

Rwanda

Ruheru Sector, Nyaruguru District, Southern Province

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Jyamumbere women farmers' cooperative



In less than three years, Jyamumbere women farmers' cooperative has drastically altered the socioeconomic positions of its 29 members and their families. Formed in early 2009 with organizational and capital support from ActionAid, women of the cooperative recently declared with smiles, cheers and laughter that they and their families have been able to free themselves from hunger.

ActionAid helped women from 5 cells of Ruheru sector to organize into a cooperative, and has supported them with training, 6 cows, and startup capital of 5 million Rwandan Francs (8,333 USD). The members of the cooperative have put this money to work by renting land, purchasing improved variety seeds and making

additional investments in their own agricultural production and other small businesses by providing capital through loans. The result has been increased agricultural production, access to sufficient caloric and nutritional consumption for the members and their families, and greater monetary income that the women are using to invest in their children's futures by covering their school fees.

The women have distributed at least one cow to each of the 5 cells, such that each member can access some of the organic fertilizer that the cows provide. Access to capital has also helped the women to invest in chemical fertilizers, which they can purchase at a 50% discount through a government subsidy program.

The cooperatives of the area have also benefitted from the recent installation of storage silos in Ruheru sector, with separate units for grains and seeds and an overall storage capacity of 50 tons. These facilities will act as a buffer against price volatility, allowing farmers greater flexibility to buy, sell and consume according to market conditions. Jyamumbere cooperative has recently stored wheat seed in these silos, which members produced jointly by renting 1.2 hectares of land for wheat cultivation.

Marta Ntakirumana, the 52-year-old Vice President of Jyamumbere cooperative and mother of 7, has markedly improved the socioeconomic situation of her family by taking advantage of the opportunities made available through the group. With greater access to fertilizer and seed, she has been able to increase her agricultural yields and income, which she has used to pay the school fees of her children and purchase clothing. She also took out a loan of 200,000 Rwandan Francs (FRW) from the cooperative, with which she was able to cover half of her initial investment in a wheat-grinding machine. It has been a successful endeavor, as she has enjoyed a steady market for grinding with daily revenue ranging from 3,000 to 15,000 FRW. In addition to the benefit of this service to the community, the cooperative has earned interest of 4,600 FRW per month on her loan. With the economic capacity to pay school fees for all of her children, Marta knows that she is helping them to build a bright future. "I feel that I have a good life now," she says, "and I hope that my children will as well."

The cooperative has also helped Marta feel a new sense of dignity. She has become an exemplary farmer, and was elected as a representative of the National Women's Council, in charge of social affairs at the sector level. Her husband, a teacher,

respects her and now supports her in attending meetings, whereas he had previously discouraged this due to cultural norms.

Venanci Nyarahabiyambere has also expressed a life-changing experience through the Jyamumbere cooperative. Through training and access to capital to finance agricultural inputs, she has significantly increased her food production. Along with the knowledge of nutrition and improved feeding gained from an exchange visit, she has seen the impact of improved nourishment in her family. She is now able to pay school fees for her children, and purchases a variety of food to diversify her family's diet. "Since we formed the cooperative, I no longer feel alone," she says. The group of women cheered and smiled as she shared that her family is now having breakfast, a rare luxury in the area.