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Agroecology and sustainable food systems



©VSF - Supporting the rehabilitation of degraded areas. Read more on p.7

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This newsletter puts the spotlight on agroecology and sustainable food systems.

Agriculture and food production are increasingly affected by the climate crisis. Also Rwanda experiences the negative effects of climate change. A transition to more sustainable food systems is vital for adaptation and mitigation strategies around the globe.

The Belgian development cooperation supports Rwandan efforts towards climate-smart agriculture, agroecology and sustainable food systems. This newsletter sheds light on the efforts of our cooperation agency Enabel and Belgian NGOs in this regard. As always, we also feature other highlights of the past three months.

At the Embassy, we are saying goodbye this month to our Deputy Head of Mission and Head of Cooperation, Mr. Jean-Michel Swalens. More than 40 years after his first arrival in Rwanda, he is now heading back to Brussels where he will share his vast expertise at headquarters level before retiring next year. Ni ah'ubutaha mu Rwanda Jean-Michel!

*Bert Versmessen,
Ambassador*



Bilateral Cooperation: Rwandan farmers learnt new technologies at the Libramont Agriculture Trade Fair 2023

Four private companies, members of the Rwanda Pig Farmers Association (RPFA), were supported by the Belgian-funded **PRISM project of Enabel** to participate at the Libramont Agriculture Trade Fair 2023 from 28-31 July. The Libramont Fair takes place each year in Belgium and is the largest open agricultural event in Europe. It welcomes nearly 200,000 visitors, 700 exhibitors and 4,000 brands.

Besides learning about new technologies and innovations to improve the production, quality and profitability of pork meat, the RPFA team also had the occasion to develop contacts in the strong Belgian piggery sector. The participants made business to business contacts with large producers and manufacturers to promote collaboration and knowledge transfer in pig value chain. At the institutional front, the RPFA started a collaboration with the Department of Veterinary Services of the University of Liege to share technical expertise. Finally, the team had the opportunity to meet with his excellency Willy Borsus, Vice-President of the Walloon Region and Minister for the economy, foreign trade, research and innovation, digitalization, regional planning, and agriculture. The Minister expressed his appreciation for this Belgo-Rwandan collaboration .



ACTEC: Inauguration at Don Bosco Muhazi TVET School: celebration of a milestone towards quality education

On 11 July, 2023, in the presence of Mr. Jean-Michel Swalens (Deputy Head of Mission – Development Cooperation, Belgian Embassy in Kigali) and the Salesian Planning and Development Office (PDO) for Burundi - Rwanda - Uganda, the educational community and the students of Muhazi's vocational training center celebrated the inauguration of a new school building. The new spaces and equipment will drastically improve the learning conditions of young people and their access to ICT. ACTEC and its partner Don Bosco Muhazi TVET School are deeply grateful for the support of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGD), Don Bosco Zwijnaarde College and the "Urunana" Belgian volunteer group. Read the full article [here](#).

For more info, contact ACTEC at Andreia.ds@actec-ong.org



VVOB: Shaping the future of school leadership

The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) is an initiative by and for African-based partners that share the goal of advancing quality education on the continent. To shape the future of the Centre, the Rwanda Ministry of Education, **VVOB-education for development** and a number of other partners joined for a co-creation workshop in July 2023.

To build quality school leadership systems, the Centre works with African governments and other educational stakeholders in four focus areas:

1. the development or re-development of school leadership policies and guidelines, as well as effective and scalable professional development programmes for school leaders
2. the delivery of professional development programmes for school leaders through capacity development of its providers
3. monitoring, evaluation and research on the effectiveness and impact of school leadership and school leadership development
4. knowledge mobilisation, advocacy and sector coordination through multi-stakeholder partnerships and dialogue.

The Minister of State for Primary and Secondary Education, Gaspard Twagirayezu, encouraged the participants: "We believe that effective school leaders create the conditions that are necessary for effective teaching and ultimately improve learning outcomes. This is why African governments need to collaboratively invest in school leadership support as part of their education policy agenda. The ACSL is an opportunity to achieve this agenda."

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For more info, contact VVOB Rwanda on info.rwanda@vvo.org or check <https://rwanda.vvo.org/>

Bilateral cooperation: Stakeholders discuss employment promotion and decent work among youth and women



As part of **Enabel's program on "Decent work and social protection"**, Rwanda's Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA) conducted dialogues on decent work and employment promotion in all the 30 districts of Rwanda from 14th August to 31st August 2023. The dialogues aimed to (1) engage employment actors and stakeholders at the central and local levels, and (2) to mainstream employment in all sectors by increasing ownership and awareness of existing initiatives at the district level. The dialogues mobilized 4363 participants from public institutions, the private sector, trade unions, education and vocational skills facilities, as well as civil society such as faith-based, women and youth organizations.

