu owns 10% of the factory and receives dividends every year that is normally shared among members.

The Tea Cooperative is also supporting the community in different ways, for instance they support an orphanage run by the Catholic nuns by providing milk for the children and other support. The cooperative is also to commence on the initiative to build houses for the most vulnerable persons of the community.



## SUPPORTING GROWERS IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

To ease transport, the cooperative has eight trucks that carry produce from plantations to the factory, these trucks have significantly eased life of farmers, before they could carry heavy sacs of green leaves for long distances, this also improved quality because tea leaves would sometimes be spoiled when exposed to heat or left for longer hours before processing.

Furthermore the cooperative has seven motorcycles for the manager of the cooperative and six agronomists to help them reach every farmer and plantation.

The cooperative's staff like agronomists facilitates farmers to carry on with farming, support in good agricultural practices and monitors the growing of the crop at the plantations.

In order to increase and easy up the farming process for its members as well as those who want to join the cooperative, Kobacyamu has 18 hangers in different strategic areas where tea leaf selection is carried out and there are plans to build more.

The cooperative also helps farmers get improved seeds and carries on advocacy for access to fertilizers as well as subsidies on agricultural inputs.

Damien Habineza, one of the Agronomists at the cooperative notes that, previously farmers had difficulty in accessing seeds, a partnership with NAEB and the cooperative helped save the situation.

The cooperative provides members with electronic weighing scales to



**Tea farmers are the backbone of the key brand message that has ensured that the brand proposition is in alignment with stakeholders' needs and beliefs, making Rwandan Tea widely known but also embracing value addition through confidence building among buyers and inspire farmers to increase production.**



know the exact quantity of their harvests, the modern machines prints out receipts that helps determine what will be paid. The receipt plays a big role in the access to finance, as a farmer can present it to his/his bank to access small loans.

As Kobacyamu continues to pave way for farmers successive benefit from tea growing, there remains some challenges like poor roads, high prices of fertilizers and limited land for tea growing, as more farmers want to join.

The president of the cooperative calls upon government and other stakeholders to support the cooperative in dealing with some of these challenges that tea growers can continue bringing out the finest tea.

M. Nzirabantinya assures the cooperative's role emphasizing that management prioritizes farmer's interest unlike in the early years. "In the past, the system of cooperatives was not managed well and there

were a lot of embezzlement. Today, we members of the cooperative are happy to work with Rwanda Cooperative Agency."

Kobacyamu Tea Cooperative also works closely with the district authorities to implement some of the government programs when called upon and whatever is done is always in the best interest of its members.

Kobacyamu Tea Cooperative supports efforts geared at improving the lifestyles of its members, quality of tea as well as widening the market for the country.

Tea farmers are the backbone of the key brand message that has ensured that the brand proposition is in alignment with stakeholders' needs and beliefs, making Rwandan Tea widely known but also embracing value addition through confidence building among buyers and inspire farmers to increase production.



# INGENZI ZA HUYE

## NURSES HOPE FOR RESTORATION OF CITY'S GLORY TO BOOST TRADE

**T**he inventiveness and development of Huye City Modern Market undeniably beatified the City. The commercial complex that upgraded the skyline of the city houses this outstanding market in Rwanda's Southern region. Currently, the biggest commercial facility in Huye District and Southern Province was among the first of its kind in the country.

There is a direct link between Huye city and this market hence the regression of the southern city directly impacted on the progress of the cooperative, which basically ventures in trade and investment.

Top officials from Ingenzi za Huye Cooperative say they completed one of the landmark buildings in Huye city that houses a modern market where over 700 traders work from, and are embarking on other development projects.

Francine Murekatete, the President of Ingenzi za Huye revealed that they have embarked on the construction of a new three-storied structure in a bid to expand the facilities and increase convenience for the traders.

The cooperative, which was established 2007, had three major objectives including construction of commercial

buildings to facilitate traders and develop the city, build residences and import basic commodities that are not easily accessed on the local market.

The Modern Market became their first venture exclusively started by the cooperative that brings together members

**Top officials from Ingenzi za Huye Cooperative say they completed one of the landmark buildings in Huye city that houses a modern market where over 700 traders work from, and are embarking on other development projects.**





subscribing to the private sector who after conceptualizing the idea secured initial resources including a bank loan.

“We did not have a lot of money so we applied for a bank loan which we used to build the modern market,” said Leopold Mubera, Vice President of the cooperative.

Mubera revealed that the complex has 65 rooms, spacious open spaces that can be partitioned according to the client’s space requirements, other two host wears stalls and food stuffs. This building housing about 700 businesses is still underutilized with about 20 per cent vacant.

The underutilization of such a facility in the centre of Huye City is blamed on the snail pace growth partly blamed on the relocation of headquarters of major public institutions like the University of Rwanda (UR), Agriculture Research Institute

(ISAR), Institute of Scientific and Technological Research (IRST) and the museum.

Previously, Rwanda’s second city and centre of education, and home to the national museum was adversely affected by the relocation of a wide range of faculties of UR. Other events that affected the development of Huye include temporary closure of Burundi-Rwanda border post (Akanyaru) and development of the Kivu Belt alternative highway.

In general, Huye ceased to be a formidable city that attracted workers from all walks of life, and a tourist destination.

“The University almost relocated all principal faculties, and this affected us variously – even as government tried bringing the institutions back the city is no longer as it used to be because many of people left and Huye is not as endowed with tourist attractions as other regions in the country,” said Murekatete.

Previously, Rwanda’s second city and centre of education, and home to the national museum was adversely affected by the relocation of a wide range of faculties of UR. Other events that affected the development of Huye include temporary closure of Burundi-Rwanda border post (Akanyaru) and development of the Kivu Belt alternative highway.

She adds: “The University community formed a formidable market as they would depend on the market for food and other commodities.”

We still have hope that the promise of H.E President Paul Kagame of returning those public institutions will sooner or later be a reality, she explained.

The city also experienced a decline in the volume of trade and rate of investment due to the emergency of Kivu Belt highway. Many districts in south-western Rwanda such as Rusizi, Nyamagabe, Nyamasheke and Karongi were potential catchment areas of Huye.

Murekatete told Rwanda Dispatch that the opened highway that starts from Rusizi via Karongi reduced the traffic in Huye as inhabitants of that region have a shorter route to Kigali hence sidelining Huye.

“The passengers to Kigali have





the option of a shorter route created since the opening of the road from Rusizi via Karongi and nothing comes from Bukavu in DR Congo passes in Huye any longer,” said the President of the cooperative.

The indefinite closure Akanyaru/Kanyaru Haut border affected businesses leading to a halt of some commodities that used to be traded in Huye market and many Burundians, especially the border communities used the market often.

## APPEALING FOR LAUNCH OF TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN HUYE

The leadership of the Cooperative call for the Government of Rwanda through Rwanda Development Board (RDB) to consider launching new tourist places in Huye, saying there are forests that can be gazetted tourist areas if animals are introduced in there.

The head of the cooperative says that Huye is lacking tourist activities that can pull crowds of tourists in spite of the area being a promising tourism destination. To this effect, the cooperative leaders call for government intervention for the area to maximally exploit its tourism potential.

## INGENZI ZA HUYE COOPERATIVE SUPPORT TO LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Ingenzi za Huye is laying its contributions towards the progress of Huye district through various ways like investments, creating jobs and facilitating trade that pay taxes to bring revenue for government.

**The cooperative is responsive to all government programmes, they said. They partners with local authorities in implementing policies and programmes that aim at uplifting the welfare of citizens. They have been at the forefront of rolling out the Girinka programme among others.**

Secondly, they contribute money on annual basis towards Huye District vote for public health insurance exclusively for the most vulnerable people in the district that subscribe to the first category of Ubudehe.

The cooperative is responsive to all government programmes, they said. They partners with local authorities in implementing policies and programmes that aim at uplifting the welfare of citizens. They have been at the forefront of rolling out the Girinka programme among others.

“As a cooperative, we are proud of being a model in the country in as far as the building infrastructures that facilitate the growth of the economy,” observes Mubera.

The cooperative says their market was the first one of its kind in the country and they are proud of having shared their experiences with many other traders and investors from across the country that built similar markets later.

**The cooperative extends gratitude to H.E President Kagame for his undying commitment to mobilize Rwandans to create cooperatives along the journey of delivering themselves from poverty as well as improving living standards.**

The Vice President gave the current state of the cooperative stressing that as members they relate well with one another and have not encountered yet a challenge linked to any internal wrangles.

