



Experience Sheet

WORKSHOP

for the SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Establishing Collective Vegetable Gardens: A Strategy to Combat Malnutrition

As part of the RECASE project, Adenya and Duhamic-ADRI support vulnerable farmers who are members of Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), with the aim of strengthening their socio-economic capacities and enabling them to become agents of social change in Rwanda. In addition to the training they receive (on livestock management, agroecology, nutrition, CBO governance, etc.), the project has developed a community solidarity approach built around six components:

- establishing community nurseries,
- setting up collective vegetable gardens,
- creating tontines (community savings groups),
- animal redistribution schemes,
- activities funded through the Participation Fund,
- and joint collective actions.

A process of capitalisation has been carried out across all these initiatives to document the methods developed and the lessons learned, while also highlighting the complementarity between the different components of the project's community solidarity approach.

Overview

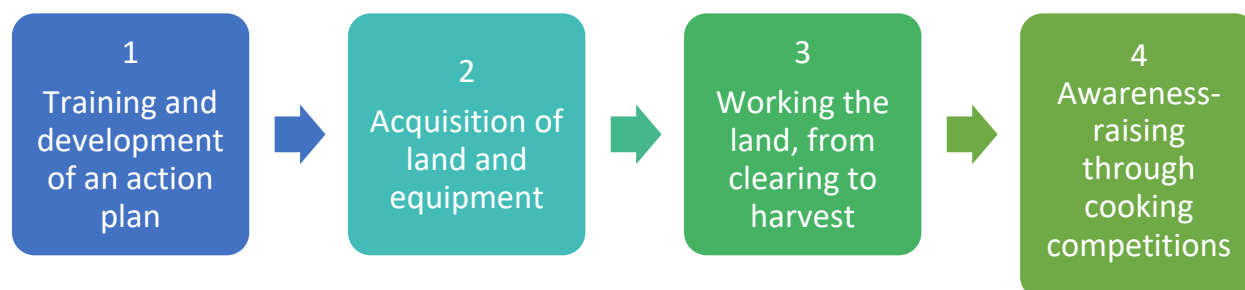
The groups supported by the RECASE project identified malnutrition as a major priority, particularly among the children under five of the farmers involved.

The chosen strategy to address this issue is the promotion of collective vegetable gardens. These enable farmers to grow fruits and vegetables together in order to prepare balanced meals at household level, while also generating some income. The sale of fruits and vegetables at local markets allows farmers to purchase missing food items, meet other needs (such as health care and education), and increase and diversify their vegetable production.



From Establishing Vegetable Gardens to Raising Awareness

This activity was carried out by the RECASE project team, made up of project facilitators and community facilitators who live close to and work directly with the groups they support. This fiche outlines the key stages of the process:



1. Training and Development of an Action Plan

- ❖ Prepare the training site (either in the CBO's collective field or in a member's field)
- ❖ Gather/prepare the materials needed for the training (training module and other tools)
- ❖ Meet with CBO members at the training site and introduce the activity
- ❖ Provide training for CBO members on agroecological and market gardening techniques
- ❖ Develop an action plan for setting up the collective fields (activities, timeline, required materials, responsibilities, and support needed)

2. Acquisition of Land and Equipment

- ❖ Support CBO committee members in negotiating access to land with the authorities
- ❖ Secure land suitable for the activity (close to a water source) from local authorities or other farmers, either free of charge or through rental
- ❖ Acquire essential equipment, provided by the project facilitators supporting the farmers (wheelbarrows, watering cans, hoes, rakes, shovels, etc.)

3. Farmers' Work on the Field: From Clearing to Harvest

- ❖ Prepare the land: clearing, first and second ploughing
- ❖ Obtain inputs (seeds, manure)
- ❖ Sow vegetable crops
- ❖ Water and maintain the plants (weeding and hoeing)
- ❖ Treat plants with natural pesticides to control insects
- ❖ Harvest vegetables and decide how the harvest will be used

4. Awareness-Raising through Cooking Competitions

- ❖ Training CBO committee members on nutrition (as a prerequisite)
- ❖ Cascading this training to other CBO members, led by farmer-facilitators (PaFos) specialised in nutrition and by CBO committee members

- ❖ Supporting CBOs by providing hygiene materials (plates, spoons, cups, cooking pots, jerrycans, mats, etc.)
- ❖ Informing CBO members about the upcoming cooking competition
- ❖ Inviting the surrounding community and other stakeholders (health centres, schools, local authorities, residents) to take part in the event
- ❖ Pooling different types of food within the CBOs and preparing balanced meals for the cooking competition
- ❖ Raising community awareness—including CBO members—on hygiene and balanced meal preparation through Q&A sessions on hygiene, nutrition, and family planning, led by a nutritionist or a health centre staff member
- ❖ Visiting the stands and scoring the CBOs that participated in the cooking competition
- ❖ Awarding prizes to the CBOs and members who excelled in the Q&A sessions

Effects and Impacts: Initiatives Multiplying Within a Dynamic of Social Transformation

The establishment of collective vegetable gardens within the CBOs has led to an increase and diversification of vegetable harvests, thereby meeting the food needs of members. Farmers have strengthened their knowledge of market gardening techniques through training and hands-on practice, while farmers living near the collective gardens have also benefited from this dynamic.

CBO members have actively taken part in community days focused on good nutrition, helping raise awareness among the population about the importance of healthy diets. Thanks to these initiatives, a reduction in cases of malnutrition—particularly among young children—has been observed.

The sale of vegetables from market gardening has enabled CBO members to build up savings, thereby improving their financial security. Moreover, the skills they have developed in vegetable production, along with their awareness-raising activities on nutrition and hygiene, have increased the visibility and recognition of CBOs within their local areas, especially among local authorities.

The actions undertaken by CBOs have inspired other local stakeholders, and more and more associations in the community are now engaging in similar projects around vegetable production—thus multiplying the positive impacts.

Hands-On Training for CBO Members in Building a Collective Vegetable Garden



The capitalisation process highlighted the factors that either facilitated or hindered the establishment of collective vegetable gardens:

Enabling Factors	Limiting Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Training attended by CBO members on market gardening and cooking techniques ✓ The use of manure, made possible by farmers' livestock ✓ The integrity and commitment of the CBO committee members ✓ Project support in equipment and supplies: wheelbarrows, watering cans, hoes, vegetable seeds, seedling bags, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reliance on rented fields, which can be reclaimed at any time ✓ Fluctuations in market prices, which sometimes discourage producers ✓ Challenges in cultivating vegetables on hillsides during the dry season due to lack of water

Complementarity Between Actions Within a CBO

The collective vegetable garden approach encourages savings in the *tontines* set up under the project, thanks to the sale of harvests. This enables CBO farmers to diversify their production. In addition, the RECASE project's livestock redistribution scheme provides farmers with manure, which is essential for market gardening. Anne-Marie, a farmer from the Nyagisozi sector, shares her experience:



I have a small plot in a lowland area. When I used to grow sweet potatoes there, after six months I would harvest a quantity worth around 10,000 Rwandan francs at the market. Now I cultivate vegetables on the same plot. After three months, I harvest produce worth 80,000 francs at the market—without even counting the vegetables consumed at home. I have decided to prioritise vegetable growing because it is more profitable and gives returns in a shorter period of time.

Anne Marie UWIZEYIMANA, Nyagisozi sector

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