The dialogues focused on the unique challenges that each district faces in combating unemployment and promoting of decent work opportunities. They also discussed strategies to effectively address these challenges and pave the way for increased and decent work opportunities.

*The **Decent Work and Social Protection portfolio** is a 5-year regional program, funded by Belgium. It aspires to create new jobs and employment opportunities, with particular attention to increased incomes and earnings, better working conditions, more access and coverage of social protection schemes, better living conditions and stronger labour governance institutions. The focus districts of the intervention in Rwanda are Rusizi, Nyamasheke, Karongi, Rutsiro, Rubavu, Kicukiro, Gasabo and Nyarugenge.*

Bilateral cooperation: Promoting bamboo as a Made in Rwanda construction material

Rwanda is committed to become a climate resilient and low carbon economy by 2050. The transition of the country towards a greener economy features among the priorities of the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1). This is why, in close partnership with the National Industrial Research and Development Agency (NIRDA), **Enabel's Belgian-funded Urban Economic Development initiative (UEDi)** aims to develop the value chain of locally produced bamboo.

The project spearheads innovative initiatives to harness the potential of bamboo as a source material in the construction sector. These include the establishment of a dedicated nursery to cultivate four bamboo species that exhibit optimal suitability for construction purposes. The project is also supporting the early establishment phases of a bamboo centre of excellence at NIRDA's research campus in Huye. These initiatives underline Enabel's dedication to advancing sustainable construction practices and nurturing the growth of bamboo-related knowledge and skills in the region.

In November, the project sets out to foster national, regional and international collaboration through the organization of an international forum on bamboo construction. The event will feature hands-on training sessions led by accomplished Colombian experts and the globally renown bamboo architect Simon Velez.

Enabel present at the 16th National Agriculture Show



The National Agriculture Show took place from 20th to 29th July 2023. The theme for this 16th edition: "Transforming Agriculture into a Resilient and Competitive Sector through Technology, Innovation and Investment". Organised by MINAGRI, the annual agriculture show is a useful platform for farmers, agribusinesses, research institutions, agroindustry, finance institutions and other stakeholders to meet. They showcase the latest agricultural technologies and innovations, exchange best practices in the sector and explore new business opportunities. The show hosted some 300 exhibitors and more than 30,000 visitors. As one of the major development partners of the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI), **Enabel** supported and actively participated in the event.

Together with its partners in the PRISM and Kwihaiza projects, Enabel showcased various innovations. With RAB, Enabel assists smallholder farmers to make profit in the commercial poultry and pig value chains through enhanced productivity. With Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium, we support the development of affordable veterinary services as well as the production and use of black soldier fly larvae as a cost-effective alternative source of protein in poultry and pig feed. With Agriterra, Enabel empowered an out-growers service company to increase the local production and supply of maize and soya, whilst linking them with animal feed companies.

*The **Kwihaiza** project (2023 - 2026) is funded by **the European Union and Luxembourg**. The project focuses on enhancing aquaculture, fisheries and horticulture value chains, while contributing to the EU Action plan on "Transformational climate-smart and inclusive agriculture in Rwanda".*

*The **Partnership for Resilient and Inclusive Smallholder Markets - PRISM** project (2019-2024) is funded by the **Belgian government**. The project focuses on strengthening the pork, poultry and animal feed value chains.*



Bamboo nursery in Huye, supported by Enabel

Enabel: 300,000 indigenous seedlings to boost biodiversity



Seeds collection in Nyungwe forest



Acacia sieberiana - Nyamata nursery

Rwanda's National Strategy on Climate Change and Low Carbon Development aspires to transform the country into a climate-resilient, low-carbon economy by 2050. To achieve this goal, Rwanda invests in social protection, improved health and disaster risk reduction. **Enabel, the Belgian development agency**, together with the Rwanda Forestry Authority (RFA) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), contributes to these goals through **the Swedish-funded project COMBIO** - Reducing vulnerability to climate change through enhanced community-based biodiversity conservation in the Eastern Province of Rwanda. This 7-year project, led by the Rwanda Ministry of Environment, aims to increase biodiversity and restore degraded land.

The COMBIO project is expected to contribute to agroecological improvements in various ways. By encouraging the planting of indigenous trees, the project intends to reduce agricultural carbon emissions and erosion, whilst protecting soils and their associated micro-fauna. The trees will also become natural habitats of wildlife important for ecosystems functioning. Importantly, indigenous trees do not require pesticides as they are naturally adapted to local pests. This is beneficial for the diversity among honeybees, butterflies, birds and bats that feed on its nectar. Through enhanced pollination this will also benefit crop production. Another advantage is that honey and other products from the COMBIO sanctuaries, such as essential oils, indigenous fruits, pharmaceutical and medicinal products, will be more natural and organic than the ones produced in regular farmlands.

