

Rwanda International Farmers' Dialogue Report

19th - 21st November 2011

*Farmers – Men and Women
Working together for food security*



Initiatives of Change

International Farmers'
Dialogue
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Where farmers renew their calling
to feed the world





(left to right) Norbert SENDEGE – Director General for Agricultural Production and Livestock in the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources Rwanda, Jamil SSEBALU - President of the Farmers' Dialogue - Africa Association, Mrs Didacienne MUKAHABESHIMANA - President of IofC-Ubupfura - Rwanda, Jim WIGAN - Coordinator of the International Farmers' Dialogue coordination group.(Photo:

On 19th November, Mr Norbert Sendege, Director General of Production and Livestock from the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal resources, officially opened the international farmers' meeting held in Musanze district, in the North of Rwanda, at the foot of the volcanoes and the National Gorillas Park, in premises of the agricultural trade union Urugaga Imbaraga. He spoke about agriculture in Rwanda and of the desire of to implement policies and structures that guarantee food security, develop agriculture, combat malnutrition and poverty and improve conditions for small-scale farmers.

Of the more than 130 participants from 16 countries, half were from Rwanda. Warm applause greeted the delegates from South Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo and island of Mayotte. Ugandan visitors included a regional district commissioner, a representative of the Kingdom of Buganda and an agricultural journalist. International visitors attended from France, Switzerland, Sweden and Great Britain, India, Cambodia, and Australia.

In her opening remarks, Mrs Didacienne Mukahabeshimana, President of Initiatives of Change-Ubupfura in Rwanda, expressed the hope “that this meeting will lead us all to a new beginning in our mission to feed humankind” She expressed her thanks to Froinçois Munyentwali from ACORD who provided financial support and later shared about the value chain as a way to create wealth for the farmer.

Jim Wigan, International Coordinator for Farmers' Dialogue and Jamil Ssebalu, Coordinator for Africa, both emphasized the importance of the commitment of each individual in this task. This occurs through meetings and a change of motivation. For Jim Wigan this means 'putting need before greed and service before status'. It involves working together to resolve the problems that farmers are facing.

The Director General, officially opened the international Farmers' Dialogue. He spoke about agriculture in Rwanda and plans to implement policies that guarantee food security, combat malnutrition and poverty and increase advice to small-scale farmers. He spoke about the problems, their priorities, programs and achievements. Agriculture contributes 34% to the gross domestic product and employs 87% of the population, but they faces many problems, soil erosion, reliance on rainfall, lack of private sector investment, unsustainable farming systems, low levels of education. High population density, small holdings of land per household and inadequate marketing. To address these challenges they have developed strategies through research into irrigation, intensification, improved post-harvest activities, livestock and promoting exports.

Shem Martin Ndabikunze, Agricultural Board Director General: “We will be operating at area level, reaching out to people to conduct research relating to their needs, increasing farmers' income is our first priority. We are promoting technology to increase farmers' capacity, boost crop quality and quantity, In the process farmers will benefit from increased production, and buyers will get quality products at lower cost as supply and demand will be



balanced”. He concluded saying “agriculture is the top priority for improving the livelihood of people and National development.



Africa Sand Dams Foundation shared their experience of water harvesting and conservation, using the sand dam technology developed in Kenya. Dams are built across a stream and then these water barriers are allowed to silt up taking up about 60% of the volume of the dam but greatly reducing evaporation losses. Developing a community

based approach to building water harvesting-sand dams, school water tanks, pipelines, terraces, tree planting; planting indigenous drought-resistant crops and improved agricultural practices. The speaker concluded his presentation by outlining the three pillars of water, soil and trees that enable farmers to invest time in further developing activities to increase food production.



Creating food, water and income security through sustainable transformation of the environment

George Porthogese (France) spoke about “green fertilizers for a productive and sustainable agriculture”. Green fertilizer is an important input to increase soil productivity and a method of soil conservation for food security.



