WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHERS

Facilitating changes in livelihoods in Rwanda
Working in partnership with others in Rwanda

1 Overview

Programme information

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<th>Sustainable Livelihoods</th>
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<td>Country</td>
<td>Rwanda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>£3.5m</td>
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<td>Start Date</td>
<td>April 2015</td>
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<td>March 2020</td>
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<td>Donors</td>
<td>Projects Direct (Oxfam), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Enterprise Development Programme and Oxfam Ireland</td>
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Problem analysis

Rwanda has come a long way since the tragic conflict that tore it apart in the 1990s. A country once synonymous with communal strife has recovered and is increasingly confident. GDP growth has been strong, up from $1.7bn in 2000 to $8bn in 2015,1 with life expectancy rising from 48.1 years to 63.9 years in the same period.2 The country even has a nascent tourist industry, receiving 924,000 visitors in 2014.3 However, growth remains unequal and poverty endemic. Today, Rwanda ranks 159 of 188 in the 2016 Human Development index,4 and in 2013 60 percent of Rwandans were still living on less than $1.90 a day.5 Over 70 percent6 of the country’s 11.6 million people live in rural areas, and rely heavily on agriculture for subsistence and livelihoods.

In 2015, Oxfam conducted a gender analysis of rural households in 10 target districts and found that women headed close to a third of agricultural households and provided almost two-thirds of the labour on family farms. It also identified a significantly greater incidence of poverty in female-headed households in researched locations.7 The link between gender and poverty is underlined by the 2014 Rwanda Horticultural Organisations Survey, which found that predominately female agricultural groups reported dramatically lower sales than observed for male groups.8

Brief programme description

Oxfam has worked in Rwanda since the 1960s, and has been physically present since 1982, delivering diverse programming focused on humanitarian response, water and sanitation, conflict management and sustainable livelihoods. Oxfam currently operates in 10 districts of the country: Kirehe and Nyagatare (Eastern Province); Rulindo, Musanze, Gakenke and Gicumbi (Northern Province); Rubavu (Western Province); and Kamonyi, Muhanga and Nyamagabe (Southern Province).

The sustainable livelihoods programme has a strategic vision that runs from 2015 to 2020, and a budget of £3.5m. Its overarching goal is to ‘create sustainable and resilient livelihoods to increase employment and income for poor people, especially women and youth’. The programme has four main objectives:

• Employment and value chain development.
• Enhancing the enabling environment for agricultural markets and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
• Strengthening citizen participation in government decision making related to the agriculture sector.
• Strengthening women’s economic leadership.

Oxfam’s work on employment and value chain development includes skills development, job-placement schemes, and support to incubators and job centres. The programme promotes the adoption of new technologies to boost production and add value, supports certification processes for internal and international markets, and offers a range of activities to boost access to business development services.

The programme also supports the enabling environment in which SMEs operate, creating the conditions for smallholder farmers and other value chain actors to thrive. Oxfam works to:

• Promote ethical certification of goods.
• Engage diverse stakeholders to improve post-harvest processes.
• Lobby for increased investment in agriculture and a policy environment that supports smallholder farmers.
• Support links between different market actors through clustering and reform of legislation on co-operatives.

The programme is taking a number of steps to boost citizen engagement in government decision making, including through a range of platforms and working groups on public-private-producer (PPP) dialogue. We also support farmers’ organizations to lobby more effectively, and develop mechanisms for grassroots monitoring and feedback into policy processes.

Finally, the programme has a component focused on addressing underlying power relationships at a household level, to improve the wellbeing of women and girls. Specifically, Oxfam is identifying and supporting solutions to time poverty, and seeking opportunities to use technology to improve women’s access to information on markets, nutrition and production practices.
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2 Achievements and challenges

Achievements to date

**Increased income and employment**
Since its inception, the programme has supported men, women and youth in nine rural districts of Rwanda to improve their yields, add value to their products, and gain employment in local industries. Key successes to date include:

• Reaching out to more than 70,000 smallholder farmer households, providing them with opportunities for economic empowerment and income-generating activities.
• Supporting mid-range enterprises with a £98,000 capital contribution and £32,000 provided as a grant. These enterprises are contributing to raising the income of more than 4,000 households.
• Securing access to export markets of smallholder enterprises by facilitating certification processes. These enterprises have reached a total membership of more than 893 farmers (of which 654 are women).

**Enhanced enabling environment**
Lobbying by the programme successfully secured commitments from the Ministry of Agriculture of the Government of Rwanda to open certification processes to small-scale farmers. This will support access to higher-value markets and increase competitiveness with larger operations.