Enabel is implementing a component related to the establishment and operationalization of 21 Community Biodiversity Sanctuaries (CBS), each covering an area between 10 and 20 hectares. They are specifically dedicated to the promotion of the use of native tree and shrub species adapted to local soil and climate conditions. Seven sanctuaries have been selected for development this year. From June to August, 168,499 seedlings from 45 indigenous tree species have already been germinated in dedicated nurseries. They are now ready for the 2023 tree planting season. More are still germinating, as indigenous tree species germinate at variable pace and rate. These trees often have highly valuable medicinal, pharmaceutical and ornamental qualities.

Through the seed collection and germination processes we drew important lessons for future conservation efforts. We found that trees tend to perform better when they occur isolated in the farmlands. They tend to flower and fruit earlier and better when compared with the same species inside National Parks like Akagera. This demonstrates the need to introduce indigenous trees in agricultural landscapes. At the same time, insect attacks were very high in the seeds collected from these farmlands. This is probably due to their proximity to crops and human seed stores. This is definitely an issue that asks for further study if we want to propagate and multiply indigenous tree seeds outside protected areas.

VSF: Agroecological practices for sustainable agriculture

The entire planet is facing agroecological and ecosystems perturbation. Rwanda is no exception. Additionally, the country has the particularity of being highly dense with over 500 persons/km². This leads to an overexploitation of natural resources that consequently impacts on food security and livelihoods of the population, particularly for those depending on agriculture and livestock. To overcome these challenges, **Vétérinaire Sans Frontière (VSF) Belgium**, in partnership with Rwandan NGOs IMBARAGA and ARDI, started a multidisciplinary 5-year project under a **One Health approach** in 2022. The project supports government policies and efforts and is funded by the Belgian development cooperation (DGD) and the Province of Vlaams Brabant (Belgium). It is implemented in the districts of Nyaruguru, Nyamabage and Kayanza.

The project aims to protect and improve soils. It does so by enhancing fertility through the use of organic manure from distributed animals, by planting crop fodders on anti-erosive hedges, through the promotion of agroforestry and the planting of fruit and melliferous trees, and by restoring the most degraded lands. It also promotes the use of improved cooking stoves and aims to have bees play their role as natural pollinators through the development of modern beekeeping. Thus far, 175 poor households and 392 beekeepers are supported to implement agroecological practices. 17 hectares of land were restored in collaboration with local communities.

Through these different activities and awareness campaigns, the project promotes agroecological methods to contribute to a virtuous cycle of ecosystem protection, biodiversity conservation and the fight against climate change.



Distribution and plantation of agroforestry and fodder tree plants.

For more info, contact VSF Belgium on info@vsf-belgium.org

EF: Learning trajectory in agroecology



Credits EF: Crops of farmer Froduald Munyemanzu applying the agroecological business model

The Belgian non-governmental actors strongly believe in mutual learning and knowledge sharing. That is why they established several joint 'learning trajectories'. **Entraide & Fraternité (EF)** animates the one that stimulates the sharing of best practices on agroecology.

Last June, 12 delegates of Belgian NGOs and their Rwandan partners (ADA, VSF, CRB, EF, Aprojumap, FXB Rwanda, Imbaraga, CRR and ACORD Rwanda) visited champions in agroecology supported by the **APTES project - Agroécologie, Pilier d'une Transition Ecologique et Sociale**. The champions are members of an *ihuriro* (a traditional association of solidarity and mutual aid) that embrace agroecological practices such as agroforestry, pesticidal plants, household nurseries, composting, rainwater harvesting, vegetable gardens, mulching, livestock, and the use of local seeds...

When asked about the transition from conventional agriculture to agroecology, a smallholder farmer shared his view: "This is not a one-year change. It has to be done progressively in order to generate agroecological inputs such as compost manure, biopesticides, local seeds, fruit trees plantlets, mulching and rainwater collection and use. As we reduce the agrochemicals, we increase the availability of agroecological inputs."

Another lesson to take home is the importance of working in solidarity and mutual help through the *ihuriro* approach. The social cohesion of the *ihuriro* and the collective work ensure that land cultivation, the making of compost, and other agroecological practices are sped up in each household.

For more info, contact Francois Munyentwari, Country representative of EF, on fmunyentwari@acordranda.org

Rikolto: Climat smart preservation of the fresh vegetable in Rubavu and Musanze corridor

Rikolto Global Director, Charlotte Flechet, visits Rwanda

On 21st August 2023, Rikolto's Global Director Charlotte Flechet, visited the Good Food for Cities project in Rubavu District. The intervention aims to increase vegetable production by smallholder farmers and train them on regenerative agriculture and new technologies.

