

Rwanda Smallholder Fish Farmers Gain Skills to Improve Their Business Performance

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THE PARTNERSHIP

Rwanda Animal Resources Improvement Cooperative (RARICO) is one of CASA Rwanda's agri-SME partners in the aquaculture value chain. It is a cooperative of 90 young members with various educational backgrounds such as animal sciences, veterinary medicine, aquaculture/aquatic resources management and related fields, who have put together the knowledge they have gained from as far afield as Israel. Founded under the guidance and mentoring of the Rwanda Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, and the Rwanda Agriculture Board, RARICO has worked with fish farmers since 2021 to disseminate fish farming skills and knowledge to rural farmers and to transfer technologies through the provision of well-skilled technicians.

Funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Swisscontact has been implementing the CASA Programme in Rwanda since 2022 to support agri-SMEs and smallholder farmer cooperatives to access affordable and relevant business development services as well as fair markets and affordable, nutritionally-improved feeds. The technical assistance provided to RARICO includes capacity building to develop fiduciary management tools, and mapping and needs assessment of agri-SMEs and smallholder cooperatives. This story recounts farmers', trainers' and partners' experiences and perspectives of a ten-day training of trainers (ToT) in Effective Governance and Leadership, Internal Control and Auditing, Business Planning, and Access to Finance. It was delivered by the Rwanda Institute of Cooperatives, Entrepreneurship and Microfinance (RICEM) with support from CASA Rwanda.

AT THE TRAINING

Among the members of COPIGAMU, a cooperative of fish farmers attending an open-air training session near their fishponds in Gatsibo District, there was an active farmer named Emmanuel Baziruguye. He sat himself strategically in front of the trainer, aquaculture technician Reverien Tuyizere, because he was interested in the topic, wanted to make sure he captured everything, and asked as many questions as he could to understand how he could better assist his partners to improve the management of their cooperative. Reverien Tuyizere, a member of RARICO, was one of ten trainers for the members of 32 fish farming cooperatives. He shared that he was impressed with the importance given to this training by the COPIGAMU members in Gatsibo, the district he was covering while his other colleagues were providing the same training in other parts of the country. "The farmers paid a lot of attention, and every member wanted to understand well, especially the roles and responsibilities of each person. I am glad we are training everyone in the cooperative and not only their leaders", Mr Tuyizere said.



Reverien Tuyizere, a RARICO aquaculture technician and trainer, responding to Emmanuel Baziruguye's questions, after a session on Effective Governance and Leadership for members of COPIGAMU, a fish farmer cooperative in Gatsibo District

"Gaining skills on governance and leadership, and especially cooperative laws, we are confident that there will be accountability and transparency and that we will be able to manage our business in a professional manner," said Emmanuel Baziruguye after the training session. He added that a good structure – with every member understanding their roles and responsibilities – will help COPIGAMU to improve the management of the cooperative and to keep growing. "We are now well skilled, and we are all at the same level of understanding regarding the mission, structure and membership responsibilities as per the cooperative law guidance. We are happy that all members of our cooperative benefited from

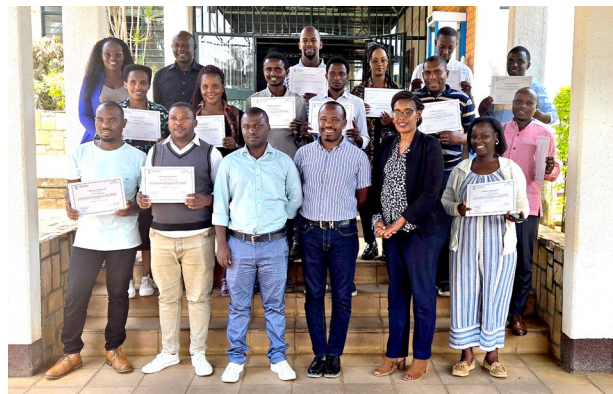


Emmanuel Baziruguye sharing his determination to keep growing the fish farming business

the same training. This will help us to avoid any conflicts or mismanagement of the business in the future,” added Mr Baziruguye, whose cooperative is in Gahanga Village, Gatsibo District, in Rwanda’s Eastern Province. He shared that he is keen on the fish farming business because it helps him to take care of his family, including paying school fees for his five children, and getting medical insurance and small loans. “We know the health and nutrition benefits of eating fish, which is why we will also always make sure every member is given some fish for their families,” he concluded.

ABOUT THE TRAINER

Reverien Tuyizere, the aquaculture expert who successfully completed the training for the fish farmer cooperatives in Gatsibo District, was identified as the team leader at the beginning of the ToT and was also nominated by RARICO leadership as training coordinator for the 14 districts in which this activity was being implemented. Expressing



The ToTs alongside CASA and RICEM representatives after receiving their certificates

his sentiments to the RARICO leaders, he said, “I am grateful for the trust of RARICO management because this helped me to put more energy into what I do, and I was really proud to contribute to the fish farming industry that is quickly growing in my lovely country.”

Mr Tuyizere, who is now a RICEM-certified trainer after the ToT conducted as part of the CASA activities, graduated in 2016 from the University of Rwanda’s Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Department of Wildlife and Aquatic Resources Management. He also studied Biomedical Laboratory Sciences in Kibogora and his experience includes working both in a fish farming cooperative and as a trainer, researching and providing technical support in aquaculture. He has a dream of becoming among the best researchers in aquaculture. “I am married, and we have one beautiful child. The knowledge I gained with support from CASA will not only help me to train fish farmers under RARICO, but with this certificate, I can also do consultancies with other institutions to get more money and continue to take care of my family more comfortably,” he added.



Mr Tuyizere, as the team leader, giving his speech at the closing of the ToT session

PARTNERS' PERSPECTIVES

After completing the first module of the training in all 14 districts – during which they trained 1,005 fish farmers through their respective cooperatives – Ruterana Prosper, the CEO of RARICO, said he is happy with the performance of the trainers: “I am proud of the RARICO trainers because during my visits in the field, I realized how much they are providing quality training. When exchanging with farmers, they said they can’t wait to start putting into practice what they have learnt so that they manage their cooperatives in a professional manner and make sure everything is in line with Rwanda’s cooperative laws. I am so thankful to Swisscontact and CASA for providing this training to the RARICO team members, because after this, we will no longer outsource trainers and this will help us to achieve our main objectives which include providing valuable training, technical assistance and product marketing support that the fish farmer cooperatives will accept to pay for,” added Mr Prosper.



A RARICO aquaculture technician providing on the job training to a fish farmer in Ngoma District

At the closing ceremony of the training of trainers, Kagabo Nkubito, CASA Rwanda Country Intervention Manager, emphasized that the knowledge gained by the RARICO aquaculture technicians is an important added value. “With the capacity you already have to support farmers in fish production, you are now able to transfer investment readiness support to secure commercial investment to grow fish production. We expect that you will help them have the knowledge on cooperative management and the importance of having business plans that can allow them to be trusted when they request loans and, most importantly, to know where they have come from and where they want to be in the future,” Mr Nkubito concluded.



RARICO members gathering for an on-site briefing session

