Murika shares stories and updates about Oxfam and partners’ work in the country. This edition focuses on our initiatives to support the creation of sustainable livelihoods for women and men, highlighting some of our achievements over the past 6 months and sharing plans for the next period.

In early 2012 Rwanda registered impressive results in poverty reduction and against some of the Millennium Development Goals. Here Oxfam shows its contribution to poverty reduction efforts, working with others to ensure that the poorest are benefitting from Rwanda’s economic growth, through creation of employment opportunities and better returns for small farmers.

We thank all the contributors to the newsletter and welcome contributions to future editions. Please send ideas, comments and suggestions to kigali@oxfam.org.uk
Women entrepreneurs in Nyagatare and Muhanga districts have completed cultivation of 2.2 million pineapple suckers (seeds) that will be used to boost the Rwandan pineapple industry with homegrown, better quality suckers. This is a fantastic achievement for women entrepreneurs supported by Oxfam.

Two years ago, Oxfam established a market-based livelihoods programme with the aim of developing women’s economic leadership in horticultural value chains. The aim was to address gender inequalities in horticulture work by creating new roles for women beyond unpaid or poorly paid labour at production level, which also has low social status. Oxfam focused on developing women as economic leaders and entrepreneur suppliers of pineapple and pineapple planting material, as a source for sustainable income in a fairly short period (18 to 24 months). Previously Rwandan pineapple growers were using suckers produced in neighbouring Uganda, whose unstable quality affected the flowering time and yield. With the increasing demand for input supply on the one hand and the Government’s plan to scale up the models and engage with other MFIs who can promote this type of work, working with research institutions in developing technologies for watering, and linking the private sector with farmers, we will start a new project focusing on tree tomato and passion fruit input supply in 2022.

The programme has enabled women to produce a marketable product with minimal resources investment. It has also changed their attitude from being dependent to seeking creative and innovative solutions to their problems. There is a positive change in the way women involved in this activity are being perceived in their homes and communities. The approach is helping to create a visible role for women in horticultural value chains as suppliers of planting material which is valued by many stakeholders. In many cases women are also hiring labourers to support their enterprises. A recent evaluation has shown that 10,000 days of labour were bought by the participating women in the previous 6 months thus creating much needed employment opportunities. Poor women have also accessed Rwf 36 million (around $60,000) in loans to support this enterprise through the micro-finance partner. Working in solidarity groups means that the women were able to access larger loans without traditional collateral requirements.

The next phases for Oxfam’s work on planting material will be to upscale the models and engage with other MFIs who can promote this type of work; working with research institutions in developing technologies for watering; and linking the private sector with farmers. We will start a new project focusing on tree tomato and passion fruit input supply in 2022.

PINEAPPLE SUCKERS ON THE AIRWAVES

Mr. Kagirazana Boniface, a researcher/technician from Rwanda Agriculture Board (RAB - formerly known as ISAR), visited women pineapple suckers producers in Nyagatare on 8th-7th February 2012. To raise awareness about the macro propagated pineapple seedlings, a one hour radio programme was aired on Radio y’Abatourage ya Nyagatare, hosted by Lambert Mkindzeza.

For the event, Boniface was accompanied by two staff of Duterimbere ASBL, a cooperative being supported by Oxfam to provide technical support to the women entrepreneurs. During the radio programme, the guests explained the seedling multiplication technique and its advantages. They also provided advice to existing producers on how to better take care of nurseries, especially in areas prone to long spells of dry season such as Nyagatare.

Boniface urged farmers to use properly developed macro propagated suckers to develop better quality pineapple orchards, instead of crowns from existing plants received from the processing units thrown as wastage. More than 10 people from Gatsibo and Muhanga called in to the programme to get more information and showing interest in purchasing quantities of suckers. Oxfam and Duterimbere are now planning to broadcast this radio programme in Nyagatare and Muhanga districts.

MEET THE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Uwamwezi Merciana, 42, pineapple cultivator, pineapple seed plant farmer and imboni (community facilitator)

Merciana is a farmer in Ntoma Sector, Nyagatare District, where she lives with her husband and their three children. Merciana was first trained in seed multiplication techniques in 2010 by Oxfam partner Duterimbere ASBL, who then selected her as a community facilitator, after noticing her keen interest in the activity and good communications skills.

Today she has trained more than 40 women to develop small pineapple nurseries. Later, with imported planting material from Uganda, Merciana used innovative ways to multiply seedlings. Today, she owns a nursery of more than 80,000 seedlings, of which she has sold more than 40,000. “I have been recognised as knowledgeable in this technique because even agronomists from Bugesera and Gitarame travel to Nyagatare to learn from me.” In her district of Nyagatare, she was chosen by her peers to chair the association of pineapple growers and seed plant farmers.

