



FOOD SECURITY

&

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

of Women in Muko Sector, Musanze



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IMPROVING FOOD SECURITY AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN SMALLHOLDER FARMERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

FOCUS ON WOMEN AGRICULTURE IN MUKO SECTOR, MUSANZE RWANDA

About 80% of Rwanda's population depends on agriculture for survival; yet there are insufficient skills in sustainable agricultural approaches, disaster mitigation, veterinary services and limited collaboration of women farmers to increase agricultural productivity.

Women smallholder farmers produce most of food consumed and yet they have limited access to credit and inputs. Smallholder women farmers also don't own most of the land they cultivate.

At the same time, women hardly have a voice in decision-making about farming, and often are allocated smaller plots on marginal land with few assets to cope with shocks.

High illiteracy rates among women, with



just 33% of women having functional literacy skills, and a lack of basic numeracy, business development and marketing skills further impede their ability to earn reasonable income farming.

The Government of Rwanda has over the years increased agriculture budget, but there is no clear agenda to support smallholder farmers and rural employed women. Instead focus is on large scale commercial farming.

Women in Rwanda make up 53% of the population and the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), estimates that Rwandan women smallholder farmers form 57% of the agricultural labour force.

Despite being major players in the agriculture sector, smallholder women farmers are some of the poorest people; they have less access to agricultural inputs and are less likely to benefit from government services.

Continent-wide, women own only 1% of the land in Africa; receive only 7% of extension services and 1% of all agricultural credit.



According to the World Bank, if women farmers in Africa had the same access to land as men, they would increase their agricultural productivity by up to 20%.

About 52% of the 3,886 households in Muko live below the poverty line and struggle to provide basic necessities such as food, medical care, and school fees. Over 50% of children between the age of six months and five years suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Agricultural Development Programme (CAADP), the World Bank and others are now calling for greater focus on women

An analysis of AAIR country strategy 2012-2017 & Participatory Baseline Survey. Institute of Policy Analysis and Research, Rwanda. March 2013. Pg.16
Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis and Nutrition Survey. National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. 2012.



farmers.

Action Aid International Rwanda (AAIR) is a country programme of Action Aid International (AAI) – an anti-poverty agency working with poor, voiceless people, communities and similar-minded partners worldwide.

Action Aid is a non-partisan, non-religious development organization that has been working in Rwanda as a full Country Programme since 1997 to contribute towards eradication of poverty and injustices with focus on tackling the root causes of poverty.

It is against this background that AAIR launched a Country Strategic Plan 2013-2017 on May 14, 2013 with a very strong focus, alignment and commitment to contribute to

the delivery of pro-poor initiatives, community development programmes and short and long term strategies including; EDPRS II and Vision 2020.

AAIR vision and mission is Rwanda free of poverty and injustice where every citizen fully enjoys the right to life with dignity and to work with poor Rwandans, with emphasis on women and the girl child.

IMPROVING FOOD SECURITY & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

For Women (smallholder farmers) and their Families in Muko sector, Musanze District

Farming in Rwanda remains largely subsistence in nature. With a rapid increase in population, pressure to ensure food security is a constant challenge for stakeholders.

Significant progress has been made in Rwanda in the past decade with regard to overall agricultural production and animal husbandry. However, operational efficiency and farm productivity and the prosperity of a very large proportion of the rural population, remain a major concern.

The Women's Rights to Sustainable Livelihoods project seeks to support women to overcome some of the challenges



confronting their ability to adopt and practice sustainable agriculture. Some of these include; unpaid care work, inadequate access to farm inputs and other resources and low budgetary allocation to activities of women smallholder farmers.

The above mentioned gaps are the root causes of insufficient agricultural production and food insecurity in some rural areas in Rwanda, especially Muko sector in Musanze District. Therefore, knowing that women smallholder farmers are the majority in agriculture sector, the project aims at improving food security and economic opportunities in Muko sector by empowering women smallholder farmers.

