

CRS F2F Rwanda

Support for mushroom production helps a rural community in Rwanda

PROJECT LOCATION	Rwanda
TIMEFRAME	2019-2023
COUNTRY PROJECT	Horticulture
HOST	ABISHYZEHAMWE-TABA

PROGRAM STATISTICS

417

Number of assignments conducted

23,838

Number of people directly trained

191

Number of hosts supported

Abishyizehamwe-Huye is a community of 302 people, most of whom are elderly and survivors of the 1994 genocide or retired soldiers and community members who lived in and around Taba village before the genocide. This village sits within the Mukura sector of Huye district in southern Rwanda. It is a small settlement located 10 kilometers from Huye City. Most of Toba's inhabitants work in agriculture to support themselves. The village has access to electricity, water for irrigation, and an early childhood education center to improve children's nutrition, which also serves as a multipurpose hall where residents can meet.

As a relocated community, however, Taba's inhabitants face a variety of challenges, including poverty, a lack of adequate housing, malnutrition, high drop-out rates from schools, early pregnancies, poor access to schools, and high unemployment among youth. The government has provided some financial and psychosocial support to the community. Together with local organization, Unity Club, the government built three hostels that each house up to 20 local families and supported elderly genocide survivors with health care services.

This support has been well-received by residents of Taba, however, they are reluctant to rely on handouts and government services indefinitely. Recently, they gathered to discuss how to lift themselves out of poverty. One suggestion that resonated within the community was cultivating mushrooms. Seeing mushroom production as a means to make money and to address some of their nutritional challenges, the community decided this was a path worth exploring.

Community members began by converting the land in front of the hostels into a small-scale mushroom farm. They launched their new endeavor with great enthusiasm, but soon realized they had a great deal to learn. "We had the idea of producing mushrooms and some of us started to grow them by ourselves, but we had no idea about best practices for production, or where we could sell our mushrooms," said community member, Desire Kalisa.



Mushrooms are planted and grown in 10 long production beds inside the mushroom shelter. *Photo by Musafiri Ndatsikira/CRS*

After witnessing the residents' evident need, and at the request of the Ministry of Agriculture, the CRS country program in Rwanda provided financial support to the Abishyizehamwe-Huye community to build mushroom shelters in November 2020. Once the shelters were operational, Farmer-to-Farmer provided technical assistance on mushroom value chain development and good agricultural practices. Leonidas Mushimiyimana, a local volunteer, partnered with U.S. volunteer Khalid Hameed to deliver training on spawn preparation and storage, mushroom processing, disease and pest prevention, and post-harvest practices. Leonidas also introduced the community to several nutritious mushroom-based recipes.



Mushroom shelter. Photo by Musafiri Ndatsikira/CRS

Following the training, Leonidas, himself a mushroom entrepreneur, began purchasing the community's mushrooms and linking the community to other potential buyers. To date, his company, DEYI Ltd., has purchased 1,098 kilograms of mushrooms for a total value of \$1,900. Looking ahead, Taba's mushroom farmers will create a legal structure that will allow the farmers and DEYI Ltd. to formalize their purchasing terms and enter into a long-term purchasing contract. The farmers are on the right path and, once they have a formal structure, they will be able to tap into other potential markets.

In the meantime, in addition to selling to DEYI Ltd., the community has started selling their produce at the Huye City market, supplying around 20 kilos of mushrooms per week and earning a modest income of \$32. The community's aim is to make mushroom production and sales a dependable source of income. As Leonidas explained, "During the training, participants expressed their desire to increase mushroom production to the point where it became a source of income that would cover most of their basic needs. They

have no land for farming other crops and currently they still depend on the government and aid from other sources, but they are confident that one day they will become the first established mushroom producers in the region, able to make a living out of it."

Expressing her gratitude to F2F, Odette Mukakibibi, one of Taba's burgeoning mushroom farmers, told CRS that, "Our community members did not know anything about mushroom production, but today, most of us have the skills we need. We also have a market to sell to and a means to earn an income, plus we know how to cook meals using mushroom recipes to feed our families. We are grateful to F2F for its support."



F2F local volunteer Leonidas Mushimiyimana trains member of Abishyizehamwe staff on mushroom cultivation in Huye. Photo by Musafiri Ndatsikira/CRS