



Project Title: Increasing maize value chain efficiency in Rwanda



**July 2020 to June 2021,
Project Progress Report**

Date: June , 2021

Table of Contents

Project Title: Increasing maize value chain efficiency in Rwanda	1
INTRODUCTION	3
I. Establishing Cooperative action plans and signing contracts.....	4
II. General activities performed by cooperatives	4
II.1 Establishing farmers field school (FFS).....	4
II.2 Maize Aggregation.....	6
III. Trainings offered to cooperatives	8
III.1 Managing Your Agriculture cooperative training.	8
III.2 Record Keeping Training	9
III.3 Female Leadership Training	10
IV. Advisory services.....	10
IV.1. New members mobilized in cooperatives.....	12
IV.2 Linking Cooperatives with Financial Institutions	13
IV.3 Crop insurance.....	14
IV.4 Use of accounting software	15
IV.5 Job creation support/ Strengthening the performance of cooperatives	15
V. Challenges faced.....	17
CONCLUSION	18



INTRODUCTION

This progress project report will highlight the summary of activities done during period of July 2020 to June 2021.

In general, the 15 cooperatives under the SDGP Maize received advisory services and trainings meant to professionalize them and ensuring effectiveness of the production cycle towards market access. Agriterra assigns business advisors who assure regular contact and advice to the cooperatives. In terms of trainings , a total of 257 farmers were directly trained in farmer field schools while additional 106 trainees were selected from cooperative representatives and staffs to receive other trainings in cooperative management and inclusiveness related topics.

For professionalization, Agriterra supported the recruitment of key cooperative staffs who have contributed a lot in their areas of business development, agronomic practices and other member services.

The following topics indicate the main point of activities done within the above highlighted period. These include the following:

- I. Establishing cooperative action plans and signing contracts
- II. General activities performed by cooperatives
- III. Trainings offered to cooperatives
- IV. Advisory services
- V. Challenges
- VI. Conclusion

I. Establishing Cooperative action plans and signing contracts

Before starting annual activities implementation, Agriterra has established action plan and signed agreement with all 15 SDGP maize cooperatives. This year, Agriterra has contributed 2,000 Euros (2,341,400 Rwf based on exchange rate of 11th January 2021) to each cooperative which is approximately 90 percent of the total budget to all cooperatives and cooperatives also have contributed to the budget the remaining 10 percent.

Action plans were developed by the cooperatives themselves with support of Agriterra Business Advisors under SDGP Maize project. The most dominating activities in action plans were about maize aggregation, farmers field schools (FFS), establishing cooperative internal procedure manuals, member mobilization, etc...

II. General activities performed by cooperatives

The general activities performed by these cooperatives include:

- Establishing farmers field school (FFS)
- Maize aggregation

II.1 Establishing farmers field school (FFS)

Before starting any agricultural season, each cooperative part of the project has established farmer field schools with the objective of teaching farmers the best agricultural practices (proper using the fertilizers, testing the seeds performance, chemical spraying, the best technics of harvesting) for increasing the production. During the field training and demo plot establishment, sector agronomist or other experts joined the training for providing more technical knowledge.

In general, each cooperative has established a demo plot of 0.5 hectares as demonstration and some other farmer field schools (FFS) have been established additionally in different zones for facilitating all farmers. (Figure.1).



Figure 1: Demo plots established in various area

Table 1: Overview of lead farmers who attended FFS & post-harvest handling training in each cooperative:

No	Cooperatives	Land size/ha
1	KABOKU	25
2	KOHIKA	10
3	KODUIBI	17
4	COAIGA	25
5	COVAMIS	15
6	CAPRORE-INTAMBWE	20
7	HIRWA - 35	20
8	ABAHUJINTEGO BUSOGWE	17
9	KOABAKA - KINAZI	15
10	COAMANYA - GISHUBI	15
11	CVMK	12
12	COVAMABA	22
13	COALFKA	12
14	ABISHYZEHAMWE URWONJYA	20

15	UBUMWE	12
TOTAL		257

The above table, highlight the number of lead farmers attended FFS and post-harvest handling training per each cooperative. The lead farmers trained by an expert from different organizations like Rwanda Agriculture board, district agronomist or sector agronomist. The lead farmers are trained 4 times during each season. Lead farmers are trained on different agriculture technics including planting technics, fertilizers and chemicals application technics, harvesting and drying technics and finally is the post harvesting handling technics. Each lead farmer has got a group of fellow farmers to train in order to disseminate the learned knowledge to all cooperative members. Each cooperative has a committee in charge of extension which organize the visit to different zones to evaluate how the lead farmers have established the demo plots in different zones and the way they implement the technics learned on cooperative FFS.