According to a survey by IPAR Muko is one of the most food-insecure areas; suffering chronic food shortage and flooding. High unemployment, coupled with limited vocational education opportunities, results in extreme poverty.

The project, sponsored by Big Lottery Fund, a UK-based organisation, is aimed at empowering 1,256 most vulnerable women smallholder farmers along with 251 vulnerable male smallholder farmers in Muko sector, through improved food security and economic exposure.

The project is delivered and managed by Actionaid Rwanda (AAR) and implemented by Faith Victory Association (FVA), a community-based NGO that has been working on women and children's rights for 10 years and partnered with AAR for seven years.

Raphael Mushumba is the partner project coordinator from Faith Victory Association (FVA). He says 50 cooperatives with a total of 1,507 members, 256 of who are men, have benefited from the project.

The three-year project commenced on June 9, 2014 and has had tremendous impact on the lives of women smallholder farmers in the area.

According to Mushumba, beneficiaries received several trainings in areas of sustainable agriculture, leadership and communication skills, agro forestry, disaster

management and women leadership.

He adds that Muko sector has a series of problems that range from dire poverty, disasters such as floods, limited land, over population and hunger.

To help this vulnerable community to become self-reliant, the project gave them agricultural inputs. They include 30,000kgs of Irish potato seeds, 3,000 kgs of maize seed, 500 goats, 500 piglets, 5,000 chicken, vegetable and tree tomato seeds which were shared amongst the cooperatives.

Jean Pierre Munyambaraga is the Muko sector agronomist. He is optimistic that the project will eradicate hunger and poverty in the area.

"The biggest problem people of Muko had was ignorance; they didn't know about best practices in farming; how to save and work in groups. But through this project, we have given them several trainings as well as in puts and are helping them implement what they have learnt."

Munyambaraga who helped in the selection of the cooperatives to be supported, also ensures that the inputs are given to the right people. The beneficiaries



are groups of very poor people in the area who were encouraged to work together through cooperatives and eradicate poverty in their households and the sector at large. This has yielded tremendous results as some of the women attest.

As the old adage states, Rome was not built in one day; the members of Hugukirwa Muko Cooperative can attest to the truth in this saying. Located in Cyivugiza cell, Nyagahondo village in Musanze, the cooperative is comprised of 30 women. It was formed as early as 2007, but was legally registered as a cooperative in 2012.

Hilarie Mujawamungu is the president of this cooperative that deals in livestock rearing, basket weaving, banana seed multiplication, maize and Irish potato growing. It also runs a savings and credit scheme. Wearing a smile on her face, Mujawamungu narrates how they started small but have managed to diversify into various income generating activities with support from Action Aid.

Women testify to new lease of life

Hilarie Mujawamungu



Her story

My husband never wanted me to work, fearing that I would be wooed by other men; I will never forget the day when I was selected to go for training in Uganda and he stopped me. When I saw other women go and returned to implement what they had learned, I was deeply hurt," Mujawamungu recalls.

Even as her husband did not want her to go out and work, his income was not enough to provide basic needs at home. "He would sometimes refuse to buy food for three or four days; it's my neighbours who would always intervene and force him to buy us some food. There are times when he would physically assault me and I would go and seek refuge from my friends for two-three days living the children behind."

The mother of four was like a prisoner in her own home, who was not supposed to have any money nor have a say in making decisions for her home.

Tired of the situation, Mujawamungu asked her husband's friends to help her make him understand her desire to work; and that was the genesis of her success story.

The man finally listened to wise counsel and allowed her to become the leader of women at her cell. She was later selected for 15-days training in basket weaving at the district and emerged the best. She was later taken to Kigali for a month for further training.

Upon her return she looked for poor women that had similar problems like her in the past and imparted in them the skills she had learnt from

Kigali. "People laughed at us but we never gave up," she says.

She says before starting the cooperative, the women were very poor even in their homes and most of the members were fighting with their husbands to provide for them.

