

Social and Behaviour Change Communication for Nutrition (SBCC-N) Project

Rwanda



Community Impact Bulletin | Issue 1
Driving livelihood transformations in refugee and host communities

About the project

The World Food Programme (WFP) in Rwanda entered into partnership with Plan International Rwanda to implement a ‘Nutrition Education and Counselling Programme’ in refugee camps hosting Congolese refugees in Rwanda, starting in December 2014. Since 1st January 2020, the programme was renamed ‘Social and Behaviour Change Communication for Nutrition (SBCC/N)’ to emphasise the importance of changing maternal, infant, and young child feeding and hygiene behaviours. It was also extended to the host communities (17 villages) adjacent to five refugee camps, namely Mugombwa, Kigeme, Kiziba, Nyabiheke, and Mahama.

Project’s main objective:

- Improve the nutritional status of women, adolescent boys and girls, and refugee children under 5 in the five selected refugee camps and five hosting districts in Rwanda.

Project’s specific objectives:

- Improve Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition (MIYCN) knowledge and practices in refugee camps and host communities.
- Increase equitable access to and control of nutritious and diversified food, enough to maintain a healthy life in refugee camps and host communities.

Project’s reach:

A total of 104,840 participants

52,023 direct participants



2,128
Breastfeeding mothers



82
Nutrition animators



73
Teen mothers



1,806
Pregnant mothers



178
Camp leaders and religious leaders



96
Government local leaders



280
Families with malnourished children



25,196
Women in reproductive age



68
Community health workers



3,643
Male partners of pregnant & lactating mothers



18,473
Adolescents

52,817 indirect participants



19,616
Children under 5 and the rest of the communities



33,201
Community members

Project's achievements | 2023 – 2025

Mushroom growing

- Mushroom facilities (fruiting and incubation houses) extended across refugee camps.
- 6 associations with 72 members (31 males and 51 females) empowered with mushroom growing skills produced 3,350 Kgs of mushrooms.



Vegetable nurseries and kitchen gardens

- 8 nurseries constructed in refugee camps and host communities
- 557 new kitchen gardens created and 8,370 existing kitchen gardens maintained for 10,917 households from refugee camps
- 439 new kitchen gardens created, and 3,044 existing kitchen gardens maintained for 3,994 households from host communities



Livestock

- 238 goats distributed to 170 vulnerable families and 68 community health workers from the host communities
- 234 domestic animals (117 rabbits and 117 pigs) provided to 5 livestock associations with 37 members (18 males and 19 females)
- The fish farming initiative introduced in Mahama refugee camp benefits 23 members (19 males and 4 females) and involves four floating cages stocked with 12,000 fingerlings.



VSLAs (Village Savings and Loans Associations) in refugee camps

- 80 VSLAs, comprising 2,302 members (502 males and 1,888 females), are currently operational. These groups have collectively saved 39,773,400 RWF and established a social fund of 1,002,700 Rwf.



Agriculture activities in refugee camps

- 23 agricultural associations, involving 265 members (101 males and 162 females), supported to grow a variety of crops. To date, the maize harvest has exceeded 40 tons.
- Radical terraces created across 4.5 hectares and a new maize drying shelter constructed at Kiziba Refugee Camp.
- Smart, climate-resilient greenhouse farming introduced at Mahama Refugee Camp, engaging 21 members (11 males and 10 females). To date, its members are cultivating yellow peppers in the greenhouse.



Project's stories of change

- Gaudance: Growing mushrooms as a thriving business
- Kitchen gardens: A home-grown solution for healthy meals in refugee families
- School club tackles malnutrition across refugee communities
- Community cooking demonstrations address malnutrition in refugee and host communities
- Refugee youth thrive through rabbit rearing
- Venant's fresh start through pig farming
- Savings groups empower women to launch local businesses
- Olive secures her livelihood through maize farming
- How radical terraces and maize drying shelters are transforming food security
- Burundian refugees build livelihoods through fisheries
- Pioneering climate-resilient farming innovation in a refugee camp



Gaudance: Growing mushrooms as a thriving business

Gaudance, a 25-year-old Congolese refugee who has lived in Rwanda for over 10 years, has transformed her life through mushroom farming. Initially, she knew nothing about the importance of mushrooms, taking them for granted - how to grow them, prepare them for nutritious meals, or even their potential as a business opportunity.