Murekatete observes that they organize regular retreats and get-togethers where they exhaustively deliberate on affairs of local development adding that they are proud of the unity of members and the manner they reach consensus whenever a decision is taken.

“We were eleven when the cooperative started and we have walked the journey together to the day. The only problem we experienced was when one of our members passed on while another one absconded but we replaced the later, we are now ten,” said the Vice President.

He observes that the idea of creating their cooperative is traced to the countrywide awareness campaign by H.E President Kagame about the role of cooperatives in fast tracking national development.

The cooperative extends gratitude to H.E President Kagame for his undying commitment to mobilize Rwandans to create cooperatives along the journey of delivering themselves from poverty as well as improving living standards.

Lastly, they heartily thank Huye District authorities for standing with them in all situations, particularly for various support since they started traders’ cooperative in Huye.



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# COORITENYA

## helping members despite challenges



The cooperative that started with 445 members in 2012 has of now been reduced to 282 active members due to the fact that the marshland has been devastated by soil erosion caused by floods and many lack good farmland.

Furthermore Price volatility, climate change, scarcity of land and lack of training are just some of the challenges faced by Cooritenya.

Madam Clementine Mukandaheranwa, the vice president of the cooperative notes that they have meaning a great deal to farmers and the community, in any case they need advocacy for government or other partners to support them in restoring the marshland and increase the farmland.

However, Cooritenya has also not been sitting idle and doing nothing but has managed to hold on and empower members to increase productivity and increase activities.

The cooperative has created jobs and increased economic activities in the area. Mukandaheranwa says they employ three permanent staff including the manager, agronomist and a security guard while others work on a temporary basis.

**C**ooperatives are key to increasing food security in Rwanda, helping smallholder farmers cope with challenges and enabling them to gain access to markets.

Venuste Uwihanganye, the president for Cooperative de Riziculteurs Terimbere Nyaruhombo (Cooritenya) in Huye, highlighted some of the benefits of what the cooperative has been able to achieve since it started operations in 2012 and challenges faced by farmers.

Due to changing weather conditions that have affected the globe, it has not spared members of the cooperative. Cooritenya initially farmed on 39 hectares of Mwogo marshland but the farmland was reduced to 25 hectares due to floods and soil erosion.

“Such difficulties have led to some members turn away from farming activities and look for other less taxing economic activities or even farm for their own consumption,” observes Uwihanganye.



## RICE FARMING

increase their farm activities, and the cooperative also supplies bean seeds on credit for those who want them, pay 100% health insurance for the members and supports those that need to save in Ejo Heza pension scheme.

Cooritenya has improved the economic activities and enhanced its community through helping the poor where they have built houses for 42 most vulnerable families and provides the nearby school with rice free of charge.

Musa Nsengimana, a member of the cooperative appreciates what the cooperative is doing for instance organizing members to have their savings in Ingoboka where many can borrow and be able to take care of their necessities like school fees. Over 60 Members have been able to buy cows and build houses with the help of the cooperative.

At the cooperative level, they are now able to access finance from financial institutions as they are assured that they can pay back loans.

"These activities benefit the communities through employment creation as well as service provision. This creates more income within the community and enhances food security," concluded Uwhanganye.

Cooritenya is a potential vehicle through which its members can create employment and expand access to income-generating activities, develop their business potential through education and training; increase savings and investment, and improve social well-being with special emphasis on gender equality, housing, education, healthcare and community development.



"The cooperative was able to build its own office block worthy Rwf.2.5 million which was later upgraded to Rwf. 4.7 million structure and built another building block at a cost of Rwf. 9 million equipping the new premises with computers at Rwf. 2million, the building also houses a store and other annex for rent," the president of the cooperative revealed.

Stakeholders have also been able to support the cooperative by building them drying sheds and where possible the cooperative uses its own means to expand space to dry their produce as winnowing is carried on.

Government and some NGOs have also been able to extend training and other capacity building initiatives to the members which have helped to build capacity in post-harvest handling techniques as well as commodity quality.

To date not only has post-harvest losses reduced significantly, but Cooritenya was the best cooperative in the province in



2019 with high quality rice, which improved market opportunities for member.

Cooritenya offer services to members as a way of building their capacity. Farmers can receive training on production techniques and urging them to exercise economies of scale to attract traders and institutional buyer as a means to increase their negotiating power.

Uwhanganye revealed that they bought livestock (goats and pigs) to distribute to each member to





operations and the cooperative was devastated and only the activities resumed almost two years after.

Some of its members were killed as being carried out, we stopped our activities but later resumed in 1996." he notes

The cooperative which operates in three sectors of Kibirizi, Busama and Nyirina of Nyanza Sector resumed activities in 1996 to continue commercializing farming.

The human resource and membership of the cooperative had been affected where by some members had been killed, others fled and it was the government that come in to aid farmers by developing their Marshland.

Developing the farmland that is primary to the cooperative encouraged the relaunch of Nyarubogo cooperative and increased members to 762 who farm 704 hectares.

## Nyarubogo Rice farmers reaping big from their cooperative

**T**he Government of Rwanda recognizes the central role that cooperatives have to play in promoting inclusive, sustainable development and economic transformation. Cooperatives are a unique form of self-help group, pooling members' resources to achieve economies of scope and scale.

One way that farmers can improve their income and livelihoods is to transition from subsistence farming to market-driven, commercial agriculture in which output is sold through cooperatives or into value chains.

Nyarubogo Cooperative from Nyanza district was established in 1990 with about 100 members acquiring its operational certificate in the following year.



**President of the cooperative, Charles Ndayisaba**

According to the President of the cooperative, Charles Ndayisaba, the cooperative started on a good note but was negatively affected by the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi when all its activities came to a halt. The dark period in this year affected all

**Nyarubogo Cooperative from Nyanza district was established in 1990 with about 100 members acquiring its operational certificate in the following year.**





## RICE FARMING

members has been crucial for the cooperative's development. Nyarubogo's story shows how a cooperative is capable of generating investment through share capital and loans.

Moreover, by creating financial viability and providing effective services to members, the cooperative has managed to increase the willingness of members to reinvest into the cooperative, generating a virtuous circle of responsible investment and sustainable development.

Though the cooperative has been able to reach many achievements, some hope for further developments being carried out in the pipe-line.

"We wish to further expand our farmland by restoring the destroyed marshland, develop good storage facilities, enhance processing and packaging units. Therefore we call upon the support of government and other different stakeholders to achieve these," concluded the president of the Nyarubogo Cooperative.

**The Cooperative has been able to create jobs, new employment opportunities and reduction of youth unemployment to alleviate poverty while promoting economic transformation and reducing the population share in subsistence agriculture, increasing income levels, thereby enabling people to pay for services and further promotion of women economic empowerment.**



The courage to work together and overcome any divisions attracted partners and donors who approached the cooperative to offer trainings like the Ministry of Agriculture and Rwanda Cooperatives Agency (RCA).

Farmers working together in the cooperative has helped to reach many achievements where they have initiated dynamic investment to improve their activities and this has improved livelihoods of members as well as farmers in the area. Now farmers are able to access services like health insurance, pension schemes, training, and financial services.

For instance, members are now able to access loans to support their families financially compared to other residents who are not able to get collateral or a guarantor.

"When members get any financial needs, the cooperative is able to come to their aid in ensuring that they get financial access like those who want to pay for school fees for their children or others who want to start income generating activities," says Ndayisaba.

He adds that access to finance has enabled members of the cooperative to build houses, buy motorcycles for own transportation and take children to good schools.

Nyarubogo Cooperative shows that under some circumstances it is also possible to develop into sustainable cooperative, even in absence of initial local collective action. This is happening mainly because of committed and visionary leaders who managed to rebuild trust and motivate farmers, but also thanks to the good support of external actors who provided effective training.

Another important benefit is when the cooperative decided to buy a vehicle to ease up transportation challenges by procuring a vehicle, they easily secured loan and they are yet to buy another as well as other assets.

The Cooperative has been able to create jobs, new employment opportunities and reduction of youth unemployment to alleviate poverty while promoting economic transformation and reducing the population share in subsistence agriculture, increasing income levels, thereby enabling people to pay for services and further promotion of women economic empowerment.

The head of the cooperative underlined that, "We have been able to support members pay for health insurance and Ejo Heza pension scheme for members."