Oxfam has also worked to amplify the voices of rural farmers in policy formulation, documenting the experiences of women and smallholder farmers in order to influence government working groups on seed and fertilizer policy.

**More accountable and responsive government**
The programme has carried out extensive research into government planning on agricultural development and identified a crucial gap between community experience and government policy on issues such as seasonal planning and subsidies.

Oxfam has also done considerable work on legislation that controls co-operative enterprises, using a Sustainable Enterprise Tool to analyse performance and draw conclusions that have influenced government reform of the legislation governing co-operatives.

Specific challenges

**Towards international organic certification**
Oxfam seeks to ensure smallholder farmers get the highest possible price for their crops, which requires maximizing market access – including international export, where possible. A key challenge for the programme has been that, while farmers have been able to gain domestic organic certification, they have found it harder to gain the internationally recognized organic crop certification which would enable access to high-value foreign markets.

Rwanda does not currently have a regulatory framework for organic certification that conforms to international standards. Enterprises within the country that seek certification are required to undertake the complicated and expensive process in Ethiopia – which lacks a border with Rwanda.

Oxfam has sought to address the problem by convening key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Agriculture, export boards, private companies and farmers’ organizations, to generate support for a national certification process. While some steps have been taken, and the Ministry of Agriculture has committed to train staff to kick-start the process, progress has been slow, and groups seeking certification still need to make significant financial commitments.

Lessons learned

**Well-intentioned policy can have unexpected negative outcomes.** Oxfam can act as a mediator to mitigate risks in such circumstances.

**Certification adds value to products, and can create dramatic improvements in market access.** It is also a long and difficult process for smallholder farmers to undertake, particularly in a context with a limited regulatory framework.

**Integrating methodologies at household level (especially through the Gender Action Learning System) in existing interventions can accelerate the achievement of gender balance within households, enterprises and communities.**

**More efforts are needed to influence financial institutions to support the agriculture sector and alleviate the existing barriers to smallholders’ access to finance.**
3 Partnerships and links with other programmes

Partnerships
Oxfam sees its role in Rwanda as a catalyst and facilitator, and has built diverse partnerships to benefit the poorest and most vulnerable people. Partners in the country include farmers’ organizations representing rural producers across the country; civil society actors; private enterprises of all sizes; women’s groups; universities, government bodies and regulatory boards; and financial institutions.

Links with other Oxfam programmes
Oxfam in Rwanda has utilized the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) to:
• Engage the people we work with through the programme in life and livelihoods planning.
• Strengthen awareness of power relationships with service providers, the private sector and government.
• Drive collective action and gender advocacy for change.

The methodology, which was developed by Oxfam Novib and its partners under the WEMAN11 programme, has been a powerful tool to help build confidence and empower communities to address the challenges they face.
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4 In focus

A drastic approach to plastic

Rwanda has made headlines across the world for its bold decision to ban the use of plastic bags. The move, introduced in 2008, has been widely credited for dramatically reducing solid waste in the country, and preserving an environment that is regarded as one of the most meticulously maintained on the continent. The ban is also rigorously enforced, with visitors thoroughly searched to ensure that no plastic bags enter the country.

While this has had a powerful positive impact on the environment, the ban has not been straightforward. A demand for plastic remains, and businesses across the country are prone to pay smugglers to import bags from neighbouring countries.

The ban also presents challenges for law-abiding, small-scale producers seeking to sell and export their well-packaged goods. Nurseries have struggled to transport seedlings to market in the alternative paper bags, which creates a significant obstacle to the operation of a viable, sustainable business. Further, foreign buyers of certain commodities, for example dried fruit, have required plastic packaging as part of purchase agreements.

Oxfam has worked as an intermediary between producers and the Rwanda Environment Management Authority (REMA), the institution responsible for enforcing the ban, supporting negotiations between government and producers. It was able to secure a deal which allowed the use of plastic by certain groups, for example Tuzamurane co-operative, a dried pineapple processing plant. Entry of plastic into the country has been permitted under strict conditions – specifically, that use is limited to the specific activity applied for (e.g. packaging dried pineapple products for export); that strong monitoring (supported by Oxfam) ensures that all bags are accounted for throughout the process; and that all bags are disposed of at a government-approved facility after use.

For further information about this programme:
www.oxfam.org.uk/livelihoods-rwanda
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Notes


9 This tool was developed in collaboration with CCOAIB (Conseil de Concertation des Organisations d’Appui aux Initiatives de Base), and has been used to collect evidence of the key drivers of cooperative business performance.