II.2 Maize Aggregation

In this agricultural seasonal (2021A), all cooperatives have grown maize on 4,809 hectares as highlighted on table 2 bellow. The total land includes the common land of the cooperatives, mostly in the wetlands leased from the government and the individual farmer owned land.

Table 2: Total land size covered by maize in this 2020-2021 season A

No	Cooperatives	Land size/ha
1	KABOKU	800
2	KOHIKA	150
3	KODUIBI	180
4	COAIGA	1543
5	COVAMIS	362
6	CAPRORE-INTAMBWE	180
7	HIRWA - 35	812
8	ABAHUJINTEGO BUSOGWE	62
9	KOABAKA - KINAZI	60
10	COAMANYA - GISHUBI	70
11	CVMK	55

12	COVAMABA	247
13	COALFKA	64
14	ABISHYZEHAMWE URWONJYA	108
15	UBUMWE	116

In general, 15 cooperatives have already harvested and sold the production to the contracted buyers. All 15 cooperatives signed a contract with Africa Improved Food (AIF) but due to challenges of market, all production was not sold to Africa Improved Foods. Out of 6,072,876 kilograms of total production sold by cooperatives for season A, a total of 4,347,897 kg (71.6%) were sold to AIF with 73.7% sold using cobs model as indicated in table 3.

Table 3: Maize Production aggregated during this 2021 season A

Total Quantity Sold (kgs)	Quantity Sold to AIF (kgs)	Quantity sold to other Buyers (kgs)	Quantity sold on cobs model (kgs)	Quantity sold on grain model (kgs)
6,072,876	4,347,897	1,724,979	4,477,897	1,594,979



Figure 2: Maize aggregation in different cooperative

III. Trainings offered to cooperatives.

During this year, 3 trainings including Managing Your Agriculture Cooperative Training (My Coop training) module 1&2, record keeping, and female readership training have been provided to the cooperatives. The following paragraph, highlight the main content of each training.

III.1 Managing Your Agriculture cooperative training.

Managing Your Agriculture cooperative training (My Coop) composed by 4 modules as follows:

- 1st module provides Basics concept of agricultural Cooperative,
- Module 2 deals with the cooperative service provision,
- Module 3 covers the service of Farm input supply,
- Module 4 covers the notions around marketing.

During the period 2020- June 2021, only modules 1&2 were provided to the cooperatives. A group of farmers' representatives was trained on cooperative management and on how to improve the services provided to the farmers. All 15 cooperatives have been already trained on module 1&2. In total, 61 cooperative members of different positions, including the representatives of board of directors, supervisory board, some key members, and the representative of cooperative staffs (manager, Accountant and Agronomist) have attended the training.

The training was participatory, and the participants appreciated the training methodology. In addition, the cooperatives expressed their eagerness to learn and improve on their governance, management and services offered to their members. At the beginning of the training, the participants shared their expectations where the majority expected to learn the basics about cooperative governance and management, the members' contributions to the cooperative development, the collaboration between different committees, quality of the services offered to the members and some other few participants mentioned about increasing maize production and post-harvest handling practices to maintain maize quality.

At the end of the training, the participants appreciated the training and have shown that their expectations about governance and management were met and have committed themselves to train other fellow cooperative members. At the end of training, each cooperative developed an action plan which comprises key activities to undertake as training follow up.



Figure 3: Participants during Mycoop training

III.2 Record Keeping Training

Record keeping training aims to equip cooperatives members, management and staff with basic skills in on-farm data recording and analysis. This training is designed to strengthen an organization and its members’ record keeping practices by creating awareness of the importance and impact of this activity. Main components of the training are the “why, what, and how” of record keeping and practical examples of record-keeping at farm level and data analysis at cooperative level. Currently, 20 members from 5 cooperatives were trained on this product. The remaining cooperatives will be trained in this coming July and August.