"Through my mushroom-growing cooperative, I have come to understand the true value of mushrooms. Not only do they provide nutritious meals to combat malnutrition in our families, but they have also created a life-changing business, something my colleagues and I have come to appreciate."

Gaudance, 25

It has been a year since Gaudance joined this cooperative, which now has 41 members. Every week, they harvest 20 kilos of mushrooms, selling each kilo for Rwf 2,000 to both refugee and host communities.

The cooperative, established under the Social and Behaviour Change Communication for Nutrition programme, owns a space with 2,000 mushroom-growing tubes. To further strengthen their financial stability, the cooperative's savings group has saved Rwf 1,200,000 from their mushroom business.



Gaudance is proud to have gained expertise in mushroom farming

"Mushroom farming has empowered me financially. For instance, I can take out a small loan to support my family during tough times. I also feel confident about starting my own small business, knowing I can access a loan from my cooperative's savings group if needed."

Gaudance, 25



Plan International supports young people with guidance for sustainable livelihoods.



Kitchen gardens: A home-grown solution for healthy meals for refugee families

Nzamukosha, 30, and Adrienne, 52, are refugee mothers who have transformed their homes by establishing kitchen gardens. Previously, financial hardships made it difficult for them to access fresh vegetables, as they had to rely on markets for their supply.

Now, both mothers share how having kitchen gardens has significantly improved their families' well-being.

“We used to struggle to afford enough vegetables for our daily meals. Now, with the kitchen gardens at homes, we have fresh produce at no cost. The little money we save goes toward other essentials for our families.”

Nzamukosha, 30



Nzamukosha no longer needs to buy vegetables as her kitchen garden sustains her.



Adrienne established a kitchen garden at home, ensuring a steady supply of vegetables.

“Parents have learnt and understood how vital vegetables are, especially for health. Kitchen gardens have reinforced the importance of nutritious meals not just for our children but for ourselves, particularly breast-feeding mothers.”

Adrienne, 52

Both women are among the many project participants who have been trained in creating kitchen gardens and understanding their role in promoting healthier families.



School club tackles malnutrition across refugee communities

In a secondary school with 2100 students near a refugee camp in Rwanda, 17-year-old Alice leads a 30-member nutrition club dedicated to combating malnutrition in both the refugee camp and the hosting communities. Meeting weekly on Wednesdays from 3:00pm to 5:00pm, the club conducts field visits to families, providing kitchen gardens' creation training, and educating on the significance of balanced diets.

Operational for one and a half years, through its initiatives both inside and outside the refugee camps, the club has contributed to the creation of 91 kitchen gardens and the cultivation of 400 mushroom tubes, resulting in a harvest of 140 kilograms, utilised for school feeding programmes.

“Our club’s primary goal is to act as role models for others by tackling malnutrition through impactful campaigns and practical training sessions.”

Alice, 16



Alice is dedicated to combating malnutrition at school and in her community.

“One of the primary concerns that our club actively tackles is child stunting, specifically targeting young children at their nursery level within the school.”

Fred, 17



Fred tending the kitchen garden his club built for a family in need.

Thanks to this school nutrition club’s impactful initiatives, a notable transformation is today evident with some citizens witnessing a shift in nutrition mindsets. Aimerance, a 32-year-old refugee mother, credits nutrition sessions for the positive change in her family’s life.



Parents, especially young mothers, have been trained to prepare nutritious meals using fresh vegetables.

“Today, we know how to prepare balanced diets, protecting our children against stunting, using vegetables and fruits, especially for pregnant and lactating women.”



Aimerance, 32



The school nutrition club empowers the community with knowledge about healthy eating.



Community cooking demonstrations address malnutrition in refugee and host communities

Through community cooking demonstrations, 17-year-old Alice is making a significant impact across refugee and host communities by equipping parents with the vital skills needed to prepare balanced diets to combat malnutrition and stunting.

At 10:00a.m., the aroma of vegetables, peeled irish potatoes, pounded coconuts, dried fishes, tomatoes, carrots, beet roots, yellow bananas and eggs fill the air, signalling the preparation of a nutritious meal for vulnerable families, particularly children.

The community cooking demonstration was led by 17-year-old Alice, along with her school nutrition club members, community health workers, nutrition mentors and parents.