Director Flechet appreciated the exceptional work achieved already by all the partners involved. By the end of the project, she hopes, there will be sustainable production, inclusive markets, and an enabling environment. Besides a 20% increase in incomes overall, Director Flechet stressed that particular attention must be given to marginalized communities and the issue of malnutrition.

Jean d'Amour Habumugisha, Chair of the KOTIBANYA cooperative, witnessed how the use of a new zero energy cooling chamber allows its members to preserve their produce for longer periods. This locally made cooling room works is an environmentally sustainable and cost-effective way to reduce postharvest handling losses. The farmers, who are trained by Kilimo Trust on composting techniques, from their side expressed their joy over the monetary savings and good production results they achieved by shifting away from the use of chemical fertilizers.

The acting Mayor of Rubavu District, Deogratus Nzabonimpa, highlighted that all the food that is produced in Rubavu is shared with the three million people living across the DRC border in Goma. This, he explained, makes any project enhancing food availability in the region all the more vital.



Global Director poses with partners and members of KOTIBANYA cooperative that will be using the newly constructed zero energy cooling chamber.

For more info, contact [Bonnke Safari, Country Coordinator](mailto:bonnke.safari@rikolto.org), on bonnke.safari@rikolto.org

ADA: Uplifting vulnerable communities through sustainable agriculture



In the districts of Nyamagabe, Huye, and Kamonyi, the "Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion" (REPES) program is transforming the lives of 1,600 vulnerable families. In collaboration with FXB and Aprojumap, **Auto Development Africa (ADA)** aims to revolutionize living conditions and foster genuine social integration.

With its holistic methodology, the program addresses diverse facets of poverty. Economic empowerment takes shape through provisions like fruit orchards, nurseries, goat rearing, and pig farming. Agroecology is pivotal to the program's success. Families have been granted plots to cultivate avocados, vegetables, and fruit trees. As they diversify their agricultural output and champion ecologically responsible methodologies, they enhance their food security. The program also empowers beneficiaries by enhancing their skills through targeted trainings. From mastering goat husbandry, to leadership and financial management, these acquired skills bolster community-driven ventures, particularly those led by enterprising women.

The story of Simon RWAGAKAYIGA illustrates the program's impact. Selected in July 2022, he received capital for income-generating activities, vital nutritional support, school supplies, uniforms, coverage of fees, and health insurance. Starting a small livestock venture, Simon and his wife now own goats and pigs. By joining REPES groups for savings and loans, they also enhanced their financial stability.

REPES erects a foundation for a more promising future for these vulnerable communities. Embracing agroecology as a guiding principle, the program not only nurtures the land but also nurtures dreams, while cultivating sustainable growth, prosperity, and lasting change.

Dear partners, dear friends,

Time has come for me to say goodbye to you after four years as Head of Cooperation at the Embassy of Belgium. It has been four busy years and every day was dedicated to making the cooperation between Rwanda and Belgium lively and dynamic.

But let us go back much further: April 1982. That month I discovered Rwanda for the first time. A Rwanda where agriculture and livestock were the main activities for more than 90% of the population. The challenges then were not the same as today, but at the time, the question of transforming agriculture was already present. The aim was to make it more productive but also more resilient by considering important factors: the fight against erosion and diseases and the use of cultural techniques and inputs to ensure farmers sufficient production and income.

The history of the country was subsequently marked by the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi and its terrible consequences. The country then embarked on a remarkable journey to rebuild a nation and rose to this challenge in a way that commands our admiration.

The world has changed and humanity is facing new challenges: climate change is no longer a chimera, it is a daily reality. Biodiversity loss and environmental degradation are also realities today. Rwanda is facing it like any other country and we are willing to support it in its efforts to deal with it. This Newsletter gives several examples of actions undertaken with the support of Belgian cooperation actors.

We are of course active in other sectors: health, urbanization, education, support to civil society, reconciliation and social cohesion and job creation for the most vulnerable. Good governance in public financial management is also an area in which we support Rwanda. Gender equality, citizen participation, social protection, and decent work are essential in our activities.

We can be proud of the successes achieved through our partnership. However, much remains to be done and a new program of governmental cooperation is being prepared. Many other actors are involved in this cooperation: NGOs, universities, civil society organizations, as well as international organizations that Belgium supports. This diversity of actors is not always easy to manage but makes our cooperation multifaceted. It is one of its main characteristics and strengths.

Now is the time for me to say goodbye, after so many years. This does not end my presence in Rwanda, it will simply take another form when the time of retirement finally comes. I thank each of you for your commitment and all the precious moments spent together. I wish to all of you much satisfaction and success in your personal lives and activities.

MURABEHO

Jean-Michel Swalens
Head of Cooperation/Deputy Head of Mission



Gashora, 1982



Masoro, 2022



Tangabo, 1983



Kigali, 2023

7

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