Investing responsibly to provide demand-driven services to





# Maraba Coffee Keeps Grip on Foreign Markets as Over 1500 Members Celebrate Improved Livelihoods

BY GEORGE KALISA

**T**he global visibility of Maraba Coffee Cooperative locally known as Abahuzamugambi ba Kawa ba Maraba, hit a record high after winning the Cup of Excellence in 2008 for its high quality specialty coffee, under the brand name - Maraba Coffee.

Nearly two decades later, the cooperative has embarked on implementing a strategic plan that includes setting up an Agriculture bank that will ease members' access to credit as well as improving financial inclusiveness of members, mostly the smallholder coffee farmers.

Since then, the coffee whose quality is maintained by overseeing the value chain right

from the farm through processing to the market has gripped on both local and foreign markets. This achievement is now common knowledge.

The news is that Rwanda's oldest coffee cooperative that started operations back in 1999 and awarded a certificate by the government of Rwanda in 2002 has transformed the livelihoods of 1,532 up from 70 pioneer members.

Following the concerted efforts of the Cooperative, members that joined while they were in the first category of Ubudehe (the poorest of the poor) have graduated to new categories, and live in palatable houses, pay children's education, Mutuelle de Santé (public health insurance), Ejo Heza pension scheme and can afford commodities outside the basics of life.

Today, the cooperative doubles as a 'demonstration agriculture school' where other cooperatives, researchers and policymakers and students from agricultural institutes access best practices on cooperative farming in general.



Jean Paul Mutimura,  
President of the  
Cooperative

Theophile Biziyaremye, the cooperative's Manager highlighting its historical background said: "The cooperative started in 1999 with 70 members before it was awarded a certificate of registration in 2002."

He revealed that the Cooperative is headquartered in Shyembe cell of Maraba Sector where it started with one washing station. Today, Maraba Coffee Cooperative boasts of four washing stations – Cyarumbo, Sovu, Kabuye and Kibingo.

This cooperative employs over 500 workers mostly in the harvesting seasons and maintains at least 33 permanent workers and pays all taxes hence contributing to the national revenues annually.

## MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS 24-YEAR JOURNEY

The Cooperative's senior officials underscored the strategies the Cooperative is currently pursuing to ensure that the welfare of its members improve every passing day. They include a savings and credit bank, offering regular



trainings on making organic composite fertilizers and pesticides to check the pastes and diseases that are responsible for a bad harvest and low prices.

Today, the cooperative doubles as a 'demonstration agriculture school' where other cooperatives, researchers and policymakers and students from agricultural institutes access best practices on cooperative farming in general.

"We support farmers access health tree plants by managing nursery beds, encourage members to have as many coffee trees as possible beyond the mandatory 100 coffee tree plants," he stressed, "we help them in extracting, washing and drying the coffee beans.

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Maraba Coffee Cooperative installed two grids from transformers, enabling residents to get electricity. It also provided safe and clean water by reclaiming water from the streams on the high lands in the area.

And, two trucks were purchased that have solved the problem of transportation of the produce from the farms and collection centres to the washing stations.

Nonetheless, the cooperative sometimes records losses due to bad debtors. Pests and diseases is another setback that have sometimes led to a bad harvest, eventually low returns to the farmers.

They are still lacking the relevant machines at the local market and spare parts, and they have to import everything they need in the factories which is taking a toll on the cooperative.

trainings and technical services, ready payment and encouraging them to diversify their economic activities beyond growing coffee.

Besides, the Cooperative relieved members of burden of transporting the coffee produce on their heads over long distances by establishing collection centres in the five Sectors of Huye District where the Cooperative has presence.

"We successfully mobilized our members from mostly the sectors of Maraba, Simbi, Mbazi, Huye, and Karama to start a Savings and Credit Cooperative, and since it opened none of our members

**This cooperative employs over 500 workers mostly in the harvesting seasons and maintains at least 33 permanent workers and pays all taxes hence contributing to the national revenues annually.**



Theophile Biziyaremye, the cooperative's Manager

faces a financial problem," noted Biziyaremye.

Jean Paul Mutimura, President of the Cooperative says, "even before harvest season and bad seasons, they access money for school fees, health insurance, pension scheme and for other essentials of life."

"The SACCO, also, gives them loans to buy more land to expand their coffee farms and meet other day-to-day demands," observes Mutimura.

"In the past years, the cooperative has been keen on the diversification of members' economic activities to widen sources of income and avoid the problems linked to overdependence on coffee. They now carryout other activities such as keeping animals of a shorter gestation period like pigs and goats," added Mutibura.

"We plan to launch market places where our members can buy especially household items at prices lower than the market price to salvage them from the unstable prices, a situation aggravated by inflation and other global challenges," he underlined.

The Cooperative owns no coffee farms and entirely depends on out growers. To ensure that the quality of the maraba coffee is maintained, the cooperative provides agronomists that regularly monitor and coach the coffee farmers on the best practices of growing the crop.

Aside, they receive free skills







# Impakomu Cooperative

## improving members' wellbeing in Ruhango

**L**ocal farming development potentialities in Byimana Sector of Ruhango District are currently either fully or partially utilized, with local agricultural approaches emphasizing on the strategy of farmers working together to enhance their productivity, this attracts different stakeholders to offer support.

A great deal of better maize, beans and sometimes soya farming potential lies in Impakomu cooperative as it had and has good opportunities for its members.

According to the president of the cooperative, Emmanuel Renzaho "Impakomu as maize growers started in 2005, operating from Rugerero village, Kamusenyi Cell in Byimana sector, Ruhango district, it fully



Emmanuel Renzaho,  
President of Impakomu cooperative

Before, farmers in the area were disorganized where everyone cultivated a melange of crops which could not enhance productivity until the idea of creating the cooperative was hatched thus choosing to reorganize and decided to concentrate on maize and beans farming.

completed registration with Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA) in 2010.

Before, farmers in the area were disorganized where everyone cultivated a melange of crops which could not enhance productivity until the idea of creating the cooperative was hatched thus choosing to reorganize and decided to concentrate on maize and beans farming.

The first years of operation, the cooperative remained with challenges of limited land to cultivate, many who had joined left for lack of land to expand activities.

Renzaho notes that they started to make innovations in their approach and again attracted farmers, today the cooperative has 302 members cultivating 16 hectors of land and harvests at least 56.8 tons of maize as per last season.



The cooperative has been able to support members through Giritungo program where every member has some livestock within their homestead, members have been given livestock like cows, pigs and goats among others.

Acquiring skills is also central to needs at Impakomu, members of the cooperative have been able to get some trainings mostly conducted in collaboration with partners. Good Agricultural Practices have been introduced and skills like in agriculture like bio-intensive applied to green beans are given.

Through stakeholders, the cooperative has also been able to own four buildings in Byimana area.

The cooperative continues to empower its members and there are more ideas in the pipeline to further develop the area, as the committee of Impakomu emphasizes.

Renzaho calls upon government to help the cooperative acquire more land like expanding and developing marshlands to have land for cultivation in order to increase output productivity and start value chain processes like building a maize factory in the area.

Given the importance of agriculture in Rwanda, and the potentialities for developing agro processing and production of agricultural products, Impakomu Cooperative has a potential and key role to play in facilitating the improvement of agriculture despite the challenge of lacking enough land.

“Even though some members left at the start, some ask to rejoin as well as new ones,” Renzaho attributes this to the improved livelihoods of members who stayed. Every year during the general Assembly of the cooperative, farmers who have applied and fulfills the requirements are submitted.

Judith Mukankusi, one of the founder members of Impakomu observes that, the aim of establishing the cooperative was to add value to farmers produce, the system of communal farming was formulated and many farmers joined in hope of raising productivity.

“We managed to pool resources together, contributing Rwf.15,000 per head and secured a loan of Rwf.2 million to buy land and started building with some members using other own hands because we had been operating under a tree.” She said.

This degree of willingness impressed some funders who came in to help the cooperative which led to the completion of the cooperative’s building.

One of the partners who came to support Impakomu was the Rural Sector Support Project (RSSP) that supported in the

completion of their building and helped to train at least 120 members of the cooperative in different skills.

Impakomu Cooperative has been able to create new employment opportunities and reduction of women unemployment to alleviate poverty while promoting economic transformation and reducing many residents from subsistence agriculture, increasing income levels, thereby enabling people improve lives.

In a bid to improve the economic status of the women in the area, another project of basket weaving was launched by the cooperative and benefited 300 women who were trained for 30 days to specialize in weaving bowls from forest grasses and sisal fibers.