With the support of nutrition mentors, Alice has received nutrition coaching to hone her skills as a future nutrition champion.

“

“I am one of the young people trained to prepare balanced diets to combat stunting. We carry out this activity within families, both inside and outside the refugee camps. My colleagues and I train both breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding mothers on how to prepare balanced diets, aiming to build families and communities free from stunting.”

Alice, 17

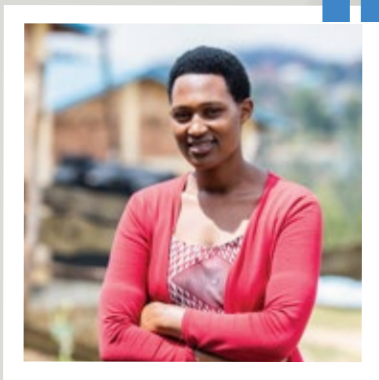


Alice trains her community members in preparing nutritious meals.



Mothers on their transformations through nutrition knowledge

Solange, a 27-year-old refugee mother of 3, spoke about the positive changes she has experienced in preparing balanced meals for her family. Before participating in the cooking demonstration in her refugee community, she had little awareness of the importance of a balanced diet.



“I never used to care much about what my family was eating. To me, food was just food, and that was it. I was one of the parents who didn’t know how to prepare balanced diets, but I have learnt how to do it now. Today, there we have no more stunting. By spreading knowledge on how to cook balanced meals, we can significantly improve the understanding of many parents who have a poor grasp of what it truly means for their children’s future.”

-Solange, 27

Solange is one of the parents whose mindset has shifted. She now values a balanced diet.

Marie, a 35-year-old health worker and nutrition mentor, reiterated the importance of consistent nutrition education.

Consistent nutrition education is crucial for society to ensure that parents help their children eat nutritious foods, starting from the early stages of development.”

Marie, 35,



Marie works closely with families, equipping them with the skills to combat malnutrition.

Held once every 3 months, the community cooking demonstration primarily aims to continually empower community members, especially young mothers, with the skills needed to foster healthy communities.

Refugee youth thrive through rabbit rearing

Diane, 23, and Augustin, 20, stand as inspiring examples within their refugee community, showcasing the transformative power of rabbit rearing. Through this modest yet impactful practice, they have found a way to support themselves and their families, proving how a small initiative can bring about profound change.

Diane, a young mother of one, has been engaged in rabbit farming for two years. Initially, she saw rabbit rearing as a simple task but soon realised its potential to significantly improve her challenging life as a refugee.

“I started with just two rabbits, and now I have 28. Rabbit rearing has become vital for my family, especially for my child and me. When we need meat for a nutritious meal, we don’t have to go to the market, we simply take one from our own hatch. When I face financial challenges, I don’t have to turn to risky alternatives. Instead, I can sell one of my rabbits for Rwf 4,000, which helps me make ends meet.”

Diane, 23



Rabbit farming has helped Diane achieve financial independence.

Augustin, who currently owns 16 rabbits, praises the rabbit rearing initiative for its transformative impact on refugee families. He explains that rabbit rearing has empowered him, easing the burden on his parents, who struggle to provide for his seven siblings.



Thanks to rabbit farming, Augustin no longer depends on his family for basic necessities.

“Rearing rabbits has been a game-changer for me, enabling me to stand on my own. I no longer depend on my parents for basic needs like clothes, shoes, and more. Moreover, I have been able to support my siblings and take pressure off my parents.”

Augustin, 20

Diane and Augustin are part of a rabbit-rearing cooperative comprising 12 members, 5 males and 7 females, who collectively manage 40 rabbit cages.



Venant's fresh start through pig farming

With rising demand and increasing market value, pig farming is empowering refugees in Rwanda, offering them renewed hope for the future. It is emerging as a vital lifeline. Venant, a 36-year-old refugee from Burundi, is one of many whose life has been transformed by this initiative.

Venant's journey began with a single pig. Now, just nine months later, he owns 7. His cooperative, comprising 16 members, collectively manages 47 pigs.

“In the short time I’ve been involved in it, I’ve come to see pig farming as a way to build a better life for my family. I no longer worry as much about financial struggles, as it provides a steady income. Now, I’m planning to start selling my pigs and exploring other income-generating opportunities.”

Venant, 36



Venant stands proudly in front of his pigsty.