Figure 4: Participants during Record Keeping training

III.3 Female Leadership Training

Most cooperatives are composed of male and female members. Often women form 30%-40% of the members, sometimes even more. However, women farmers are frequently underrepresented in decision-making bodies within agricultural cooperatives. The inclusion of women in cooperatives is important for the development of farmer-led agricultural enterprises, for the farm as a family business and in order to contribute to more equal relations between men and women in general. Therefore, Agriterra supports the process of building female leadership in agricultural cooperatives by organizing female leadership training for 5 cooperatives with high less intervention of women to cooperative activities. In total 25 cooperative representatives attended the training. The main objective of this training is to support cooperatives towards better understanding of the position of women in cooperatives, that will contribute to a proactive attitude towards increasing women membership, women entrepreneurship and women leadership in their own cooperatives. During the workshop, male members also invited to increase their knowledge on leadership, gender and diversity.



Figure 4: Female Leadership Training

IV. Advisory services

Agriterra business advisors have been providing business advisory services to the maize cooperatives under SDGP Maize project. This activity is implemented through combined regular visits and remote follow ups of activities. With travel restrictions related to COVID 19 pandemic, the cooperatives were supported remotely for some time but once movements were allowed Agriterra business advisors resumed their visits to the cooperatives. With the support of the business advisors, many cooperatives have managed to make some good steps towards their development. This can be in the field of business operations, managerial activities, investments, governance and financial management.



A good example is KODUIBI cooperative from Mugesera sector, Ngoma district, which has managed to improve its business management since they started working with Agriterra. KODUIBI cooperative supported by Agriterra, was able to recruit a cooperative manager in July 2020. The cooperative business has been growing since then as they have managed to invest in building a business facility partly used by the cooperative while the other part is leased by other businesses. In addition, the cooperative, with the support of its manager has developed a business plan and mobilized a loan for its new business of agro-dealership. The cooperative has made a remarkable progress during last year from July 2020 to June 2021. the business is running very well and the cooperative is very confident that it will be able to keep the manager by fully paying his salary once Agriterra support in paying the staff ends.

Another success story of the advisory services provided to our maize clients' cooperatives is from COAMANYA Gishubi which has recruited an accountant in July 2020 and before that time the cooperative had no staff at all. Since the arrival of the accountant, in combination with the advisory services of Agriterra, the cooperative has decided to buy a computer which has helped them to improve their bookkeeping. Now the cooperative keeps track of all the expenses in writing, as well as on the computer, just to have the backup for all their records and they have installed Info System software which supports them to have all the records of their members and producing reports on financial reports. This software was bought with the support of Agriterra. Cooperatives emerge or fall with the confidence of their members and good book keeping is an important pillar for success. The cooperative has also started a new business agro-dealership business since September 2020 and currently owns a shop selling fertilizers and maize seeds to its members and other farmers in the community.

CAPRORE is a cooperative located in the Eastern part of Rwanda in Gatsibo district. the cooperative was supported by Agriterra to recruit a manager and the accountant. The cooperative started a new business of agro-dealership. This cooperative is mainly producing maize in season A and soybean in season B and cooperative members are now able to easily get access to the seeds and fertilizers at the cooperative while the business also generate income for the cooperative. The members can also get inputs on credit and repay after selling their produce.

Another example of the cooperative that has started a new business is KOABAKA KINAZI located in Ruhango district. This cooperative has also employed a manager with the support of Agriterra. The cooperative applied for agro-dealership and has started selling inputs to farmers and the members are happy with the service.

There are so many success stories coming up for Maize cooperatives and just to mention few of them and Agriterra expects that those mentioned cooperatives and other unmentioned cooperatives will continue to grow even further in the years to come.



Figure 1: KODUIBI cooperative's input shop established by the idea of cooperative Manager.

IV.1. New members mobilized in cooperatives.

Last year (2020), Agriterra encouraged the selected cooperatives to recruit new members to increase their economies of scale. In order to be convinced to join a cooperative, farmers need to believe that the cooperative is performing well and will serve their individual and joint shared needs in an economically viable way. The following table highlights the new members mobilized:

Table 4: New cooperative members mobilized

No	Cooperatives	Total Number of New Members mobilized	Number of Male	Number of Female
1	KABOKU	2	2	0
2	KOHIKA	3	2	1
3	KODUIBI	15	9	6
4	COAIGA	38	24	14
5	COVAMIS	20	14	6
6	CAPRORE-INTAMBWE	108	76	32
7	HIRWA - 35	45	16	29
8	ABAHUJINTEGO BUSOGWE	5	2	3
9	KOABAKA - KINAZI	1	1	0
10	COAMANYA - GISHUBI	16	15	1

11	CVMK	0	0	0
12	COVAMABA	341	161	180
13	COALFKA	7	4	3
14	ABISHYZEHAMWE URWONJYA	6	5	1
15	UBUMWE	0	0	0

From 2020 - 2021, a total of 607 farmers have joined the selected cooperatives, these new members include 331 males and 276 females. Currently, the total cooperatives members are 12,979 members with 5,398 females (41.6%) and 7,581 males (58.4%). The cooperative membership indicates that the number of females joining and willing to actively participate in their cooperatives has been increasing progressively.