Merciana’s husband has also shown great trust in her leadership abilities. “In my family my husband sees me as an equal contributor and can’t take any decision without consulting me.” According to Merciana he was initially sceptical about her business but now he has agreed to shift their home closer to the small farm where she could better attend to her nursery.

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Oxfam continues work with financial service providers on increasing access to middle-range finance

Access to credit enhances development opportunities. Formal financial institutions usually target the upper end of the market whereas the lower end remains dependent on informal finance and micro-credit institutions. This leaves a gap in the middle range (Rwf 2 to 15 million), termed as ‘the missing middle’ in many developing countries, and Rwanda is no exception. But financing for small and medium sized enterprises (SMES) is important for poverty reduction in Rwanda as such entities can more easily create more jobs per dollar of investment than large companies. In addition, as a relatively emergent aspect of the private sector, SMEs are more easily influenced in terms of building beneficial relationships with small farmers.

In order to uplift the horticulture sector, the development of middle range financing is crucial as it provides an opportunity for small and medium private sector firms and smallholder entrepreneurs to develop better enterprises, particularly in rural settings. The middle range entrepreneurs can serve as a market lead while remaining connected to the producers.

Oxfam has been exploring the possibility of developing middle range financial products for MFIs focusing on women entrepreneurs and small private sector firms to develop enterprises in the horticulture sector. The initial research and piloting on the issue has led to launching of a formal study from the perspective of financial institutions and enterprises. The study covers three major aspects:

• Exploring alternatives to collateral
• Identifying business services required for middle range entrepreneurs
• Understanding capacity building needs of financial institutions.

Recently Oxfam has initiated a ‘learning group’ comprising of ARM (microfinance umbrella institution), four MFIs (Duterimbere IMF, Bukavu SUNSHINE, Makabola IMF, BUKABOLA IMF, and Laetare IMF) and four banks (BCI, BURAKA, RDB, LM"). The project will focus on the specific needs of SMEs in the agriculture sector.

16 days of activism - raising awareness of the impact of gender-based violence on household food security

In commemoration of the 16 days of activism on violence against women from November - December 2011, Oxfam worked with the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) to carry out a situation analysis of the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on food security in households - a case study of Nyabihu, one of the districts with the highest proportion of households with poor food consumption in the country. Following the study, the project provided training to local leaders on fighting GBV to enable women to live free from violence.

While GBV interventions often focus on the health and legal consequences of violence, the study demonstrated that there are strong interrelations between gender-based violence on the one hand and poverty and hunger on the other. The most common form of violence experience by women was domestic violence within the home. Where this exists, and since women have a prime responsibility for food provision in the household, the entrenched unequal social distribution of power and resources between men and women constitute an exacerbating factor to hunger in households.

Of course all gender-based violence including domestic violence is an unacceptable breach of women’s rights and should be addressed as such. However women and men participants also shared their practical experiences on how domestic violence also results in immediate costs for households and communities in terms of money and time. In some cases injuries from violence can be long-lasting and therefore permanently reduce or destroy the productivity capacity of the victim which also has negative implications for household livelihoods strategies. Domestic violence also often results in out of pocket expenditure to access health and/or courts services, draining household resources and incomes as the spouses often miss paid work and neglect household work. The inability to work has a direct impact on hunger meaning that household members can go hungry.

Why do women stay after violence? Well, according to them, “I will report my husband to the police who will feed my children; Where will I get food to bring him every day at the police station?” said Jeanine, a woman in Kimironko who was being frequently beaten by her working husband.

Addressing gender issues in value chains - the GALS methodology introduced into Oxfam’s work in Rwanda

In February 2012, Oxfam kicked off a new IFAD-funded regional project to introduce GALS (Gender Action Learning System) into our agriculture work here in Rwanda. The work is being rolled out in Rwanda by two local partners, Duhamic-AORDI and ACDRD.

GALS adapts simple diagramming, mapping and participatory methods to empower not only women but also men of all ages and education levels, including those who cannot read and write. This has led to significant increases in recognition of socio-economic rights of women including on property ownership, decision-making and division of labour in the household. GALS has also contributed to reductions in alcoholism and adultery, recognition of women’s reproductive rights, and reduction in gender-based violence in households as well as strengthening of women’s voice in local government processes.

Oxfam has already worked with 75,000 women globally using the GALS methodology and plans to roll it out across all Rwanda programmes by 2015. From their participation at the inception workshop, women farmers of Kamonyi and Muhanga said the
difference in sharing tasks is sometimes due to the nature of the work. Work that requires a lot of time to sit and concentrate such as screening rice was reserved for women, while activities that required moving around and trading is done by their men. Overall the exercise demonstrated for these Rwandan communities that women work harder than men, but often benefit much less.