The President of the cooperative observes that members’ lives have changed where they are able to afford basic necessities in live, pay fees for their children and build family houses. The cooperative also supports to pay for them in Community Based Health Insurance and facilitate to make savings in Ejo Heza saving scheme as well as access to finance in local micro-finance institutions.

.....

**Impakomu Cooperative has been able to create new employment opportunities and reduction of women unemployment to alleviate poverty while promoting economic transformation and reducing many residents from subsistence agriculture, increasing income levels, thereby enabling people improve lives.**

.....





The cooperative has the potential for poverty reduction by pooling resources together and keeping strong links with external environment to promote the interests of members.

Working together has helped tea growers overcome challenges that arise in their farming activities and welfare of members, the cooperative handles tea from the plantations and supports members pay for their health insurance, savings in Ejo Heza pension scheme and providing guarantee for those seeking loans from bank.

The Villageois Umucyagi has invested in different income generating activities, while it previously has been correcting money from members for its daily operations, as investments start earning money is returned back to members.

Today, members of the cooperative cultivate about 734ha while the cooperative has its own 15ha of planted with tea, 5ha planted forest and has constructed 10 houses for rentals.

The community surrounding the tea plantations have also benefited where the cooperative has created employment for local workforce and the most vulnerable are paid for community based health insurance as well as built houses for them.

The major achievements of the cooperative has been the dynamic investments to improve services required by members like financial services, health insurance, pension schemes, skills development and enhancing commercialization of agriculture.

## The Villageois Umucyagi improve livelihoods of tea growers

**T**he Villageois Umucyagi is a cooperative of Tea farmers based in Murambi, Giheke Sector in Rusizi District, Western Province. Dating back in 1973, the cooperative was reinvigorated and acquired its new legal status in 2012 under the new cooperative law as indicated on its registration RCA No 003/2012.

With 4,032 registered members comprising of 2,190 men, 1,505 women and 37 other groups/ association, the cooperative operates in four sectors of Shangi Bushenge, Ruharambuga and Karengera in Nyamasheke District and six sectors of Giheke, Nkungu, Nyakarenzo, Mururu, Gihundwe and Kamembe Rusizi District.

Marc Musabirema, President of the General Assembly of The Villageois Umucyagi observes that enhancing production of tea both in quality and quantity was the major objective of their union. They sought to improve the incomes and livelihoods of members through commercial farming.

Musabirema explains that to achieve these goals they established three structures headed by the General Assembly composed of 50 members representing 38 collections centers. The second structure is a 5-member Executive Committee and the audit committee of three individuals all elected from the 50 members.



**Marc Musabirema, President of the General Assembly of The Villageois Umucyagi**

“.....  
**Today, members of the cooperative cultivate about 734ha while the cooperative has its own 15ha of planted with tea, 5ha planted forest and has constructed 10 houses for rentals.**  
.....”



# KOABURA COOPERATIVE: Strengthening farmers capacity towards better farming methods

**F**ollowing the implementation of the Land Husbandry Water Harvesting and Hillside Irrigation (LWH) Project which included terracing of fields over the past years, some farmers strongly came out to apply the benefits under this initiative in Rambura Sector of Nyabibu District in the Western Province of Rwanda.

Farmers in the area established KOABURA, known in full as Koperative Abesamihigo Mubuhinzi ba Rambura in 2015 to put into action what the project had taught them.

KOABURA fully registered as a cooperative under Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA) and the following year in 2016 received a

certificate of operation as a fully functional farmer's organization.

According to Alphonsine Nyirabarera, the president of KOABURA Cooperative, they started with 145 members only, a number that has grown to the current 784 members, of which women lead in number with 414 women and 370 men.

The cooperative continues to admit willing farmer to join them, starting with Rwf.5,000 requirement for entry, this amount has grown as the cooperative grows and today you are required to pay Rwf.30,000 which can be paid in installments.

To further improve their activities and decentralize the operations, they established 70 saving groups within 10 zones of Rambura sector. Every zone has seven saving





groups where each zone has its own head to oversee the farming activities and wellbeing of the members.

Therefore, the cooperative is playing a crucial role in hunger and poverty alleviation, promotion of social harmony and ensures that they achieve a more equitable economic growth.

Smallholder farmers are now provided with an easy access to financial resources to improve crop production where many had previously lacked finances to access agricultural inputs like improved and proper seeds, fertilizers and pest-sides.

"The cooperative was established for various purposes, including economic and social development, empowering smallholder farmers, address market failures, purchase agricultural inputs at affordable prices, and advise farmers on better and sustainable agricultural practices," observes Nyirabarera.

She explains that the major roles of the cooperative to the rural communities include poverty reduction, creation of employment, improved food security, women empowerment and human capital development.

"KOABURA cooperative was formed out of Irish Potato farmers but later embraced wheat farming too. It was not easy at the start because when we harvested 16.5 tons of Irish potatoes, we lost all of them due to poor storage facilities that had been built for us, we then ventured into wheat and tamarillo farming but that too did yield any good results but we never gave up," she notes.

However, with the persistence



Alphonsine Nyirabarera, the president of KOABURA Cooperative.

of the farmers in Rambura their investments would come to pay off and the entry of stakeholders guaranteed a more promising future.

The Cooperative managed to save up to 10 million francs and before long, the Single Project Implementation Unit (SPIU), under the government came to their aid which supported their endeavors to meet targets and goals.

SPIU has supported the cooperative access improved seeds and helped them procure three vans used in transportation of the produce from collection sites in different zones to the market. The project has also

provided trainings in post-harvest handling, building infrastructure like the cooperative's new meeting hall and market linkages among others.

After building capacity, the cooperative is now in good position; has built structures and created jobs in the area.

There are five permanent workers employed by the cooperative, while 15 casual workers help in the fields, some help in the supervision and collection of produce from the zones using vans.

The head of the cooperative revealed that the cooperative is





now on an upward trend where its earning some good returns from their agricultural activities every season.

Working together is already fruitful for the farmers in Rambura, livelihoods have been improved where members are able to cater for their families, pay school fees for their children, pay community based health insurance and make savings in Ejo Heza for the future.

As a region known for having suffered from malnutrition, the cooperative has worked with partners to set-up village kitchens as per zones to cook for children while educating mothers about healthy meals and how to maintain

good hygiene in household.

Non-members of the cooperative have also been able to benefit through trainings and the terracing program, these are normally implemented by the cooperative in partnership with SPIU for community development

KOABURA is involved in community responsibilities to cater for the vulnerable people where they provide food and other items like chickens (Layers) for eggs, fruit seedlings and other farming initiatives depending on the needs of the vulnerable groups.

Nyirabarera says they have plans to expand their humanitarian

activities going to other areas when they don't operate from like the sectors of Bigogwe and Shyira, to continue giving chicken and fruit seedlings to the needy.

The manager of the cooperative, Jean Pierre Tuyigene says that they provide training sessions to all sorts of farmers in the area so that they acquire good agricultural practices and improve their farming activities.

These activities have helped increase production of the produce, from Irish potatoes, wheat, fruits and vegetables for the farmers in Rambura sector.

Tuyigene notes that the trainings help all farmers in the area because when one farmer gains skills, he/she automatically shares with the neighbor which increases productivity in the area and this has a positive impact to the cooperative and the citizens in general.

Nonetheless, the cooperative still faces with a limited number of skilled agricultural technicians to find farmers in their localities and advise them.

Post-harvest losses due to inappropriate post-harvest management and facilities, and failure to use modern farming techniques are other major impediments to the cooperative as the president mentions.

A poor condition of the road network during the rainy season is another challenge in some parts where the cooperative operates from. Nyirabarera calls on the concerned authorities to look into some of those challenges to ensure better operations.





# COOTHEGIM

improving livelihoods  
of tea growers through  
constant support

**H**undreds of tea growers brought together under the Gisovu - Muko Tea Growers Cooperative (COOTHEGIM) have had their livelihood improved most due to the undying commitment of the leadership of the Karongi based tea cooperative.

Senior officials of the cooperative have revealed that COOTHEGIM is the market leader at both the national and international level with their high quality tea (brand) attracting the highest price. This is why they have taken farther the sensitization campaign on quality assurance to ensure

their brand keeps grip on the foreign markets.

Samson Kanyandekwe, the President of COOTHEGIM told Rwanda Dispatch that Twumba Sector where they are headquartered was ranked number one in the performance of Ejo Heza, long term saving scheme. He attributed residents' high responsiveness to this savings scheme in the sector to spirited sensitization campaigns the cooperative carries-out and support to its members that constitute a larger proportion of the inhabitants there.

