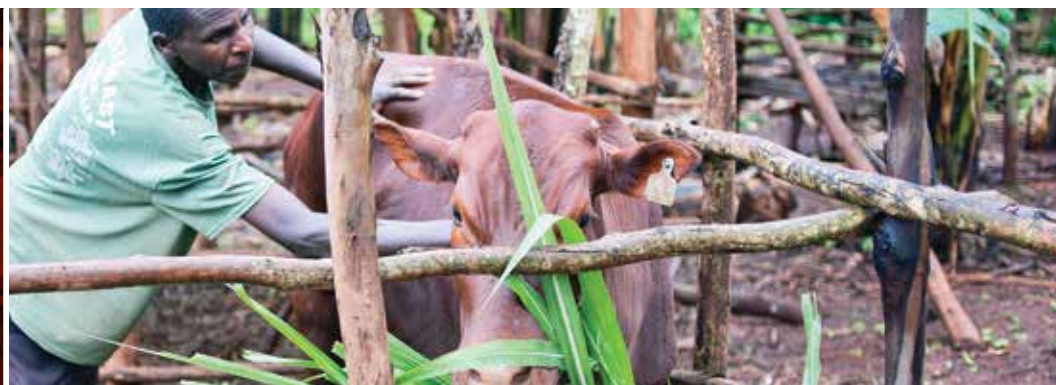


case study



Rwandan Red Cross: Experience in cow rotation programming



OVC project coordinator Robert Muyenzi congratulates a farmer on becoming the new beneficiary of a young calf under Rwandan Red Cross' cattle rotation program in Mbeho village. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC

Country context

Rwanda – “the land of a thousand hills” – is a small, landlocked and resource-poor country in East Africa, wedged between Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and Uganda.¹

With an estimated population of 11.6 million in an area of 26,334 square kilometres, Rwanda is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa, with almost 407 people per square kilometre.

Following the collapse of Rwanda's economy in 1994, the past two decades have witnessed the emergence of sustained period of economic growth, due in large part to the wide-ranging programme focusing on rebuilding and reforming the country. Although Rwanda has made significant progress in reducing the number of people living in poverty and in improving health and education services, almost half of the population continues to be vulnerable to food insecurity and poverty. Nearly 45 per cent of Rwanda's population lives in poverty² and according to WFP's *Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis and Nutrition Survey* chronic malnutrition among children between six months and five years remains very high, at an estimated rate of 43 per cent.³

The majority of the population lives in rural areas on small farms. This further limits the population's access to sufficient food in order to meet their dietary needs and can in turn also jeopardize rural livelihoods.

There are many factors that contribute to Rwanda's problems: recurring droughts, deforestation, poor soil quality, climate change and limited natural resources. However, a major factor includes the

Facts

- Capital: Kigali
- Population: 11,689,696
- Area: 26,334 square kilometres
- Poverty rate: 44.9 per cent
- Extreme poverty rate: 24.1 per cent



relatively small size of the typical family farm, which is generally considered the lower threshold for providing sufficient food or an income. Under these conditions, coping with the impact of annual droughts remains a significant challenge. Furthermore, demographic growth continues to increase pressure on these small-holdings to produce more food for more people.

The country also faces a number of further challenges, including widespread HIV and AIDS infections and orphaned children.

The situation has become critical in a number of districts across the country. The government has made efforts to tackle these problems with the establishment of model villages, the 'Agasozi Ndatwa,' which aim to integrate all necessary features of life within different communities. With the assistance of the Rwandan Red Cross, they aim to provide infrastructure, such as water, electricity; health and ed-

ucation services; agricultural practices; quality housing, etc. As part of the national programme, the Rwandan Red Cross has provided for shelter, food security and livelihoods activities, especially for orphans, vulnerable families and returnees.

A livestock initiative is one component of the food security and livelihoods programme. A cow rotation fund was launched in a number of different communities across the country to make households and communities resilient to shocks. The cow rotation fund, which is linked to agricultural activities, aims for a more holistic approach in addressing food and nutrition insecurity problems in a sustainable manner.

The cow rotation fund

The cow rotation initiative seeks to provide herds of cattle, pigs, goats, rabbits and other livestock to targeted communities. The aim is that a number of select-

ed beneficiaries should directly receive livestock from the Rwandan Red Cross and take care and manage them. In order to ensure that each household in the community receives livestock, the first-born heifer, pig, goat or rabbit is passed on to another household; which again reproduces newborns for new households. The rotation goes until every household in the community has livestock that it can raise.

Project sequence

1. Partnership building

The Red Cross partnered with local and district level government bodies to assist the government in implementing the national programme in different districts. To assure the quality of the partnership and ensure the commitment of both sides to improve the livelihoods and food security of affected households, a programme policy was signed.



During this process a steering committee was formed with representatives from the Rwandan Red Cross and its branches, local government leaders, district level government representatives, government technicians, and

Oswald Rudasingwa tends his cow on his small farm in Agatoki, in the Kayanza district of Rwanda. Oswald received a cow from the Rwandan Red Cross as part of the food security and livelihoods programme. He uses the cow to fertilize his land and provide milk for his family. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC



Agnes Niyonsaba tends her garden in Mbeho village, Gisagara district. The garden is fertilized by the manure from the cow she received through the Rwandan Red Cross's cow rotation programme. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC

beneficiary representatives (two men and two women).