IV.2 Linking Cooperatives with Financial Institutions

One objective of the SDGP maize project is to facilitate cooperatives to access finance by linking them with financial institutions in order to boost the business development while making cooperatives more bankable. From July 2020 to June 2021, 6 cooperatives (HIRWA-35, COALFKA, COVAMIS, ABAHUJINTEGO BUSOGWE, KOHIIKA and COAMANYA GISHUBI) have been linked with different financial institutions. The following table indicates the amount of loan which have been taken by each cooperative and the purpose of the loan.

Table 5: Loan taken by cooperative to be used for different purpose.

No	Cooperatives	Total amount of loan /Rwf	Financial institution provided the loan	Purpose of that loan
1	KOHIKA	25,000,000	Bank of Kigali	Buying inputs (seed and fertilizers) and collecting maize production from members and non-members by paying the production in advance.
2	COVAMIS	10,500,000	Bank of Kigali	Buying inputs (seed and fertilizers) and collecting maize production from members and non-members by paying the production in advance.
3	HIRWA – 35	15,000,000	Axon Tunga Microfinance (10,000,000 RWF) and URWEGO opportunity bank (5,000,000 RWF)	Buying inputs (seed and fertilizers) and collecting maize production from both members and non-members by paying the production in advance.

4	ABAHUJINTEGO BUSOGWE	1,500,000	Sacco Mukingo	Buying a plot which will be used to construct a drying facilities.
5	COALFKA	1,000,000	CPF INEZA	Increasing quantity of inputs sold by cooperative.
5	COAMANYA GISHUBI	500,000	SACCO TUGANE HEZA GISHUBI	The cooperative took this loan to pay agricultural insurance for 11 hectares of Maize

Among the 15 cooperatives, 6 have secured loans to be used for different activities as highlighted on table 4 above. In general, 53,500,000 Rwf have been mobilized by cooperatives to be invested on income generating activities. Agriterra is supporting the cooperatives in the proper management of the loans and expects even higher amount of mobilized loans in the coming year.

IV.3 Crop insurance

Crop insurance is one of the mitigating factors against the climate shocks. Previously, some maize cooperatives were not used to take the crop insurance for their maize but with advices provided by business advisors the cooperatives have started understanding the importance taking the insurance of their crops. When the cooperative or individual farmers insure their crops, they are entitled to compensation depending on the percentage of the loss in case climate shocks arise. Below is a table showing the area insured and the insurer.

No	Cooperative name	Area insured (Ha)	Insurer
1	KOHIKA	100.2	SONARWA
2	KABOKU	43.5	RADIANT
3	CAPRORE INTAMBWE	80	SONARWA
4	HIRWA-35	10	RADIANT
5	COALFKA	13.5	SONARWA
6	COVAMABA	100	SONARWA
7	ABISHYZEHAMWE URWONJYA	36	SONARWA
8	CVMK	30	RADIANT
9	COAMANYA GISHUBI	11	RADIANT
10	KODUIBI	12.4	PRIME
11	COAIGA	19.6	RADIANT
12	COVAMIS	27.5	RADIANT
Total area insured		483.7	



The table above shows the cooperative name, the area insured by each cooperative and the insurer. Among the 15 maize cooperatives under the SDGP Maize project, 12 maize cooperatives have taken insurance for their maize crop in season A 2021. The total area insured by the cooperatives is 483.7 hectares and some of these cooperatives have faced climate shocks and have already been compensated for the losses incurred. .

After these cooperatives have been reimbursed due to climate shocks they faced, they have found that insurance is the only way of protecting the farmers against the losses caused by climate change and are more willing to insure even large area compared to the area insured last season.