This has meant that none of our members has at any one time failed to pay for Mutuelle de Santé, and the cooperative ensures easy access to funds in case members are lacking money to pay for the health insurance, which is deducted from their sales during harvest.

## HISTORIC BACKGROUND

Kanyandekwe, recalls that the cooperative started on June 27, 1999 as an association called ATHEGIM. Since then, its membership has steadily been growing from 2,633 pioneer members to 2,988 to the day.

It became a fully fledged cooperative on July 23, 2004 hence changing its name to COOTHEGIM and gained its legal status as a tea cooperative on January 18, 2010 after undergoing both structural and managerial transformation.

The head of the cooperative noted that membership shrank from close to 4,000 to 2,988 following a new zoning system. This zoning policy of agricultural land that started in 2016 when members left COOTHEGIM to join Kathecogro and Coothegab that took 585 tea growers and 239 respectively.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

The tea cooperative has progressed by leaps and bounds in terms of production per unit of land, physical infrastructure, and working environment including improvement in the transportation of tea produce from the growers' plantations to the tea factory at Gisovu.

"We didn't have a single truck when we started operations as a tea cooperative, but we proudly own six trucks today," observed Kanyandekwe.

Commenting on the importance of trucks, the cooperative's President noted that apart from relieving farmers the burden of transporting their harvest using primitive ways over long distances to the factory, the scale of damage of the harvest dramatically reduced with the purchase of the trucks.

From 727.89 hectares the cooperative started with, the plantations grew to over 1,000 hectares before the implementation of the zoning policy. Today, the cooperative harvests some 888.18 hectares and has 110.85



"We didn't have a single truck when we started operations as a tea cooperative, but we proudly own six trucks today," observed Kanyandekwe.

young tea not ready to be harvested but nurses plans to expand its land as it braces to be self-reliant in five years time.

Operating in three sectors of Twumba, Rwankuba and Mutuntu in Karongi



Tea production has been increasing year in, year out since they commenced cooperative farming from about 4,000Kgs per/ha yearly (2003) to the current 7,000Kgs/ha., explains the Manager of the cooperative, Sinayobye.

District and Nkomane in Nyamagabe District. The cooperative has 17 collection centres called sites from 22 it had established before the zoning policy became effective.

Tea production has been increasing year in, year out since they commenced cooperative farming from about 4,000Kgs per/ha yearly (2003) to the current 7,000Kgs/ha., explains the Manager of the cooperative, Thomas Sinayobye.

Sinayobye, however, stressed that the production is still short of the projected 9,000Kgs/ha annually. While annual revenues, have been growing from 3 million Rwandan francs when they started the cooperative, the price has also been raised to 424/kg.

For this reason, Kanyandekwe



## TEA GROWERS

said that training members on better ways of raising the quality of tea is a continuous process. In this regard, the cooperative ensures that it avails fertilizers to all farmers in time as well as deploying their technical staff, agronomists included to continue coaching farmers on the best practices in the tea sector.

And, they are grateful to the government of Rwanda first to H.E President Paul Kagame, NAEB and their esteemed partners such as USADF and Gisovu factory for all the efforts that led to a myriad of achievements, particularly the steadfast improvement in the tea price.

And, they categorically and proudly extend gratitude to USADF for the financial support that has been critical in empowering the tea growers. For instance, the cooperative distributes free seeds to farmers as well as providing initial capital to lower income newcomers in the tea farming field.

COOTHEGIM, also, underwent fundamental structural reforms that positively impacted on service delivery as well as taking accountability and transparency to greater heights.

"The reforms saw the streamlining of our cooperative into mainly three committees, which include the general assembly, monitoring and evaluation, and management committee," Kanyandekwe



revealed during a recent interview with Rwanda Dispatch.

Kanyandekwe further says that the other committees charged with different responsibilities ensure that members receive the services that are part of their entitlements, altogether have led to increased satisfaction of members.

These include conflict resolution committee, tender committee and services committee.

The services committee oversees the clerks that fulfill day-to-day office duties and directly ensures that drivers, porters and other casual workers meet their responsibilities while the

conflict resolution committee is invaluable in making sure that any disputes in the cooperative are amicably settled.

All such initiatives, Kanyandekwe emphasizes, have strengthened the unity of members and ensure that the cooperative is managed in conformity to the laws guiding cooperatives in the country as well as allaying mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds.

The cooperative is grateful to the government that gave them 10% shares in Gisovu Tea Company (GTC), the factory where they supply tea leaves. The government of Rwanda owns 30% in the factory while investors are the

.....  
**COOTHEGIM, also, underwent fundamental structural reforms that positively impacted on service delivery as well as taking accountability and transparency to greater heights.**  
.....



majority shareholders with 60%.

Every end of year, members of the cooperative share the dividends from the factory depending on harvests from each member.

Over the years, the number of permanent employees has been on the rise and the cooperative today employs 74 permanent workers. Notably, they pay pension scheme money (RSSB) for all them and contribute taxes.

The steady increase in the prices of tea at the international market is one of the factors that continue to attract tea growers to the cooperative and to the occupation at large.

Besides, the cooperative and all members pay taxes to the government, which they say is an invaluable contribution to national development and particularly to Karongi District.

The cooperative mobilizes communities to engage in social assistance programmes, including paying for food, health insurance, Ejo Heza - a



pension scheme, the education of their children and participate in all government programmes designed to fast track national development.

## COOTHEGIM EMBRACES CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

At least 29 tea growers in particularly Twumba sector and neighbourhoods have received cows under Girinka programme initiated by the cooperative in line with the government policy of helping the poorer in communities to graduate from biting poverty.

**The cooperative is pursuing an ongoing programme of expanding hectares under tea growing. According to this plan the cooperative will be purchasing 150 hectares per year until they reach a target of increasing the cooperative land by 750 hectares in five years.**

## TEA GROWERS

In addition, 19 she-goats were distributed to poor households that grow tea to help complement their incomes and get organic fertilizers in a bid to increase output per unit of land under tea.

COOTHEGIM working with partners and clients extended safe and clean water to inhabitants of Twumba, Rwankuba, and Nkomane.

## ONGOING PROJECTS AND FUTURE PLANS

They plan to purchase another truck to increase convenience in transporting the tea produce as well as delivery of fertilizers and other farm tools to members.

The cooperative is pursuing an ongoing programme of expanding hectares under tea growing. According to this plan the cooperative will be purchasing 150 hectares per year until they reach a target of increasing the cooperative land by 750 hectares in five years.

To expand the infrastructure of the cooperative, there are plans to build a new block in bid to expand physical offices.

Further, they plan to bolster the cooperative canteen by increasing the items in it to make it more affordable for farmers. Members are entitled to picking household items and pay later when they get the money.





# KOPAKAMA

## safeguards production of delicious coffee from western hills

**T**housands of coffee trees on the mountainous slopes of western Rwanda form one the most breathtaking scenery and beautiful vegetation, but that pales in comparison to the taste with aroma providing hints of lemon and orange blossom of the coffee from this region.

In Mushubati of Rutsiro District and bordering areas in Karongi District, is an elevated region with good soil quality favorable for coffee farming. Farmers here grow coffee on the hilly

slopes at 1,788 altitudes, besides the sandy, stony soils they receive favorable rains throughout the year.

This region has known coffee for decades but the 1994



“  
Having realized the value of growing coffee as arguably the most valued cash crop known in the country, the cooperative secured funds from partners to build storage facilities and targeted processing while continuing to mobilize farmers on both sides of Rutsiro and Karongi districts.”

genocide against the Tutsi paralyzed coffee growing as many farmers were killed and others went into exile. It was years following the liberation when Rwandans returned and started thinking once again of coffee as a cash crop.

According to Francis Nkurikiyinka, President of Kopakama, 45 coffee farmers organized themselves in 1998 to form a cooperative that would help them collectively reap the benefits from the crop.

Having realized the value of growing coffee as arguably the most valued cash crop known in the country, the cooperative secured funds from partners to build storage facilities and targeted processing while continuing to mobilize farmers on both sides of Rutsiro and Karongi districts.

Starting with ten members,





## COFFEE PROCESSING

Kopakama handles this process and has established a system of processing all coffee Cherries from farmers which it oversees right from the washing station, non-cooperative members in their zone are included.

