



Rwanda Horticulture Export Standards Initiative

The project aimed to expand Rwanda's export to international and regional markets for fruits, vegetables and flowers. As a result, it is expected to bring greater prosperity to the country's producers, cooperatives, and agribusinesses.

A result story on the project is available [here](#).

STDF/PG/145

Status

Completed

Start Date

01/05/2007

End Date

30/05/2009

Project Value (US\$)

\$642,545

STDF Contribution (US\$)

\$589,845

Beneficiaries

Rwanda

Implementing Entities

Michigan State University (MSU), USA

Partners

Rwanda Bureau of Standards (RBS)
Rwanda Horticulture Development Authority (RHODA)
Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources, Rwanda
World Bank Group

Background

Nearly 90% of the population in Rwanda relies on agriculture as main source of income. Following years of political instability and post-genocide rebuilding, agricultural trade offered potential to generate economic growth and reduce poverty. The government prioritized efforts to expand fruit, vegetable and flower exports to regional and international markets, establishing the Rwanda Horticultural Development Authority (RHODA) to champion the horticulture sector. Producers and traders in the sector were facing many challenges trying to access regional and international markets, while the capacity gaps were concentrated on the understanding and implementation of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements.

The key step to increase horticultural export market access was to establish a sound SPS management system that would ensure plant health management domestically and that, in turn, would build confidence among trading partners that the fruits, vegetables and flowers shipped from Rwanda would be free from pests and diseases, safe for human health and safe for the environment.

Results

Paving the way for a sound plant health system

Prior to the project, Rwanda lacked the institutional and legislative structures needed to comply with international phytosanitary requirements for trade. This hindered public and private sector efforts to develop the horticulture sector and access market opportunities. Through the application of the International Plant Protection Convention's (IPPC) Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) tool, project partners identified priority needs and options to strengthen the country's phytosanitary capacity. The project played a key role in establishing and operationalizing the National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO) and helping Rwanda to become a member of the IPPC. The NPPO was set up to manage and operate a phytosanitary certification system supporting the safe exports of plants and plant products.

A plant protection and agrochemical legislation was drafted and submitted to the parliament for ratification. The law will contribute to the effective control of pests and will allow to set up a sustainable national phytosanitary structure.

Increased SPS awareness and technical skills to adopt good practices

The project raised awareness and increased the knowledge base in the sector. A range of SPS training materials on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), plant health and SPS issues were developed and used in capacity building activities for public and private stakeholders involved in the horticulture sector. Videos on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) were produced and translated into French and Kinyarwanda. Experts from government agencies, the private sector and academia attended training workshops to improve their knowledge and skills on SPS management.

The project also generated a national plant pest list as part of a larger regional pest database. Information on this database was shared with East African countries and beyond to gain momentum across the region, improving the capacity to identify and control pests affecting trade.

SPS action plan for horticulture sector

Through the development of a national SPS strategy and action plan, the project identified, prioritized and facilitated the steps necessary to build an SPS management system to improve Rwanda's compliance with international standards. In this context, activities were carried out to analyse phytosanitary export standards and other market requirements, as well as to identify potential donors to support specific activities in the action plan. These efforts helped to secure additional project resources. The SPS Action Plan remains the foundation for activities undertaken by plant health and horticulture authorities to promote SPS compliance.

Recommendations

Focusing on non-SPS-related challenges to boost exports

While the project succeeded in laying the foundations for an effective SPS management system, this did not automatically translate into increased exports of flowers, fruits and vegetables to international and regional export markets. Capacity to meet SPS requirements, while necessary for market access, may not be sufficient on its own to expand agricultural exports. In the case of Rwanda, global macro-economic trends, including limited access to credit, created other critical challenges for horticulture producers and exporters.

Fostering public-private partnership in the horticultural sector

Stakeholder participation was a major factor contributing to the sustainability of activities carried out under the project. Yet while the project demonstrated a strong public-sector commitment and participation, involving the private sector was proved to be more difficult, mainly due to the absence of capable industry associations and educated private sector stakeholders within Rwanda's subsistence agricultural economy. As a result, the project was less successful than expected in its efforts to develop public-private partnerships within the horticulture sector. This highlights the importance of understanding the situation of the private sector and, where appropriate, taking steps to enhance private sector capacity.

Improving further the project design

Applying a capacity evaluation tool during the project design and formulation phase, rather than as an activity under the project, would have led to greater results. Similarly, project design should actively consider how to manage risks related to staff turn-over (e.g. departure of trained trainers) in order to enhance the impact of training carried out.

Stimulating the legislation approval to control better plant pests and diseases

Expectations to develop and ratify plant health legislation within the scope of a two-year project turned out to be over-ambitious. Where projects include activities to draft or update legislation, it is wise at the outset to identify incentives and mechanisms to advance approval of this legislation, even after the end of the project.

Building upon the project's foundation and following efforts made by other donors and development partners, the new legislation on plant health protection was passed by the parliament in 2016, which includes phytosanitary certification delivery and the inspection by the competent authority.