Partnerships with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Belgian Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, German Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross, Spanish Red Cross, as well as with DFID and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria were also formed for financial support and food security trainings.

2. Needs Assessment

Together with beneficiary representatives, government technicians and local government leaders, the Rwandan Red Cross conducted a needs assessment.

3. Food security and livelihoods measures

Based on needs assessment in the communities, the cow rotation fund was initiated. Households received livestock and were trained in agricultural practices, nutrition, and income management as a means enhancing their resilience.

4. Identifying the beneficiaries

Direct and indirect beneficiaries were identified and a plan was developed which would map out the rotation process, ensuring that the all members of the community receive livestock bought by the Rwandan Red Cross fund. Contracts have been signed by individual representatives of households to bind households to the conditions of the rotation programme. Last-

Members of the Abisunganye cooperative in the Bugesera district of Rwanda cutting cassava at a plantation. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC





ly, a beneficiary list was created by the steering committee, which is updated after each rotation phase.

5. Livestock distribution

The steering committee was jointly distributing the livestock. In the case of cows, only female cows were distributed, while the newborn males were sold on the market. In order to ensure reproduction, government veterinary technicians artificially impregnated these cows.

For small livestock such as pigs, one male was distributed for 15 female pigs, to ensure the reproduction process.

6. Training and education

Training constitutes an essential component of the work of the Red Cross; in particular it provides a means to

follow up on programmes and to ensure their sustainability. Local experts or Rwandan Red Cross specialists, who participated as volunteers, provided the training. Specialists from different areas trained beneficiaries on livestock maintenance and supporting issues, i.e., appropriate and new farming techniques and best practices, nutrition education, income management and simplified accounting.

7. Sustainability

Through the partnership with local and district level government bodies and programme policy, a well-planned strategy was formulated. With this commitment, continuous support to the beneficiaries was assured. Keeping track of the beneficiaries after each round of the rotation was furthermore key to guarantee equality within

Rwandan Red Cross volunteer Issa murakezi demonstrates the essentials of a balanced diet during a training on healthy eating for kids in Mbeho village, Gisagara district. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC



Vincent Paul Rukongi and his wife tend their gardens in Nemba village in the Bugesera district of Rwanda. Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC

the community. Additional household training has covered maintaining livestock and integrating new best farming practices into daily work. This is how the programme has been running since 2008.

Positive impacts

- A large number of beneficiaries have been reached through the programme and needs have been met with limited resources.
- Livelihoods have been strengthened in a sustainable manner.
- Cow and other livestock manure have helped fertilize the land and thus increased agricultural crop production. Kitchen gardens are now flourishing through the newly provided manure.
- Households are able to sell excess farm produce at the local market and generate a measure of financial gain. Therefore, they can now put aside some money for household activities, such as the payment of health insurance costs or school fees.
- The cows are providing milk for a healthy diet and have improved the nutritional status of households.
- The cows reproduce calves that are further distributed throughout the community. This has not only benefitted households on individual levels, but

has also contributed to a sense of solidarity in the community.

- The trainings and ongoing veterinary assistance by government technicians have helped beneficiaries maintain their livestock in the face of diseases and other problems.
- A just distribution of livestock within the community is ensured through the monitoring system of the beneficiary list by the steering committee. This way it is guaranteed that the programme reaches out to a large number of beneficiaries in an effective manner.
- Households are now more aware of how to nourish their families, especially children, through the training that has been provided. Families are now getting healthy and diversified meals

with sufficient vitamins and proteins on a daily basis. Red Cross volunteers have been very active in ensuring that this information is made known to as many mothers as possible.

- Appropriate and new farming techniques help maintain nutrients in the soil and therewith increase the quality of the soil.
- Households have become aware of the dry seasons and their periodic drought coping strategies. They are now growing different crops and cultivating productive swamps depending on seasonal factors.
- A number of households have also introduced kitchen gardens and vegetable production in their backyards.

*A man milks a cow in Mbeho village in Gisagara District of Rwanda. Rwandan Red Cross operates a cattle rotation programme in the village as part of the food security and livelihoods programme. The aim is that every family in the village will one day have a cow. Cows are not only milk provider – they are also a great source of natural fertilizer for the land.
Photo: Victor Lacken/IFRC*



Learning points

↘ Partnering with the government

Partnership with the government and the programme policy has helped to institutionalize the programme and to ensure its quality through continuous technical support.

↘ Integrating activities

Linking livestock programme to agricultural best practices, nutrition and income management activities as well as taking a holistic approach is crucial to ensuring that livelihoods are sustainable and resilient to shocks.

↘ Training

Training has provided beneficiaries the capabilities to maintain their livestock, to get the maximum out of their rearing, and to cope with the dry seasons. This way households can be independent and continue the programme by themselves thus ensuring its sustainability.

1. UNDP (2012). 'International Human Development Indicators', [online]. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/> [Accessed 29.01.2013].
2. UNDP (2012). 'About Rwanda', [online]. Available at: www.rw.undp.org/content/rwanda/en/home/countryinfo/ [Accessed 29.01.2013].
3. WFP and Minagri NISR (2012). 'Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis and Nutrition Survey', [online]. Available at: <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp255144.pdf>



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