"We were very poor to an extent of failing to buy salt and would entirely depend on men. All the time most of us would be fighting with our husbands to provide or would sleep hungry," Mujawamungu recalls.

When they formed the cooperative, they started weaving baskets which they sold at a price ranging from Rwf3,000 to 10,000 depending on the size. However, life still remained hard as the market for baskets was small and little income trickled in.

Life however changed when the women partnered with Action Aid in 2010 and received training in sustainable agriculture. In 2012, Mujawamungu, says they received funding worth Rwf3.2m from AAR which they invested in banana seed multiplication and would sell each seed at Rwf500.

They also received Rwf800, 000 through PFA which they used to train other cooperatives in the district and established a forum for networking. The women received training on their rights, communication skills and how to track budget allocation to agriculture. She says before the intervention of Action Aid, their cooperative was only dealing in basket weaving but has now managed to diversify into other projects. They have managed to buy a piece of land at Rwf230, 000 and every member has given a pig worth Rwf60,000.

The cooperative received funds from Action Aid to oversee the construction of an Early Child Development Centre which is up and running.

Mujawamungu confidently says that all her members are doing well and that violence in homes has reduced as the women can provide for their basic need as well as support their husbands. They all have health insurance and know their rights as women. She says that each member of the cooperative now owns a phone—something that was a myth when they had just started their cooperative.

Life changing story

Emelance Uwiragiye



For Emelance Uwiragiye, also a member of Hugukirwa Muko Cooperative, she would chose to die if she is to back to the life she was in before joining this cooperative.

"I and my husband had no stable job, we would survive on digging for other people who would pay us Rwf700 a day, but this was not enough to provide for us and worse still these odd jobs wouldn't come regularly."

Domestic problems kept piling when Uwiragiye gave birth to a child with a cleft lip who needed

specialised medical attention. She recalls spending more than two and half years nursing her child and thus couldn't get enough time to do her odd jobs to support her husband look after the family.

"Life became very hard, my child was not breastfeeding so we would use the little money we had to buy milk for him but it was never enough. He was malnourished and underweight and was worried that I would lose him at some point."

Her child was later enrolled into the nutrition programme at

Nyakinama Health Centre where she was given 2kgs of porridge flour per week. Although it was not enough, she used it sparingly so that the child did not lack what to eat before the end of the week.

Uwiragiye's life revolved around nursing her child and isolation as well as sleepless nights because of hunger. In 2012 she was introduced to Hugukirwa Muko through one of the members she used to work for.

"I used to dig for one of the members at the cooperative and was very hard working; so the ladies their got concerned about my low standards of living. I had no shoes; my feet were cracked and had ragged clothes. The women contributed and helped to pay my membership fee, I was the 30th member of the cooperative."

The women taught her weaving and her first basket earned Rwf5, 000. "I saved Rwf1, 000 in the cooperative and used the remaining balance to buy Irish, salt, soap, jelly and shoes. For the first time in many years she was satisfied that day.

Through Improving Food Security and Economic

Opportunities for Women Programme, Uwiragiye no longer sleeps hungry and has been able to buy land worth Rwf200,000 where she grows maize and beans. Together with her husband, they managed to build a five-roomed house and now live in their own house.

"Through the project, I have been able to acquire a pig, a goat, a sheep and four hens," she said. Today Uwiragiye can't fail to raise Rwf7, 000 in a month and is also able to pay for her child and her step brother's school fees.

She adds that they acquired training in sustainable agriculture and livestock keeping which she uses to look after her animals and tend her garden professionally and maximise benefit.

She commends AAIR for supporting and giving a platform to voiceless poor women and help them eradicate poverty in their families.

Her child is now healthy and is currently studying at the Muko ECCD that was also constructed by AAIR.

Widow sees life through new window of charity

Venerande Nyirabapagasi

The death of her partner had come with the death of her hope; poured a distressing wretchedness onto her struggling life and incubated more problems.

