

## ***EU-funded kitchen garden programme tackles malnutrition in Rwanda***

***This article is proposed by Amparo Gonzalez Diez, Team leader of Agriculture and Rural Development Section at the EU Delegation to Rwanda***

***Rwanda has grappled with a nationwide malnutrition issue for many years. According to a [Demographic and Health Survey](#) (2019-2020), three in ten children under five in Rwanda are stunted, or too short for their age. Over the centuries, kitchen gardens have been key to the country's food security, so it is no surprise that they played a central role in an initiative implemented by the Rwandan government, with EU support, that aimed to increase household production of fruit and vegetables, and educate young people about healthy and sustainable agricultural practices and nutrition.***

In a bid to tackle food insecurity and malnutrition and to educate poor rural communities on good agricultural practices and dietary diversity, the Rwandan Government launched the Kitchen and School Garden Programme (KSGP). It was part of Rwanda's decentralized agriculture strategy and the National Multi-Sectoral Strategy to Eliminate Malnutrition for the period 2009-2017. The [EU Delegation in Rwanda](#) provided financial support to the KSGP programme.

Through the kitchen garden component of the programme, the Rwandan government targeted increased fruit and vegetable production and consumption at the household level. With school gardening, the objective was both to provide extra food for students and to educate them about best agricultural practices and nutrition. The EU provided support by designing and printing kitchen garden guides for dissemination in schools.



*1 Vegetables growing in a school garden.*



*2 A school lunch composed of rice, beans and cabbage.*

### **Assessment of KSGP impact on nutrition**

- **Positive impact on household nutrition:** kitchen gardening increases the availability and, potentially, the diversity of food, as most of the vegetables produced are consumed within the household instead of being sold. For households growing vegetables, having a kitchen garden contributes to eating vegetables more frequently.
- **Positive impact on children/students:** school meals have improved thanks to the programme, with healthy ingredients from well-maintained school gardens.
- **The benefits of combining the programme with other similar initiatives:** the evaluation also highlighted the benefits of combining the programme with other national initiatives related to nutrition and agriculture such as the [Girinka programme](#), which was set up to reduce child malnutrition and increase the incomes of poor farmers by providing cows to poor households. Other initiatives with which the programme could generate synergies include a programme to distribute bio-fortified crops such as iron-rich beans and vitamin-rich sweet potatoes, and a programme to distribute food to children under two and to pregnant and lactating women.

***“The Government of Rwanda recognises that the problem of malnutrition is not only a health sector problem but a multi-sectorial challenge.” Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC), Rwanda***

## EU support

EU support targeted agricultural decentralisation in general and, in particular, the implementation of the Rwandan Government’s Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture (SPAT II) for the period 2010-2017. Kitchen gardens featured briefly in this plan and the programme was scaled-up in the subsequent SPAT III.



*3 A kitchen garden built with locally available and renewable materials.*

The EU provided additional technical assistance from 2010 onwards and this largely focused on national policy and strategic aspects related to food security and nutrition, in addition to more specific technical issues such as growth monitoring and producing a manual for setting up model school gardens. The EU's budget support was complemented by funding from the World Bank and the UK.

***“The kitchen garden activity is a key element when dealing with social benefits like better health, improved nutrition, employment, food security within the household, and community social life.” Amparo Gonzalez Diez, Team leader of Agriculture and Rural Development***

The KSGP evaluation, which was conducted in May 2018, identified a number of **lessons learnt**, including:

- **Technical assistance:** Technical assistance should be intensified with regards to the environmental sustainability package and should cover water and fertility management methods;
- **Learning techniques:** An investigation should be carried out into adjusting and extending the school gardens' technical manual to households. A training package going beyond the kitchen garden should also be developed to address other issues such as fertility and water management, erosion control, pest and disease management, seed production and conservation, and product storage and processing;
- **Stakeholders' coordination:** To ensure maximum impact on reducing malnutrition in Rwanda and to improve support to future kitchen garden initiatives, coordination and synergies should be enhanced with all stakeholders supporting similar interventions (UNICEF, FAO, WFP, USAID, EU);
- **Additional support:** further support should be provided for self-production of food, in addition to better hygiene and access to safe drinking water;
- **Inclusiveness:** More field visits should be conducted, to maintain direct contact with the villagers' reality and the challenges and achievements of the programme, and to ensure that no section of the community is marginalised during implementation;
- **Systemic approach:** a food system approach should be envisaged that looks at national food security and household food security together to fight malnutrition;
- **Gender:** To bring about changes in the household, nutrition education should be equally accessible to both men and women;
- **Education:** The survey revealed that many households do not see any link between increased vegetable consumption and improved family health, indicating the importance of increased nutritional education. The link between nutrition education, agriculture education and meal design in the school canteen should also be strengthened;
- **Community ownership:** Household and community ownership is crucial to the programme's success; therefore, an inclusive approach involving consultation with all stakeholders would be preferable to a top-down approach when it comes to selecting the best garden models and crops. The assessment highlighted that long-term sustainability of the kitchen gardens depends on the perception of households and the extent to which the kitchen garden meets their needs.