The next phase is to support households and communities to:
• Reflect and plan for the future, including promoting changes in gender relations, personal growth, wellbeing and leadership as key dimensions in livelihood development.
• Develop leadership potential and negotiation skills for co-ordinated collective action
• Develop concrete strategies for inclusion of the extremely poor and disadvantaged as leaders
• Document and communicate household and community plans in pictorial and multimedia form for advocacy with local authorities
• Track and evaluate their achievements quantitatively and qualitatively for participants’ own action learning, and as input into institutional decision-making.
22nd February 2012 at Centre d’Acceuil Saint Francois d’Assise, in association with its partner agency Practical Action on 21st and A workshop on participatory market systems development was held.

Planting material' based on its experience of pineapple suckers enterprises

Oxfam workshop prepares for scale up of planting material enterprises

Oxfam has started work on ‘developing women leadership in agriculture’ and has already started work on the new project. The project is supported by partners such as the Tanzania Agricultural Research Organization (TARO) and the National Agribusiness Committee (NAC). The project aims to strengthen the capacity of women farmers to participate in the market and improve their livelihoods. To date, the project has trained over 1,000 women farmers in various aspects of agricultural production and marketing. The project has also led to the establishment of several women’s cooperatives that are engaged in the production and sale of agricultural products. The project is expected to reach over 10,000 women farmers by the end of the project period in 2015.

As part of the project, Oxfam is working with partners such as TARO and NAC to support the establishment and strengthening of women’s cooperatives. The project is also working with local governments to support the establishment of women’s cooperatives in areas where women’s access to resources such as land and credit is limited. The project is also supporting the development of women’s leadership skills through training and mentoring. The project is expected to make a significant contribution to the improvement of women’s livelihoods in the target areas.

Evaluation of Oxfam’s market-based livelihood programme and stakeholder learning event

In September 2011 Oxfam conducted an external evaluation of its market-based livelihood work to date in the horticulture sector. The evaluation team carried out 4 weeks of in-depth research at household and community level and established the following:

- The projects have reached the desired target groups especially women from Nyagatare, Muhanga, Nyamashere, Kirehe, Gasabo and Nyarugenge covering around 2,500 women participants.
- In the pineapple seed multiplication the project has reached 56% resourceful poor households and 41% poor, very poor and abject poor households categories in Rwanda.
- Business models have been well accepted by communities, partners and small private sector firms shown in the quick uptake of the business models by a range of actors.
- There have been significant improvements in income for smallholder farmers. For example in mushroom production women are seeing returns of around 20,000 RWF per week which is particularly impressive since these farmers are very vulnerable comprising 40% widows and women affected by HIV.
- The programme has seen women access RwF 36 million of direct financing through innovative relationships with financial institutions to support their agricultural enterprise activities.
- The programme has already created around 10,000 days of additional bought labour as women entrepreneurs seek support for their growing activities.
- It also revealed clear indications of improving gender relations in terms of women’s involvement in decision making at household level and acceptance of their skills and capacities at community and local government level.
- The programme has started to influence market systems by creating space for women and small private sector firms through innovations and right application of technologies.

However, the results shown in the evaluation are only preliminary and further success of the programme will depend on addressing some of the challenges that were also identified by the study. These include reducing the workload of women, further facilitating market linkages/services development, refining the interventions further to fit in to annual time schedules while reducing seasonal risks, and facilitate scaling-up through more focused engagement with others.

Oxfam celebrates achievements and gets experience from challenges during learning event

Oxfam’s monitoring, evaluation and accountability systems place a large emphasis on learning from programme performance to continually improve the work that we are doing. As such on the 21st - 22nd September 2011, Oxfam organised a learning review event following the evaluation of its Rwanda country programme, with over 50 attending participants including Oxfam staff, partners, stakeholders and government officials, to share the findings of the evaluation, reflect on Oxfam’s market-based livelihood programme and stakeholder learning event.

The event was co-chaired by Maggie Carroll, Oxfam Country Director and Tony Nsanganira, Head of the Agriculture Department at the Rwanda Development Board.

During a session on the role of Government, Private sector and NGOs, stakeholders showed interest and appreciation in the development model that Oxfam is using to promote market based livelihoods in Rwanda, and were eager to learn from and apply it in their own business development initiatives. Stakeholders concluded that the Oxfam programme has moved beyond value chain development and will serve as a very good case-study for a holistic private-sector engagement in Rwanda.