Fifty-year-old Venerande Nyirabapagasi's story was that of chronic need and despair, until she joined Hugukirwa Muko Cooperative and got support from AAIR.

"I was not legally married and was staying in a rented house

with my partner and our four children. He died trying to flee the country in 2001 and until today, I've never seen his body but was only told by some of his friends that he was killed," she sadly recalls.

Nyirabapagasi was a full time house wife before the death of her partner and never at one point thought that she could find work to sustain neither herself nor the kids. However all this changed after the misfortune that befell her family.



"Seven months after receiving the news of the death of my partner, I was evicted from the house where I was staying. I had to sell my clothes and things in the house to get a roof on my head," she said.

Despite getting a place after her first eviction, she didn't stay there for long as she was evicted again because she was unable to pay rent.

She would sometimes spend a week homeless with no roof on her head or food to eat. One day, she got a Good Samaritan who gave her shelter for two years. It was then that she met a friend who introduced her to the cooperative; at first she was

hesitant to join because she didn't have any money.

She eventually joined the group and was taught how to weave baskets; she made 20 baskets that sold at Rwf5,000 each. This was the beginning of the end of her misery as she used part of the money to buy a plot of land and the balance for basic needs at home. The members in her group helped her construct a house with each member contributing Rwf1,000 to pay the builder.

Last year, Nyirabapagasi and her group members received a boost from Faith Victory Association, an implementing partner of the **Improving Food Security and Economic**

Opportunities for Women project. They were given 100 chicken, 10 goats, 10 pigs, and 600kgs of Irish potato feeds and fertilizers.

Today, the mother of four is a proud owner of 2 pigs, 4 hens, a house worth Rwf500,000. She is also anticipating a good harvest of Irish potatoes grown on one and half hectares of land. She no longer lacks what to eat or fail to have a roof on her head as was the case before. In addition, she is able to pay health insurance for herself and her children as well as pay for their school fees.

Today, this beneficiary of the cooperative is sharing her knowledge and experience to empower other poor and marginalised women in Muko. She has so far trained four groups, comprising 30 members each, in basket weaving free of charge. Her desire is to own a piece of land where she can cultivate as well as have electricity in her house.

"All I have today is because of the support I got from AAIR; they have given me knowledge through several trainings. Who knew that at one point I could own a phone, and know how to operate it?"

From despair to satisfaction

Marcelline Uzamukunda



Marcelline Uzamukunda suffered from domestic violence for years often ending up homeless, but from formation of the cooperative helped turn her life round.

Her husband did petty jobs for survival and from the money he earned, it was evident that he was unable to provide for his family on his own.

"Whenever I would serve my husband food without salt he would pour it in my face,

he would be filled with rage and would throw me and the kids out of the house for some days," she said.

Tired of the situation, Uzamukunda looked for women with similar situations to start a cooperative. Today she is the president of Twiteze Imbere Sangano cooperative.

"I looked for 15 women and in 2011 we started our cooperative with 22 members at the time and wanted to

better their lives. We started by saving Rwf1,500 every month which we did for a year and later bought a mattress for each member."

They kept saving as a group and later used the money to buy pigs and chicken for the members. They also ventured into Irish potato growing and their lives have since greatly improved.

One of their early achievements is when members harvested two tons of Irish and each member took home 15kgs for consumption and sold the remaining balance. Later, AAIR came in and gave them support of Rwf2m which they used to rent five hectares of land. They later received more support through FVA that gave them 600kgs of Irish potato seed which they planted on the rented land. They also received 100 chicken, 10 pigs and 10 goats which they shared amongst the members.

Anathalie Nyirankiranuye is one of the beneficiaries from this project. She now sleeps on a mattress, has a pig that produces fertilisers for her garden at home. She has also received training in sustainable agriculture, project and financial management.