George Porthogese

Caroline Kagin (Kenya) addressed the gathering about “Food Security”. She described food security by quoting Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). “Food security exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy life. According to FAO about a billion people face hunger and malnutrition. Peoples right to food is achieved when every human being has access to quality food and sufficient means of attaining it”.

She continued, “The causes of food insecurity are, inadequate agricultural support services; insufficient marketing systems; population increase; corruption, wrong priorities; unreliable rains, poor infrastructure; poverty, wars/conflicts; man made and natural disasters and inadequate support-funding”.

She asked us to value food producers and link food providers to customers building their knowledge and skills. “Its is evident that food production needs to be efficient to sustain our communities and countries. This can only happen in a peaceful environment where each person feels secure and can do their agricultural work without disruption”.



Bahati Bagalwa

Bahati Bagalwa (D R Congo) gave a presentation on the agricultural situation in the South Kivu Province. He listed the challenges they are facing, lack of access to fertilizers, absence of agriculture policy, degradation of the soil, climate change and security. These issues lead to low production, increased rate of malnutrition and an increase in price of food. He talked of many initiatives they are undertaking.

Hajji Ssebalu Jamil, (Uganda) gave a brief background of the agriculture situation and farming systems in Africa. Highlighting the challenges facing agriculture, among them under-capitalization, inadequate funding of research and technology; low land and labor productivity. This has given rise to a sector with a weak knowledge base, resulting in low-input, low-output and low-value-added production. Other concerns are, inadequate use of yield enhancing practices, the impacts of global warming, poor market access and infrastructure. He emphasized the need to improve training and management skills and noted, “There is a missing link between universities and research institutes”.



Hajji Jamil Ssebalu

He offered some solutions: Address chronic under-capitalization, implement the Maputo Agreement, create an enabling environment for provision of finance and credit facilities. Promote sustainable agricultural. Encourage private and government investment in research. Address land policy issues especially security of tenure and equitable land distribution. Improving human capital, providing access to health facilities, basic education and extension services. Ensure national development strategies place emphasis on soil and water conservation rather than expansion of cultivated land. Create incentives and an enabling environments for communities and individual farmers. Improve rural infrastructure and marketing. Expand roads in rural areas to lower freight costs, which are five times higher than elsewhere in the world. Increase ICT absorption, especially the mobile density, increase electricity coverage, lower power tariffs to encourage increased use by SMEs, agro-industries and farmers; and improve port handling facilities (both coastal and inland) and simplify customs clearance procedures. Promote bio-fuel production from non-food crops. Improve access to education and technical skills. Increase labor productivity. African countries and donors need to work together to increase access to education in rural areas. He ended by saying that Africa has the potential to feed itself, help the rest of the world and improve its livelihood, if the governments, civil society and all stake holders play their role in the development of agriculture and **Invest in Farmers Dialogue activities in the continent.**

FARMERS' PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

George Kamau Kiiru (Kenya) I am a retired Forest Extension worker and a small-scale farmer. When I worked for the forest department I persuaded farmers to plant trees in their own gardens, however small they may be. I used my 1.5acre garden to demonstrate planting crop-friendly species - Grevellia Robusta, Dombeya Goetzenii, Prunus Africana and others. These are now a source of firewood and timber for my family. I have a small woodlot where I get material for repairing my farmyard. I have a tree-nursery for supplying tree seedlings to attract farmers. I have planted, potatoes, carrots, cabbages, maize and fruit species for domestic use. Many of the surrounding farmers visit to learn about small-scale agriculture. I have dug shallow wells to irrigate my crops during the dry weather. I promote agriculture through meetings with the chief and at my church. I visit groups and train them to minimize cutting trees for firewood by using energy saving cookers. This has been well received by farmers especially when fuel prices are very high. We have fifty-fifty weather now. This means we don't have reliable seasons as we used to. This is as a result of forest destruction. There is the saying that “one may not know the importance of a certain thing until one loses it”. Many did not know the importance of our natural forests until now when we have lost



George and Rebecca Kamau Kiiru

them. The weather is unpredictable making farming difficult. My message to farmers is that there will be no proper farming if our environment is not cared for.