The specific recommendations / perceptions from the stakeholders on scaling up from the workshop included:

- The Oxfam business models are aligned to government priorities and can further supplement / contribute to government’s efforts of attracting FDI in the agricultural sector;
- Continued and deep market analysis is required for further scaling-up of the Oxfam model and sharing of information is critical within the wider value chain;
- Government agencies should spearhead the creation of a platform of all actors at each stage in the chain to reduce gaps;
- It is essential to develop and use appropriate technologies to develop horticultural value chains in Rwanda;
- The financial sector should develop better value chain finance strategies and simplify the loan access by SMEs and low income groups;
- Private sector actors can play a key role in scaling-up by providing market services and technology application. However clear and transparent collaboration between producers and the private sector is required;
- Donor agencies and NGOs should facilitate linking innovations and research in horticulture value chain and share best practices which can aid scaling up;

Oxfam is now working with relevant stakeholders in private sector especially financial institutions, government agencies and civil society, to take forward some of the more specific recommendations and to start scaling up some of the business models, so that more poor women and men are able to benefit from expansion of the horticultural activities in Rwanda.
Enterprise spotlight: a focus on Shekina Enterprises

On the winding road between Kigali and the Congolese border, behind the unassuming gates of a compound in Rulindo, a new technology is on the verge of revolutionising pineapple production to benefit poor and vulnerable farmers.

Shekina Enterprises, a medium-sized company set up in 2007 by Damien Mbatezimana has its sights set on the export markets of Europe, Canada, and the USA. Already exporting dried vegetables, Shekina is expanding into dried pineapple. Two years ago this would have been impossible but together Oxfam, the National Agricultural Exports Board (NAEB) and the Belgian Technical Cooperation, have developed a new drying technology unique to Rwanda.

Damien explains, “Oxfam were interested in finding export markets for dried fruit produced by small-scale farmers and asked if we could work together. It’s difficult to find new technology in Rwanda. I had to design and build my own driers and while they were good for vegetables they didn’t work well for fruit. When Oxfam got in touch I’d been having a lot of difficulties. I was just about to give up. Wherever I sent my dried fruit samples they’d tell me the quality wasn’t good enough.”

“Oxfam did a study of the technology needed for drying fruit. We went to South Africa to find a company called Dryers for Africa and found they were making what we needed but powered by electricity. We asked them to make a modified version as electricity in Rwanda is very costly so wouldn’t be viable. Together we designed a new dryer.”

Oxfam analyses agricultural value-chains to find ways of adding value and linking small-scale producers with Rwanda’s private sector companies. Working with experts in post-harvest technology and product development, Oxfam supported Shekina Enterprises with business planning, development and market identification, and linked them with poor and vulnerable women farmers from the local area.

Damien’s business currently employs 105 people, 75% of whom are women. Once he has finalised his export markets he plans to apply for bank loans to buy up to four more driers so he can expand to work with several hundred pineapple producers. he explains, “What Oxfam are trying to do is create a market for small-scale farmers. When farmers in this area produce pineapples they don’t have a market to sell to. I saw that vegetables and fruit don’t have any added value in this country. I could really see a way I could add value. I can make a profit and my farmers can also profit from the new technology we’ve developed.”

Oxfam is also working with partner Duterimbere IMF to develop a financial leasing product so other companies and co-operatives can also start ordering and using the dryers within the Rwandan market.

What’s new at Oxfam!

Oxfam will shortly be sharing the results of the participatory land reform evaluation carried out in association with IPAR, watch this space

• Oxfam has hired Kwetu Film Institute to build the capacity of civil society actors in film documentary for advocacy. Following training on filming, editing, screen writing, sound recording, etc. The trainees have produced two short films on their work in Rwanda which will be screened in the coming weeks and during the Rwanda film festival

• Oxfam has entered in partnership with Practical Action to look at the feasibility of development a Business Services Development Unit that will address key service needs for small enterprises particularly in relation to market facilitation.

To join any Oxfam activities, please email kigali@oxfam.org.uk to receive an invite and/or updates

Go live!

It was an exciting afternoon as over 100 guests; Affiliates, government, partners, friends and beneficiaries joined us for the go live event held at “Nyirangarama” a busy centre, halfway between Kigali and Musanze, and a must stop centre for passengers eager to get fresh or dried fruits and vegetables that would be both rare and expensive in Kigali or Musaze supermarkets. Launching the joint strategy from Rulindo, was an effort to offer, a “real side” of the work being done by Oxfam on the ground and its development agenda in general.

In her speech, Maggie Carroll the Country Representative in Rwanda, emphasised on the importance of the joint strategy, presenting a new, unified and stronger Oxfam, ready to partner more with the Rwandan government in its development agenda, promising to deliver even more effective interventions to the target group. Recorded video message of support and congratulations from our affiliates - now colleagues in Holland, Dublin and Madrid and written messages from partners and friends: Action Aid, Christian Aid and Save the Children were presented, following the final of an exciting women entrepreneur champion competition, initiated by Oxfam in commemoration of the international women’s day and a week dedicated to women’s economic empowerment in Rwanda

Guests were treated to a testing tour of the drying and processing factories of the fresh, dried fruits and vegetables which are produced by our beneficiaries’ women farmers and dried by Shekinah, our beneficiary private sector organisation.