From despair to satisfaction

Marcelline Uzamukunda



It is every woman's dream to walk down the aisle and live happily forever with the man of her dreams. However, this was not the case for 40-year-old Donatille Kanziga, a member of Hagurukamumwete Cyogo Cooperative. Her story is that of transformation from the misery of gender-based violence to that of hope. Kanziga was a victim of domestic violence for many years and often times she would end up hospitalised.

Her husband was a farmer who grew maize and beans on their one hectare piece of land. Kanziga her work was to plant, weed and harvest the crops but had

no say on the sales of their produce nor would she get to know how the husband spent the money. "I was like my husband's employee, whenever I would ask about the sales of our produce, he would get violent. There is a time he hit me so hard on the head that I sustained a deep cut. I had to be rushed to hospital to be stitched simply because I had asked about the sales of our produce." she narrates.

The life of the mother of four was that of dire poverty, isolation with no right or say on family property. Despite her husband taking all the money, he was not providing the basic needs at home

to an extent that she even lacked basic needs.

"That was when our current president of the cooperative got concerned about my situation and asked me to join her to start a group that will better our lives." She was looking for women with situations similar to that of Kazinga. Today, the cooperative has 30 members. The group started by contributing Rwf1,000 every month which they kept for a year and later used to fight sleeping on grass beds in their homes. In 2012 they bought mattresses for every member including beddings.

"I took my mattress home with bed sheets and a blanket. Two days later after sleeping on the mattress, my husband started smiling and treating me well. He started calling me Cherie (sweetheart) a word he had not used in a long time.

Every morning he would greet me, 'how are you my sweetheart.' It is then that I realised that poverty was the cause of my misery and worked even harder," she said. In 2013, AAIR through its implementing partners Faith Victory Association and Girl Guides, gave the women training in project management, sustainable agriculture and livestock keeping. This came with

financial support of Rwf1.8m which they used to buy 30 pigs and feeds. "We used our own savings as a cooperative to construct a pigsty," she said. They also rented one hectare of land where they grow Irish potatoes.

It's then that Kanziga's husband started appreciating her efforts and later started involving her in decision making for the home. Today she no longer depends on her husband—they work together to provide for the family. He even reminds her to go for the cooperative meetings when she is getting late, and sometimes gives her money to contribute for the growth of their cooperative. Last year the group got another boost from AAIR through FVA and were given 600kgs of Irish potato seed, 50kgs of maize seed, fertilizers, 100 chicken, 10 goats and 10 pigs.

Today Kanziga owns 2 pigs, 3 hens and a goat and has a kitchen garden where she grows vegetables to ensure good nutrition for her family. She is now happily married and helps the husband to provide for the home; paying school fees for the children as well as health insurance, thanks to AAIR support. Today the cooperative is worth Rwf5m.

Support, bigger production and a brighter future

Pelagie Nyiraruhato,



My husband used to beat me, telling me to join cooperatives but I was hesitant because I had low self esteem. He would always insult me saying; you're only good at begging, look at how you're making me sleep on grass, why can't you be like other women who are working together with their husbands?"

That is the tale of 47-year-old Pelagie Nyiraruhato, also a member of Hagurukamumwete cooperative, who was always fighting with the husband for basic needs.

Both Nyiraruhato and husband are farmers, but lacked knowledge on modern methods of farming. They would plant different types of crops on the same piece of land and in the end the returns to their efforts were insignificant. Their survival therefore was one of constant hunger, more tilling and the cyclic flow of their lifestyle had come to be expected and accepted.

"Even our harvest was not enough to feed us; sometimes we would go hungry for a day or two. I was very poor and would wear ragged clothes;

my feet were cracked because I had no shoes," she recalls.

However, all this changed when the mother of seven joined a cooperative and later received support from AAIR. She got training in sustainable agriculture and use of fertilizers. She now grows one type of crop on their one and half hectares of land and plants on season which was not the case before.

