



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

IMPROVED SEEDS

Rwanda faces food insecurity issues. It is due to the fact that the seeds used to grow traditional crops that farmers have been cultivating for years are not adequate anymore. To resolve such problems, researchers have produced newly improved varieties of seeds.

Since 2011, the government of Rwanda has set a policy on seeds research promotion. This policy is running until 2017. The goal is to have farmers use the selected seeds. In 2011, an estimated 40 percent of farmers were using these seeds.

However, there is still a lack of improved seeds among the frequently cultivated crops like maize, beans and cassava. Currently the ones that are available do not resist diseases and climate change conditions.

This is mainly because Rwanda doesn't produce enough of these improved seeds. Many of the varieties are imported and the private and research sectors in Rwanda are often not able to properly evaluate the seeds.

This affects agricultural production and it means sometimes, there may be food shortages.

The Weekly for Rwanda

Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

The Problem: Food Shortages

Today in Rwanda, we are in agricultural Season A, which starts in September and ends in December. The season used to be characterized by average rain, and the main crops that are grown include beans, maize, Irish potatoes, and cassava. However, there is still a lack of adequate seeds for these crops, and sometimes the ones which are available do not resist diseases and other effects of climate change.

An example is cassava that was grown in Ruhango District in the Southern province. It was during Season A, last year. Farmers were told to pull up the cassava due to disease. Farmers didn't realize what was happening was likely caused by climate change. The Rwandan Ministry of Agriculture explained that the disease was caused by "mouse branches." These are small insects that appear on the cassava because of too much sunlight and they disappear during the wet season. Far from what the farmers imagined, the disease in

cassava was related to climate change, as season A used to be rainy and now it is sunny.

Rwandan agriculture researchers say that more than half of agricultural development issues could be resolved by the use of improved seeds which resist climate change consequences.

However, the researchers note that farmers still don't understand the importance of using improved seeds. The farmers argue that those seeds are expensive.

It is very important to note that climate change is with us and therefore we need to adapt to these changes in a serious way, otherwise, food shortages will increase.

It's important to note that the development of seeds that are more resistant to climate change is an important adaptation measure.

Activities for Journalists

Food security is in line with two things: make sure there is enough food for all people, and keep the environment, soil and natural resources healthy.

In Rwanda, there is a program called Nkunganire. This program enables the farmers to buy supplies at half price on selected crops to cultivate in their regions. Currently, the main selected crop in Gicumbi, Northern Province, is beans; and the main selected crop in Muhanga, Southern Province, is maize. Still, the farmers are complaining about the price of improved seeds. Journalists need to help farmers realize that the improved seeds will help them have better crop yields – in times of a changing climate.

Journalists can play a major role in disclosing information to farmers on the appropriate crops to grow during specific seasons and the improved seeds to use:

- The focus can be on prices of the improved seeds. By producing radio shows that can compare the expenses of a farmer when he or she grows normal seeds, and what he or she gains during the harvest season – and what the expenses and benefits are if the farmer uses improved seeds. This may help farmers to understand why they need to use these new seeds. You could also have a discussion about what options farmers might have when it comes to purchasing these new, improved seeds. Is there assistance available to help them purchase the seeds?
- Through the radio talk show, journalists can call the private sectors to invest in Rwanda seeds industry so that the adequate improved seeds may reach farmers.

- In terms of proximity, journalists at community radio stations may also think about interviewing extension officers – and get them to talk about the benefits of the improved seeds.

Community Engagement

Let farmers drive the conversation. Is it difficult for them to buy the new seeds? For those who have tried the new seeds – have they had good results? For farmers who are using traditional seeds – have they had good luck? Bad luck?

Let farmers compare the two seeds.

Have a panel discussion with farmers and experts – have some farmers who have tried the new seeds and some who haven't. Compare the results.

Make sure you do follow up stories on farmers who are trying the new seeds. Visit their fields and check their crops. Did those new seeds make a difference?

Useful Links

http://www.minagri.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/CIP/MORE_INFORMATION_ABOUT_CROP_INTENSIFICATION_PROGRAM.pdf

<https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/wiley/rwanda-government-programme-2011-2017-lfQmn2GwSt>

http://www.minagri.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/RWANDA_SAKSS/PSTA_III_2013-17

<http://rab.gov.rw/departments/research/>

Useful source of information

- Dr Murekezi Charles, Director General in charge of agriculture development in Rwanda Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources

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- Mrs Murebwayire Christine, Coordinator of Farmers Chamber at Private Sector Federation;

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