The cooperative pays upfront when farmers supply coffee Cherries, both members of the cooperative and non-members in the zone are treated equally to further encourage farmers, keep a steady supply and high quality.

Thereafter, the cooperative handles the rest of the processing until the final sale to customers. After selling, the cooperative once again evaluates what has been done and from the profits, they are able to give out a second payment, this is determined according to each farmer's supply as a mean to encourage farmers improve the quality and continue coffee growing.

When coffee processing is complete at the washing station it's taken to the dry mill in Karongi for further processing before its moved to NAEB where final preparation for export is handled.

The cooperative emphasizes on closely following every process in the coffee chain from the farm ensuring that everything is done right until delivery to customers. Kopakama focuses on producing high quality specialty coffee to collect premium prices on the market.

The President of the cooperative says that when

the achievements of the cooperative grew the numbers with a balanced gender representation. Today, there are 585 men and 477 women who total to 1,062 cooperative members.

Kopakama is organized in five zones of Suri, Mukura, Mageragere, Bumba and Cyarusera, this zoning system helps in mobilizing farmers. The zoning system introduced by National Agricultural Export Board (NAEB) mandates growers to supply coffee cherries to nearby collection or washing station. This has enhanced quality because coffee is treated at the right time applying the right methods.

**The cooperative emphasizes on closely following every process in the coffee chain from the farm ensuring that everything is done right until delivery to customers. Kopakama focuses on producing high quality specialty coffee to collect premium prices on the market.**

The structures of the cooperative are based on zones, where each has its own representatives that have 16 members to represent others during the general assembly.

Nkurikiyinka explains that to ease longer journeys made by farmers supplying produce, the cooperative identified strategic locations nearer to plantations and built washing stations in Mushubati, Nyagatare and Mukura.

Having good soils and climate in this part of Rwanda is not the only determinant for best coffee but the processes from which coffee passes from the farm to the final consumer adds a lot to the pleasant-tasting of the delicious drink.





## COFFEE PROCESSING

you follow the right course of action while processing coffee you will get quality which fetches high prices.

Kopakama produces coffee in two types, the specialty coffee grown as organic under natural conditions with no chemical inputs like industrial fertilizers, and the other coffee applied with all agricultural inputs.

Coffee produced in Rwanda has gained quality in recent years as government encouraged farmers to work together in cooperatives and improve quality which ultimately has increased quantity as well, this is having domino effects to livelihoods of many farmers.

In order to improve coffee farming practices, trainings have been conducted with the help of other partners aiming to share the work and improve farming systems, processing and marketing coffee.

### DOMINO EFFECTS FOR COFFEE FARMERS

As a farmer, Nkurikiyinka observes that the cooperative is the best thing that happened to farmers in the region and apart from raising farmer's livelihoods, they are creating employment to the community mostly the youth.

Before the cooperative was created, those who grew coffee could barely get market, today all they produce is taken at high prices and during good seasons a bonus after sale is always expected.

Members of Kopakama with



eggs in one basket, the cooperative supports farmers start other income generating activities apart from coffee such initiatives include buying livestock for its members which has double benefits in keeping livestock and getting manure to improve the quality of the crop.

Nkurikiyinka underlines that the livestock which is normally a cow is passed on from one member to another upon giving birth, when one receives a calf from his colleague it creates a bond between the two and this has created unity among members.

The program of giving livestock which is copied from the government policy of Girinka, officials of the cooperative say it

their families are insured in the Community Based Health Insurance commonly known as Mituele de Santé which is fully paid by the cooperative. The cooperative also supports its members as well as staff to subscribe in the long term savings through Ejo Heza pension scheme.

To avoid putting all their



## COFFEE PROCESSING

has strengthened unity in Kopakama while improving the economic livelihoods of its members.

These developments are not benefiting members only but residents as well, where Kopakama operates from are some of the biggest beneficiaries because services offered by the cooperative are non-selective. These services range from buying coffee to bonuses offered to members as well as non-member farmers.

Employment is another important initiative offered on a competitive basis, the cooperative has about 30 permanent staff including administrative positions, field officers like agronomists, cleaners and security personnel.

The residents also benefit from casual labour and are free to use infrastructures established by the cooperative like electricity and water supply networks among others. Kopakama supports initiatives by residents like tailoring and keeps encouraging innovations to uplift communities.

The Manager of the cooperative underlined the support provided to members during lockdowns imposed to curb the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. He said that the cooperative was close to its members through providing any support in the difficult time.

In general, the cooperative



**Sustainability is an important part of what Kopakama wants to achieve, they have started a program of buying land to expand coffee growing activities.**

was able to provide food supplements, sanitary essentials like basins, soap, face masks and sanitizers among other basic necessities.

Sustainability is an important part of what Kopakama wants to achieve, they have started a program of buying land to expand coffee growing activities. Having the youth within their ranks, the cooperative envisions they are perfect generation to continue this noble work after the old

are no longer able to carry-on.

However, the youth lack land to cultivate which forced the cooperative to give them land they had acquired which is cultivated in groups and the produce from the youth will be processed separately by the cooperative in an innovative way to sale as 'Youth Coffee'.

The manager says they support to government programs, they partner with local authorities to identify areas that require the cooperative's support in response to uplift the welfare of the citizens and support community.

However, production of coffee doesn't go without challenges. The labor intensive activity that goes with its disadvantages and sometimes there are price fluctuations on the market.

The production of coffee also faces limited land resources to expand farms. Other challenges include climate change that brings extreme weather conditions, diseases and pests that affect harvests.







# Cooproviba/Gisiza

## Attaches value to production of high quality Banana Beer

**B**ananas have carried a significant importance to Rwanda's diet for a long time now. It is one of the highly consumed staple crops in the country thanks to its multipurpose use –culinary and brewing.

Urwagwa, a high demand banana brew is known among top alcoholic beverages in the Eastern Africa region for centuries. In Rwanda, the popular alcohol drink still plays an important role in fulfilling social obligations like marriage, community

gatherings and constitutes a significant source of income to its producers.

The brewing process is known to different cultures and were passed over to generations



**Anthère Ntahonsigaye,**  
President of Cooproviba/Gisiza

“Before, farmers in the area were disorganized where everyone cultivated a melange of crops which could not enhance productivity until the idea of creating the cooperative was hatched thus choosing to reorganize and decided to concentrate on maize and beans farming.”

but as demand grew some were starting to loose their originality and to safeguard it, this called for modernized brewing.

Banana growers and Urwagwa brewers in Musasa of Rutsiro District saw an opportunity in the increasing demand of Urwagwa, but there was a deteriorating quality of the drink on market. They resolved to work together to improve the value chain of banana brewing.

When they realized a bigger potential they talked to more farmers and fifteen residents of Gisiza, Rutsiro in the Western Province initiated Coopérative de Production de Vin de Bananes, COOPROVIBA as its French acronym.

Anthère Ntahonsigaye, President of Cooproviba/Gisiza underlined that “Urwaga”, is an artisanal beer made from



## MANUFACTURING

had started deteriorating," Ntahonsigaye said.

The Cooperative was started in 2009 with only 15 members who contributed a share capital of Rwf 100,000 that totaled to Rwf 1,500,000 at the time. Today, the cooperative has grown by leaps and bounds since they introduced new brands.

"We got this idea after noticing that banana farmers where loosing so much of their produce due to lack of enough market while their produce would go wasted and people were getting health related issues as a result of consuming unhygienic brew through rudimentary processes," explains the president of the cooperative.

He underlined that, today the banana brew from their factory is a bottled drink of high

the fermentation of the Musa acuminata variety of bananas that is very popular among the local population and beyond.

The popularity of the drink encouraged them, as Ntahonsigaye said, to think of building a factory that has been able to contribute to development of farmers, local population and the district in general.

With Cooproviba/Gisiza having started a modern banana processing factory, the first of its kind in the district, banana farmers are already upbeat, saying this presents a major market for their produce.

"The facility is providing a ready market for



farmers and improving the quality of banana brew currently made compared to the traditional system that

**Impakomu Cooperative has been able to create new employment opportunities and reduction of women unemployment to alleviate poverty while promoting economic transformation and reducing many residents from subsistence agriculture, increasing income levels, thereby enabling people to improve lives.**





## MANUFACTURING

quality standard, and making healthy drinks is one of their priorities.

With the deteriorating quality in many of traditional producers, which are not on the required standards as per Rwanda Standards Board (RSB), discouraging sub-standard brewing which involves squeezing bananas using one's feet because its unhygienic and can bring health difficulties.