Today Nyiruhato can sell, reserve some of her harvest for domestic consumption as well as keep some for planting in the next season, which was not the case before. Last year she received a piglet, a goat and three hens from FVA. She commends AAIR for making her what she is today. She no longer fights with the husband for basic needs and is able to afford a nice Kitenge worth Rwf15,000 for herself. She also helps with paying school fees for the children, their health insurance and other basic needs in the home. Violence, hunger and sleepless nights are now history in her life and is now dreaming big for the future.

AAIR support speak volumes; Confidence, new skills, new incomes and still counting

Languide Ayabato



Twiyubake women cooperative in Cyogo village, Muko sector, Musanze District, has had profound impact on the lives of its members and their families—facilitating them to restore their hope and sense of dignity by supporting each other and working together.

Since the formation of the cooperative, the women have been involved in various income generating activities and have become trustable leaders in their communities. Before forming

the cooperative, members of Twiyubake lived a miserable life, characterised by poverty and chronic hunger.

Languide Ayabato a widow is the president of this cooperative, she says all she ever wanted when starting this group was for her to get a better life. "I would hear stories of women who had developed through cooperatives and wished to be like them, but didn't know how to get there. I would sleep on grass I didn't know how to improve my life."

Ayabato joined the cooperative in 2012; however the start was not easy for them as they didn't have enough money. AAIR came to their rescue in 2014 with financial support of Rwf1m which they invested in tree tomato planting and making banana juice.

Still in the same year, they received more support from AAIR through FVA where they were given Irish potato seeds, 10 pigs, 10 goats, 100 chicken and fertilizers. In addition to livestock, the group has now ventured into Irish potato growing.

Today, Ayabato says she has gained a lot of skills and has been empowered to lead 30 women in her cooperative. "I can now boldly speak in public, represent and empower other women. I am now capable and hope to be a leader someday at the cell or sector level."

She says members of her cooperative have gained knowledge and skills in agriculture and financial management. They no longer sleep hungry or wait for their husbands to provide in the home as their lives have been empowered to earn a living.

Hope

Emerthe Nyirandagijimana

Emerthe Nyirandagijimana testifies that she says she had lost all hope for a better future and was resigned to her miserable life.

"There is a time I had misunderstandings with my husband and I spent two months bathing with no soap and eating food without salt. He would eat from the restaurant and stay in the bar till late and didn't want to know anything about providing for the home," she recalls. The 47-year-old mother of eight was depressed by the behaviour of the husband and at some point stopped her children from going to school because she was unable to pay for their school requirements.

"I was very poor and shy too, I couldn't stand or express myself before anyone. I was a stay-at-home wife and would do substance farming on our land where we would grow beans, sweet potatoes and tomatoes." She however would always listen to radio on how women can also provide for themselves without entirely depending on their husbands. One day at a village meeting, they were taught how to form a group and how they can

be empowered. It is then that she joined the Twiyubake Cyogo cooperative where they agreed to pay Rwf1,200 each and later used their savings to buy mattresses for the members.

When her husband learnt that she had joined a cooperative, he started supporting her and would even pay for her the monthly savings fee. After every member had acquired a mattress for their families, they later ventured into tree tomato planting and would harvest more than 60kgs per day which they would sell at Rwf600 per kg. She says their president taught them how to use the money; they bought Kitenge for each member at Rwf5,000 and rented land for Rwf200,000 to expand their tree tomato garden.

In 2014, the Rwanda Girl Guide Association asked them to do another project and that's when they ventured into banana juice making with financial support from AAIR of Rwf900,000. They used this money to buy cans, buckets and saucepans as well as bananas for making the juice. They make 20 jerry cans of juice in a week which within the range Rwf14,000-40,000

per jerry can depending on how a customer wanted it diluted. Nyirandagijimana now has a pig and 3 hens that were recently given to each member of the cooperative in

Muko by FVA.

Today she does not lack what to eat or fail to buy salt or soap in her home. She now works together with her husband

and now owns a farm where she is applying the knowledge she acquired during the AAIR trainings on agriculture. They grow maize, cassava and sweet potatoes.

