Supporting market-oriented farming, improving farmers’ incomes and welfare

By THOMAS KAGERA

Agriculture is current the second largest contributor to the Rwandan economy with share of 33% and growth of 5.8 % over last several years. The strategic plan for agriculture transformation PSTA is aiming to transform agriculture sector from subsistence to market oriented agriculture. To reach this goal, basic production infrastructure, professional farmer’s organization, value chain approach, markets and strong institutions need to be in place. In the last 10 years, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has been trying to well align its support and development agenda to all of above government main challenges and one of its interventions is the Smallholder Market Oriented Agriculture Project (SMAP).

About SMAP Project

Before SMAP, a pilot project was implemented from 2010 to 2013 in Bugesera and Ngoma districts to build capacities of farmers in rice growing and horticulture practices. A total of 12,441 farmers benefited from improved techniques for rice and horticulture farming. The project was successful in increasing rice yields up to more than 7MT/ha and doubling income of horticulture farmers.

Owing to the successful implementation, JICA was requested by the Government of Rwanda to upscale the project in four provinces. SMAP has therefore been implemented from 2014 to wind up in 2019.

Rulindo District farmers’ cooperative experience

Between the serrated verdant hills of Muku and Bushoki in Mukoto Cell of Bushoki sector, Rulindo district, just in close proximity with the district headquarters, lays a 10 hectare well equipped farm. The farm is 10 hectare well kept farm of vegetables, planted with crops on soil bands in rows, mulched with dry grass to prevent moisture evaporation and boost soil fertility. Farmers start by collecting market information, plan cultivation accordingly and the project assists them by teaching affordable agriculture practices.

The mayor of Musanze, Jean Claude Musabyimana says that even local leaders have been trained in cooperatives management and horticultural practices so that when the project closes, sustainability will be assured.

SMAP is a project following the Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment Project (SHEP) Approach conducted by JICA under the commitment shown at The 5th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD V) in 2013. It aims at empowering farmers as Mainstream Economic Actors to achieve Inclusive and Resilient Society. The next TICAD debuts next month in Africa. Taking this opportunity, JICA is organizing a workshop in order to share and discuss the progress, achievements as well as challenges of SHEP Approach application in Africa. Representatives from 16 African countries including Rwanda are expected to attend at the workshop. TICAD VI will be held in Nairobi Kenya from 27th to 28th August 2016.

Farmers are very motivated with SMAP training. They say the new techniques are very useful for improving their marketing skills, cultivation techniques hences increasing production and income. Musengimana Valentine, the president of Terimbere Mukoto, says productivity from the cooperative’s farm has increased in more ways than one. “We are using a small piece of land to grow tomatoes, green pepper, eggplants, French beans and cabbages, but the soil- band system has seen quality and quantity of vegetables improving over time. Today, we can harvest a cabbage of 4kg from the half kilo that we could harvest before SMAP support,” she enthuses.

Terimbere Cooperative members’ knowledge does not end with them.

“We share and transfer the acquired knowledge with our neighbors in our respective villages, many of who are yearning to join the cooperative,” says Musengimana adding that at the peak of harvesting time they employ about five casual laborers.

She says green-pepper has an ever ready market. “Buyers from the DRC and other parts of the country are always on the ready. Before harvesting, we contact them on phones to share specific details on quality and quantities we have at hand.”

Local leaders have also worked with JICA in the implementation of SMAP which feeds directly into their contribution towards achieving the ideals of EDPRS II and Vision 2020. The next TICAD debuts next month in Africa. Taking this opportunity, JICA is organizing a workshop in order to share and discuss the progress, achievements as well as challenges of SHEP Approach application in Africa. Representatives from 16 African countries including Rwanda are expected to attend at the workshop. TICAD VI will be held in Nairobi Kenya from 27th to 28th August 2016.