IV.4 Use of accounting software

Since the time Agriterra started working with these 15 maize cooperatives under SDGP Maize project, none of them was using any kind of accounting software and very few had computers and all their records were being recorded in books. As of now, 12 cooperatives have computers used in their everyday work and only three cooperatives are left without computers (CVMK, Abahujintego busogwe and Abishyizehamwe Urwonjya) but they are willing to buy them in the nearly future. Seven cooperatives have adopted the use of Info System Software, this software helps the cooperative to have a well detailed membership database, record everyday transactions and make financial reports needed. All the 7 seven cooperatives have already bought the software with the support of Agriterra.

IV.5 Job creation support/ Strengthening the performance of cooperatives.

When Agriterra started collaborating with the selected 15 cooperatives, only two (2) cooperatives (COALFKA and UBUMWE) had permanent staff. Currently, 13 cooperatives were able to contract different key staffs which were needed to ensure that the cooperatives have the required skills for their business to run efficiently.

Up to now, 14 staffs on different position have been hired by the above cooperatives. Among 14 staffs, 6 are managers, 5 accountants and 3 agronomists. Through a complementary project, Agriterra has managed to support these cooperatives by contributing 50 percent of the salaries, plus communication and transport facilitation, while the cooperatives contribute 50 percent of the salary for their staff.

Agriterra aims to see the cooperatives becoming able to maintain staffs after the project without external support, being the reason why cooperatives have to fix a realistic salary which is manageable at their level. As of now the project supporting the cooperative to pay the staff is phasing out and many cooperatives aim to maintain the staffs because they have realized benefits of employing professional staffs.



Figure 2: cooperative chairmen and staff after contract signing

According to cooperative testimonies, the recruited staff have helped the cooperatives in different ways. The following are examples of the impact the new staff had to the cooperatives:

- Linking cooperative with insurance companies (exp: Radiant, Sonarwa and Prime insurance) to secure crop insurance for maize.
- Linking farmers to financial institutions
- The production has been increased through application of good agriculture practices.
- Updating cooperative books and establish regular financial and narrative monthly reports.
- Facilitate cooperative to start new income generating activities (Eg: KODUIBI, COAMANYA Gishubi, KOABAKA Kinazi have started selling inputs to their members)
- Business plan development

V. Challenges faced

In the implementation of Agriterra's activities there are some challenges we have faced as mentioned below :

1. **Covid-19 effect:** since March 2020 when the first case of covid-19 occurred in Rwanda, the government of Rwanda has introduced covid-19 prevention measures including total lockdown, travel restrictions among districts, and many other prevention measures which highly affected our work about reaching to farmers. These measures have also affected the cooperatives' everyday work since they were not allowed to conduct general assembly meetings and that affected the decision-making processes. The pandemic has caused some cooperative leaders to rule beyond their terms because general assembly's weren't allowed. The pandemic has affected all the sectors of life including the farmers either their income or the cooperative income since some of their businesses were not operating as usual. On the side of Agriterra services to cooperatives such as trainings, the number of participants per cooperative has reduced from 5 to 3 or 4 participants because of prevention measures.
2. **Approval from Nyaruguru district:** one of the project intervention district has been reluctant to offer a required collaboration letter to Agriterra. Fortunately, the issue has now been settled with the support of Africa Improved Foods. The concerned cooperative in the above-mentioned district is called Abishyizehamwe Urwonjya cooperative. Despite the delay in participating in Agriterra activities as planned, the cooperative received the contract since 2021 which include activities and services of Agriterra. In addition to this, a professional accountant has been recruited with support of Agriterra.



CONCLUSION

The project “Increasing maize value chain efficiency in Rwanda”, started with the inception phase that led to the selection of 15 cooperatives from different districts by Agriterra. Together, Agriterra and the cooperatives have developed one-year action plans and the implementation is in progress. Agriterra and its project partners have started playing their roles and have already achieved a lot in supporting the cooperatives. The introduction of the cob model has been rather successful, as many cooperatives appear to be motivated to keep using the model in the coming years. Additionally, the rejection rates at the factory have been very low because of the low aflatoxin contents in the maize.

During the COVID-19 lock down, the SDGP maize team managed to provide advisory services remotely through telecommunication channels, even though more could have been achieved if the COVID-19 pandemic would not have broken out. The support in recruiting key staffs for the cooperatives has made a great contribution in terms of professional way of working and better services to the farmers especially on the production level. For the year 2021, priority activities include to continue working on good agricultural practices, providing trainings to improve management and services to the members and last but not least the inclusiveness activities.