Producers like Cooproviba/ Gisiza are raising the bar high in brewing of banana beer but there has been a high cost of production since they started.

The nature and size of the factory was one the factors that the business would not make immediate profits and whatever was made would be washed away in factory overheads as they built capacity.

Ntahonsigaye revealed that they are now starting to take into account how to reduce the cost of production in order to make the price of their drinks affordable to many people.

Today, the factory has a permanent address with in-built state of art machines compared to previously when they operated from one of the members' home facility and rented other required space for storage.

The plant is able to buy 15 tons of bananas from the farmers per week and produces 1,000 crates of banana wine per week, each crate has 24 bottles all well packaged that meets



quality standards as set by RSB.

To ease up the transport problems, Cooproviba has two vehicles that help in the transportation of the produce from farmers to the factory and at the same time distribute to different selling outlets across the country.

According to the president, Cooproviba is oriented towards agro-processing industry sector with an objective of creating jobs and fighting against poverty among shareholders and the local population.

"We have our mission based on giving value addition to the Rwandan bananas by acquisition of appropriate production equipment's and technologies in banana beer transformation and compete with other beers by enhancing quality." He said

The factory has been able to contribute to the socio-economic wellbeing of its' area through job creation as it employees 11 permanent workers and over 30 casual laborers. The factory pays well at the end of every month and all employees are able to take good care of their families by paying fees for their children, health insurance and meeting other domestic demands.

"We share the profits among members, pay health insurance for all our workers and make sure that they also save in Ejo Heza pension scheme of which we do for them and when one encounters a situation that needs our help, we are always there to help them." Ntahonsigaye underlined.





their production and limited ability to satisfy the market as production is still low compared to the demand.

The President of the cooperative notes that, nonetheless Rwandans now enjoy the great Urwagwa beer taste with quality standards and a fresher taste because of their quality production and intend to expand the factory with more machines and workers so as to meet the demand on market.

Cooproviba/Gisiza has been able to give a cow to each member and is also helping the needy by building houses for them as well as pay for their health insurance as a way of uplifting their community.

Furthermore, Cooproviba/Gisiza facilitates farmers by giving them banana suckers for planting and this is done in partnership with Rwanda Agricultural Board (RAB), when farmers harvest the

“Our originality of Urwagwa has been kept with the required quality standards and packaging as well as branding necessities.”

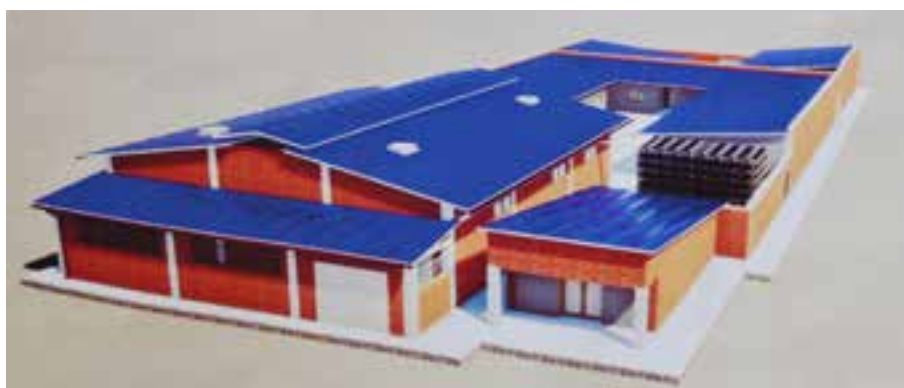
cooperative buys their harvest at a fair price.

However, Ntahonsigaye says that they sometimes encounter challenges mostly in acquiring new factory machines which most of them are procured from outside the country.

The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic was a major impediment to the cooperative as it was to most of the world, it caused a setback in

“Our originality of Urwagwa has been kept with the required quality standards and packaging as well as branding necessities.” He said.

The factory of Cooproviba/Gisiza cooperative is certified by Rwanda Standards Board for quality assurance which was given before its products were put on market. This confirms that they subscribe to all standards set by RSB that contain a number of requirements which are put in place to make sure that whatever is for sale is fit for consumption.







# KOAIRA COOPERATIVE accords Irish potato farmers' access to better markets

Sector after legally registering as a cooperative in July 2018.

According to the president of the cooperative, Vincent Nshizirungu, they started with 167 members working from the two cells but lacked an office and storage for their produce thus the cooperative focused on getting space for their physical address.

"Our first goal was to find a place to work from as we did not have any structural building, so we decided to settle for renting a block in Nyagafumberi Village but we later bought land and developed it with the help of PASP in 2019, thereafter becoming fully functional." Nshizirungu revealed.

In year 2021, in partnership with PASP organization they procured a lorry and other office materials most required like weighing machines. The cooperative has gradually acquired many assets and membership grown from the initial Rwf.5,000 to Rwf.25,100 required to join the cooperative.

Under the intervention, farmers now are able to have their produce transported on time, ready markets for their produce at pre-negotiated prices and the produce has also improved as buyers set the standards that farmers adhere to.

**F**or an individual smallholder farmer, sourcing for markets of their products can be a laborious and costly activity. Even after the efforts, one is never guaranteed that they got the best possible deal.

Such challenges are likely to lead Irish Potato farmers to turn away from farming activities and look for other less tasking economic activities or even farm for their own consumption.

To smallholder farmers in Nyabihu District in the Western province of Rwanda, these challenges have been consigned to the annals of history. Thanks to Koaira Cooperative in partnership with PASP that sought to organize farmers to bridge the gap between farmers and potential markets to allow them guaranteed access.



**Nshizirungu Vincent,**  
**The President of the cooperative.**

Koaira cooperative started with the aim of adding value chain supply for Irish potato farmers in the cells of Rega and Arusha in Bigogwe



members and financial institutions are assured repayment.

The cooperative has plans of setting up a seedling field where they will be able to provide members and other farmers good quality seedlings to improve value to their produce whereas encouraging the youth and more women, who compose a big number of the community to benefit.

In its implementation, the initiative is enabling the community achieve key and strategic government objectives such as poverty reduction, access to finance and use of better quality inputs for the agriculture sector.

The intervention has also led to major improvement in aspects of road infrastructure, where government has already constructed half way the road to Arusha.

The president of the cooperative underscored the need to expand their activities and said they are now in talks with local authorities to give them unusable and underutilized public land to cultivate it.

The few years Koaira's operation has improved farmer's activities and livelihoods, but some challenges still drag farmers down like getting quality seedlings on time as well as enough fertilizers that have become also very expensive.

However, Nshizirungu says they are advising farmers to turn to alternatives like making compost and mixing animal manure with industrial fertilizers which fairly yields good production.

This is a marked difference from the traditional approaches where farmers depended on middle men who rarely cared about the market bargain process and were always looking for a cheaper bargain.

"Farmers can now concentrate on producing without worrying about the market because this is now guaranteed. We have seen yields go up and farmers' wellbeing improve," says Nshizirungu.

The cooperative also managed to help its members during the Covid-19 pandemic even as it was still young, members were

supported with some financial assistance for those who had financial constraints.

Koaira has grown and today has 514 members, all supported by the cooperative catering for their Ejo Heza, a pension saving scheme and health insurance in the Community-Based Health Insurance. They also intend to carry out crop diversification by growing vegetables to supplement members incomes.

Farmers now have access to finance without collateral because the cooperative guarantees its





# STAKEHOLDERS IMPRESSED WITH STEADY PROGRESS OF RWANDA'S COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT



Hosting the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) summit is one of the landmark achievements recorded by Rwanda's cooperative movement. ICA is the independent association that unites, represents and serves cooperatives worldwide. Rwanda Cooperative Alliance (RCA) officials said the summit is one of the fruits gained from collaboration and partnership flourishing between RCA and cooperative bodies at the regional and global levels.

Over 10,000 people representing cooperative movements worldwide were in Kigali in 2019 to draw best practices from Rwanda's cooperative movement and exchange ideas on the way forward.

"Rwanda gained a lot from this summit and among the gains is the decision to have the Head Office of cooperative movement of EAC economic bloc in Rwanda. Although negotiations are underway in reference to modalities, ICA President accepted the decision," said Prof. Dr. Jean Bosco Harelimana, the Director General of RCA in an exclusive interview with Rwanda Dispatch.

Aside, the Rwandan government

through RCA, established in 2007 to promote, register and regulate cooperatives, streamlined the management of cooperatives. RCA recognizes stakeholders for walking the journey with them and describes their financial and technical support as critical in evolution of Rwanda's cooperative movement.