Light at the end of the tunnel

Mukanoheri Jeanine & Sophie Nirere



Life was difficult before AAIR started helping us, we didn't have much as a cooperative and all we ever wanted was to buy mattresses." That is the story of 52-year-old Sophie Nirere, a mother of nine, who was ready to endure all her misery if only she could get a good place to sleep. Little did she know that AAIR had bigger and better plans for their group?

AAIR trained members in their cooperative in livestock keeping and sustainable agriculture and later gave them some money which they used to buy goats for every

member. Since AAIR and FVA came to their rescue, Nirere's life has changed for the better. She says; "we got fertilizers for our crops, I now have two goats and we also grow maize and Irish potatoes applying the good methods of farming as we were trained by AAIR."

She adds that since joining the cooperative, she is able to help her husband in providing for the basic needs at home. Her husband now respects her and is proud of her.

"My husband no longer despises me; he is very proud of me and we are now at peace. A lot has

changed, I've helped my family develop and all my children are in school," she added. The family is now planning to buy cows next year such that they can get milk to boost their nutrition in families as well as earn some income.

Thirty five-year-old Mukanoheri Jeanine is the president of Twisungane Cooperative where Nirere is a member. She says that as village women, they had been left behind in everything.

"I was tired of sleeping on grass and always heard on radio how women in groups were buying mattresses for their families. So during our village meetings, I shared my idea with the rest of the women and asked for those that were interested to start a group." That was the birth of their cooperative. Each member contributed Rwf1,000. At one time, they tried to get a loan from the bank but failed. So, in order to accumulate money they decided to loan their members who would pay with interest.

Dukataze Mwiterambere

Fidele Wibabala



"After a year we had raised Rwf750,000 which we used to buy mattresses for each member and did the same the next year such that our children could also sleep on proper beds. In 2013, we gave each member Rwf27,000 to pay health insurance for every member in their household," she explains.

In their cooperative they had members who were extremely poor and later decided to buy for them goats, an act that attracted development partners. It's then that AAR picked interest in their cooperative and gave them financial support of Rwf1.58m which they used to buy 36 goats and constructed a kraal for them.

A year later the goats had produced 20 kids and they sold 17 of them at Rwf250,000 which they used to rent one and half hectare of land. Last year FVA gave the group 600kgs of Irish potato seed which they planted on their rented land. They were also given 10 pigs, 10 goats and 100 chickens. They have so far harvested 470kgs of Irish on half hectare of the land and earned Rwf56,000 which they have saved on the cooperative account.

Mukanoheri says the cooperatives projects today are worth about Rwf2.1m and the standards of living for her members has greatly improved, thanks to support they got from AAR.

Fidele Wibabala, 41 and his two children lived in isolation and poverty. He used to dislike farming and had little knowledge about it. "I thought a farmer can't benefit much but rather grow crops for his own consumption. I didn't know good farming practices such as use of fertilizers and wouldn't harvest much from my beans and potato garden," he recalls.

However all this changed for him in 2014 when he joined Dukataze Mwiterambere cooperative comprised of 30 members. He was trained on good farming practices and has since then reaped big from it. "I used to grow crops but couldn't harvest surplus for sale, it would only be for home consumption and was never enough sometimes."

However, since his training,

Wibabala's harvest has doubled. He is able to get food for his family as surplus for sale. He now grows Irish potatoes, tree tomatoes, beans, maize, cabbage and bananas and he employs three casual workers to help him in the garden.

During the harvesting season, he makes good money out of his produce which he uses to fend for his family needs. He has been able to buy himself a cow, build a house and is educating his children.

"I wouldn't have achieved all this if it wasn't for support from AAR; I even bought myself a television and can now watch all the news; I am up-to-date with what is going on in our country. I even have a phone, my life has greatly improved and I am no longer ignorant."



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

of Women in Muko Sector, Musanze

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