For Venant, pig farming represents a fresh start and a promising pathway to financial independence, enabling refugees to overcome adversity and rebuild their lives with dignity and resilience.



Savings groups empower women to launch local businesses

Solange, 32, and Chantal, 49, are both members of the savings group, within a refugee camp, which they witness to strengthen financial empowerment for its participants, especially offering small loans to create their own small businesses.

For Solange, the club facilitated a loan of Rwf 60,000, enabling her to launch a vegetable business in the local market of the camp's host community. From her vegetable business, she is able to consistently save for her household. Her savings totals Rwf 7,500 per month.

"Today, my primary focus is saving for my child's future education. I sell tomatoes, cabbages, onions, and other vegetables, which have empowered me to enhance my family's well-being, and all I wanted was the ability to sustain my livelihood."

Solange, 32



Solange started a vegetable business with a small loan from her savings group.

Chantal, a 49-year-old mother, also benefited from the savings club, receiving a small loan which she used to purchase a small plot of land and establish her own shop. Her shop sells essential items, including salt, fruits, soap, sanitary pads, and other everyday necessities, enabling her to contribute Rwf 5,000 weekly to the savings club and support her husband financially to care for their six children.



Chantal used a small loan from her savings group to set up a shop at home.

"I initially started by renting a space for my business, but eventually, through a small loan of Rwf 100,000, which I managed to expand and be successful to buy my own property, the achievement that has sharpened my better sense for a brighter future."

Chantal, 49

Both Solange and Chantal's Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) has been operating for three years, and has 38 members, including 25 females and 13 males.



Olive secures her livelihood through maize farming

A bountiful maize harvest and the promise of food security initially brought Olive, 31, a sense of stability for herself and her two children. Through her cooperative, she learnt that modern agricultural practices can bring about transformative change.

“When I joined the maize farming cooperative, I received 100 kilograms of maize as food assistance from the harvest. I also collaborated with my colleagues to prepare our produce for the market. This initiative has been crucial in helping us navigate challenging times, helping us with both food security and a source of income.”

Olive, 31



Olive is delighted with the maize harvest her cooperative has achieved.

Currently, Olive’s cooperative has stored a one-tonne maize harvest in a secure shelter. Beyond farming, the cooperative is equipping its members with financial literacy and savings strategies through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs).

The cooperative is part of a larger initiative comprising three maize farming cooperatives with 35 members, including 13 males and 22 females. To support their empowerment, Plan International Rwanda and the World Food Programme (WFP) Rwanda have leased three farms covering 3.5 hectares. Members receive high-quality seedlings, pesticides, and training in agricultural best practices and financial management.



How radical terraces and maize drying shelters are transforming food security

At just 23 years old, Nirere never imagined that the dry, sloping mountains surrounding her refugee camp could be transformed into fertile farmland. Yet, thanks to the introduction of radical terraces, she and her community have turned once-barren terrain into a thriving agricultural space.



Nirere and her cooperative are celebrating a bountiful maize harvest.



"When we first started, we never believed these terraces could produce such a high yield. But during our first harvest season, we were amazed by the abundance of maize we grew. Our harvest will help us in many ways, particularly by enabling us to become more self-reliant and less dependent on refugee aid."

Nirere, 23

To ensure proper cultivation, Nirere and her 150- member cooperative received fertilisers, manure, and pesticides to produce a healthy harvest. For the storage and preservation of their crops, they were provided with a new maize drying shelter, which can store up to 20 tonnes.

"My cooperative members and I require further training in productive agricultural practices and terrace management to ensure long-term sustainability."

Nirere, 23



Radical terraces have been constructed on the arid mountain within the refugee camp.

This initiative, implemented under the Social and Behaviour Change Communication for Nutrition (SBCC-N) project, has created 4.5 hectares of radical terraces in the camp. These efforts have not only improved agricultural productivity but also provided employment opportunities for the community.



Burundian refugees build livelihoods through fisheries

For Beatrice, a 37-year-old refugee from Burundi, fishing was once an afterthought. Now, after nearly nine years in Rwanda, she sees it as a lifeline for herself and her five children, thanks to a modern fishery initiative introduced to her community cooperative.



Beatrice believes fish farming will improve her economic situation.



“With the new fish floating cages created for us, we are hopeful that our production will increase. I am pleased to be part of this initiative. It is about empowerment and creating sustainable livelihoods, especially for vulnerable families.”