The agency, thus, makes special mention of Business Development Fund (BDF), National Agricultural Export Development Board (NAEB), Rwanda Agricultural Board (RAB), Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MANAGRI) and Ministry of ICT and Innovation.

Overview of statistics of cooperatives in Rwanda



The Director General elaborated on their 5-year strategic plan that spells out increasing productivity in cooperative movement as key priority.

There's documented evidence in Agriculture and Agribusiness sectors about the increasing productivity - these trends are attributed to efforts by RCA, RAB, MINAGRI, NAEB and other partners.

Current enabling environment is hugely responsible for dramatic increase in productivity and membership of cooperatives, which translate in improved incomes

Rwanda cooperative movement is promoting financial inclusion and encourages members to work directly with financial institutions, and receive financial services from 437 SACCOs plus other commercial institutions.



cooperatives for crop cultivation.”

Harerimana said the Crop Intensification Programme, Ministry of Agriculture and the union use cooperatives as vehicle for distribution of improved seeds and fertilizers.

“UNICOOPAGI through the P4P initiative use cooperative structures to build capacity in post-harvest handling techniques and commodity quality, leading to post-harvest loss reduction, and led to improved market opportunities for smallholder farmers.”

Players in the sub-sector say cooperatives ensure success of government programmes impacting the living standards of Rwandans.

“Cooperatives mobilize and facilitate members to subscribe and pay contributions in the long term saving scheme dubbed Ejo Heza. It’s the best model to attain financial inclusion,” observes Abdil Wahab Ntaganda, Inspector of cooperatives in the Southern Province.

Pierre Twagirayezu, a smallholder farmer from COOPIMU, Nyamagabe District said that following UNICOOPAGI/VI AGROFORESTRY’s trainings, skills helped to widen his income and improve family welfare.

Before, Twagirayezu’s family lived side by side with biting poverty and family was engulfed by food security all blame on low productivity linked to traditional farming which he engaged in.

“I now pay school fees, medical insurance and other needs, all because I heeded to lessons from trainings,” attests Twagirayezu.

Marthe M. Nzirabatinya, President of Kobacyamu Tea Cooperative in Nyamagabe District confirms the role of cooperatives in supporting farmers that lives and communities are uplifted.

and livelihoods – gains that aligns with the National Strategy for Transformation (NSTI).

From 200 cooperatives with 300,000 subscriptions to 10,786 cooperatives bringing together 5.3m cooperative members from all walks with Rwf53bn is a tremendous achievement. Rwanda cooperative movement is promoting financial inclusion and encourages members to work directly with financial institutions, and receive financial services from 437 SACCOs plus other financial institutions.

The bulging subscription of cooperative members speaks volumes about the growing trust among Rwandans in the cooperative movement that has emerged from turbulent times defined by massive mismanagement and misappropriation of public funds.

Empowerment of cooperative leaders and members through regular trainings ensures promotion of skills - prerequisite for good governance. Subsequently, transparency, integrity and accountability that define this movement have

meant a lot in restoration of trust - essential in not only building cooperatives but also ensuring high performance.

To this effect, RCA encourages cooperatives to hire relevant personnel to run sensitive offices.

Startling stories gathered during a recent tour by Rwanda Dispatch journalists in the Southern Province and parts of Western Province indicate that the cooperatives’ roles in fueling economic development cannot be faulted.

Stakeholders appreciate ways the government has employed to empower members particularly lower income earners that access farm tools like improved seeds and fertilizers, financial skills, post-harvest handling techniques as well as scaling up commodity quality.

Emphasizing government’s role Athanase Harerimana, Coordinator for a union of agricultural cooperatives (UNICOOPAGI) noted: “The government has invested reclaiming marshlands, terracing and hillside irrigation to increase production. These reclaimed lands are given to smallholder farmers through

“**Stakeholders appreciate ways the government has employed to empower members particularly lower income earners that access farm tools like improved seeds and fertilizers, financial skills, post-harvest handling techniques as well as scaling up commodity quality.**”



# Qatar World Cup:

## Stakes will be high for Gulf State to make the tourney a success



The Lusail Stadium is the biggest stadium in Qatar and was inaugurated on 9 September 2022.

BY JEJE MUHINDE

**AS QATAR** gears up for the World Cup 2022, stakes will be high for the Gulf State to host a successful tournament when it kicks off from November 20 to December 18.

For the first time, the FIFA World Cup 2022 is set to be a special one considering it

will be the first time that to be hosted by a Muslim country.

The tournament features 32 teams that officially qualified for the competition. Joining the host nation Qatar will be 31 other countries that earned a ticket through regional qualifying matches.

Qatar's massive wealth afforded the Gulf state to build

world-class facilities from training centers to stadiums.

Eight stadiums will host the event across Qatar's five cities: Lusail, Al Khor, Al Rayyan, Al Wakrah, and Doha. Many of the stadiums have been built from scratch with works that started in 2011 for many of them.

What is special about these

stadiums is that they are all across five different Qatari cities, and they're located within a 55-km radius of Qatar's capital city of Doha.

The Khalifa Stadium that will host the third-place playoff match has been operational since 1976; all other stadiums have been constructed with the FIFA World Cup, Qatari, and culture in mind.

At a staggering cost of \$767 million, Lusail Iconic Stadium has the highest capacity (80,000) and will host the final, interestingly when the tournament ends, it will be turned into a college, community centre, and clinic.

The Al Bayt Stadium is set to host nine matches and will be the stage for the opening ceremony. The opener match will be between hosts Qatar and Ecuador on November 20.

Like the previous editions, more than 1.2 million football fans from different countries are expected to descend to the peninsula for the tournament.

If you're a fan from Rwanda planning to travel for the tournament, remarkably you'll need two important things, a FIFA ticket and even a confirmed accommodation to enter Qatar from November 1.

If you're planning to buy an online last-minute sales ticket, the window was open from Tuesday, September 27, and will run until the end of the competition on December 18.

Also, given the state-of-the-art air conditioning, don't forget to travel with a sweater to Qatar because seven of the eight stadiums are



**Khalifa International Stadium:** Also known as National Stadium, is a multi-purpose stadium in Doha, Qatar, it is part of the Doha Sports City complex, which also includes Aspire Academy, Hamad Aquatic Centre, and the Aspire Tower.

**If you're planning to buy an online last-minute sales ticket, the window was open from Tuesday, September 27, and will run until the end of the competition on December 18.**

air-conditioned.

However, before traveling be warned that one challenge you're likely to face is where to sleep for most of the tournament because there is a hotel shortage. Hotels are not simply available.

Reports from Qatar have indicated that many hotels are booked out and organizers are facing criticism over the lack of affordable accommodation.

For instance, Airbnb rooms are charging up to \$350 to \$4,500 per night, according to a BBC radio report.

A luxury villa is up for a cost of \$11,500 per night and the cheapest room, a prefabricated cabin in the desert is priced at \$207 (Rwf.207,000) per night.

Since the World Cup is expected to attract more than one million visitors, by March Qatar only had 30,000 hotel rooms, 80% of which had already been booked by Fifa

for football teams, officials, and sponsors.

According to James M. Dorsey, a Middle East expert, landlords in Qatar are either not extending contracts or want to raise the rent by astronomical amounts because of the World Cup.

To boost accommodation, organizers have been forced

to find another solution. From Jeddah, there will be another extra 160 flights organized per match day.

Two cruise ships are being converted into floating hotels that will be moored at Doha's port.

For ticket holders to get to Qatar from neighboring cities like Riyadh, Muscat, and

Kuwait, the promised high-speed trains between the Gulf States are not finished.

Despite the accommodation chaos, some fans have planned to stay in Dubai and will travel to Doha only on match days.

In addition to hotel shortage, there is another downside that comes with it; alcohol is only set to be sold in certain fan zones.

Further, the Gulf State does not tolerate misbehavior which is bound to occur with many people coming from different countries gathering in the smallest country to ever hold a World Cup.

Being the smallest nation by land size ever to stage the World Cup, a lot is at stake for the Qataris who spent over \$200bn since it won the bid to host the tournament in 2010 to build infrastructure and stadiums.

For them, the tournament is not only about success but pride, prestige, and reputation.



**Al-Bayt Stadium** is a retractable roof 60,000 capacity sitter football stadium in Al Khor. The stadium will host the opening match of the 2022 World Cup between the host and Ecuador.



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