Rebecca Kiiru Kamau (Kenya) I am a housewife and a small-scale farmer. I assist my husband in his farming activities by supervising our casual workers. I tell my neighbors about the importance of trees for firewood for the homesteads. I give firewood to some old people when our trees are pruned. At the moment farming is not easy in our country because of changes in the weather. I thank you for inviting my husband to many Farmers' Dialogue meetings. From the experience he has gained we are able to feed our family throughout the year and sell some products. We are also able to train the surrounding farmers through seeing our garden.

On the community level I am able to give hope to some families who have a big load, caring for their grandchildren, mostly due to HIV/AIDS. We form small merry-go-round groups where we contribute a small amount of money every week and give it to one person to support herself. Most are women groups. Often men are desperate when it comes to family problems and many have committed suicide. We also meet in church to hold mothers' meetings where we give them hope and advise them to invest the groups small amount of money in farming

Charles Gaikia is a Parish Youth Coordinator, (Kenya) is leading a large community of young people who are either in or have left school. His greatest challenge is to minimize and eliminate the use of alcohol and drugs by the young people, not only in his church but in other churches and among all young people. They sometimes turn abusive and violent but his cool temper helps keeps them out of trouble. The most difficult part of his work is when he addresses the HIV/AIDS issue - young people take it as a joke but when he gives them vivid examples of those who have died from the epidemic they become calm. At home he is a good farmer. He assists his family in livestock and agricultural issues and keeps rabbits.



Charles Gaikia



Alice Wanja

Alice Wanja is a women group leader. (Kenya) Is actively practicing what she learnt from the group and has become a teacher to surrounding farmers, where members come to learn in her garden. She is a voluntary Community Health Worker assisting those with simple medical problems, giving minor medical instructions, especially to pregnant and breast feeding women. Most of her work is focused on those with HIV/AIDS. She advises them on proper feeding to give strength and gives moral support.

Dr Hashi (Somalia) Is an active farmer who came with the support of Somali friends in Sweden.



Christer Lilliehook

He said, he had gained so much through meeting farmers from so many different countries. He spoke about the security difficulties at home. At the end of the Dialogue Christer Lilliehook from Sweden gave him a Swedish designed water filter. This small suitcase sized container when filled with water and placed in the sun kills all bacteria making the water safe to drink.



Dr. Hashi

Tongo James Elisama and Peter Chol Thuch (Southern Sudan) spoke about their newly independent country, proudly reporting that they had set up the Southern Sudan Farmers'



Tongo James Elisama and Peter Chol Thuch

Dialogue before independence. They talked of the need for security with the Lords Resistance Army still active and the needs common to all farmers that once fulfilled can lead to food security. They outlined a programme of training through Farmers’ Dialogues. They believe farming can be a source of employment. Both came with the full support of their government.

Dr Aloyce Kessy, Didas Nzingamasabo, Josefa Mariseli and Juliana Kitutu Swai (Tanzania) went back home determined to take what they had learnt to farmers across their country with plans to register the Tanzania Farmers’ Dialogue constitution to help them raise funds and to hold meeting in five areas around Tanzania.



Didas Nzingamasabo, Dr Aloyce Kessy, Josefa Mariseli and Juliana Kitutu Swai

Before the closure of the meeting a question was raised by a participant.

What can each of us do?

Attitudes need to change, we need to find a fresh source of inspiration.

Start with change in ourselves. Be sure that as individuals we are doing all we can. This brings a source of unity with others.

Practice leadership, which is at the heart of democracy. This calls for everyone to be a leader. Responsibility is there to be taken. Empower others.

Seek God's purpose for the evolution of humanity. This needs daily research - in times of thought and listening - healing the past and creating the future.

There is a role for everyone.

The meeting ended by reading the the Farmers’ Dialogue “Farmers Declaration” and acknowledging all those who contributed for the event to happen. It was agreed that at the request of Colleagues in D R Congo the next International Farmers’ Dialogue would be held in 2013



Delegates at the Rwanda International Farmers’ Dialogue