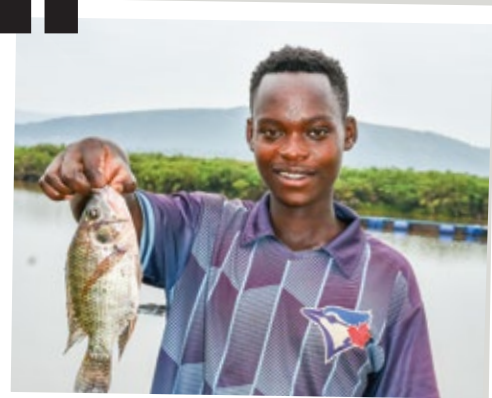
Beatrice, 37

Beatrice runs a small fishing business within both the refugee and host communities. She buys fish at Rwf 2,000 and sells them for Rwf 3,000, earning a modest income to support her family. However, she knows that this is not enough. With the introduction of modern fish farming techniques, she hopes to expand her business and improve her living conditions.

Jean Claude, 22, another Burundian refugee, has spent years fishing along the riverbank to support his five siblings and elderly parents.

“I have relied on traditional fishing to make a living and support my family. It has helped us survive, but the income is limited. Now, learning modern fish farming techniques means we can manage resources better and turn this into a real business.”

Jean Claude, 22



Claude is one of the young people actively involved in the fish farming cooperative.

Beatrice and Jean Claude are part of a newly established fishery cooperative that is bringing hope to their refugee community. The cooperative consists of 23 members, with 19 men and 4 women, who have been equipped with a floating cage containing 12,000 fingerlings. Together, they are working to increase production, not only to feed the camp but also to supply local markets, ensuring a more stable and sustainable source of income.



Pioneering climate-resilient farming innovation in a refugee camp

In a refugee camp in Rwanda, an innovative greenhouse initiative is offering both refugees and host communities a sustainable way to grow food and generate income. The project has yielded its first harvest of fresh yellow peppers, marking a significant step towards climate-resilient farming.

Charlotte, 32, a Congolese refugee, and Jacques, 21, a young participant from the refugee camp's host community, share how it is transforming mindsets and driving an agricultural revolution.



Charlotte is thrilled with the impressive yields from the greenhouse.

“I have discovered that modern farming techniques enable us to maximise small spaces and achieve higher yields. The greenhouse is a foundation for greater opportunities, encouraging us to take ownership, expand the initiative, and increase our income from the harvest.”

Charlotte, 32

Jacques believes the greenhouse presents a viable solution, particularly for young farmers.

“Young people part of this new initiative have acquired new skills that can enable them to develop their home-grown agricultural solutions, especially modern farming techniques using small spaces.”

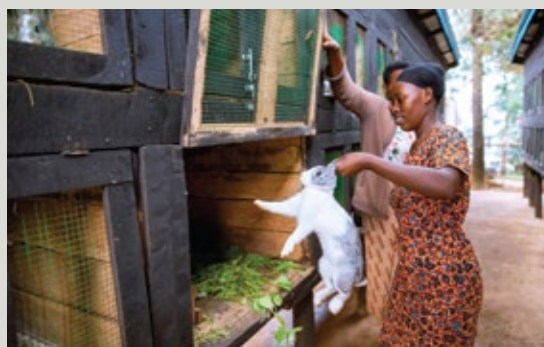
Jacques, 21



Jacques has gained new skills in modern agriculture.

The greenhouse initiative operates as a cooperative, bringing together Burundian and Congolese refugees alongside members of the host community. It started with 21 members, with 11 males and 10 females, demonstrating that with the right knowledge and resources, refugees and host communities can drive sustainable solutions, build resilience, and transform their lives. During its first harvest, the cooperative anticipates producing 700 kilograms of yellow peppers.

Project Pictorial Stories



About Plan International Rwanda

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We believe in the power and potential of every child but know this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

Plan International has been operating in Rwanda since 2007 to change gender and social norms as well as policies that hold children back from reaching their potential.

Working together with children, young people, supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges girls and vulnerable children face. We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood and we enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity.

We are present at national and local levels with a focus on the districts of Bugesera, Gatsibo and Nyaruguru. We also work in 6 refugee camps across the country.

We won't stop until we are all equal.

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