

Leadership training for Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Community Resilience to Climate Change and Peacebuilding –GER-Rwanda 2024

A quiet yet transformative movement is unfolding across the Gasabo, Bugesera, and Ruhango districts in Rwanda. Over 300 individuals, including local leaders, religious figures, women, men, and youth, have united with a shared commitment to restoring and preserving the environment for future generations. Their collective action is driving forest conservation, large-scale tree planting, and ecosystem recovery, ensuring that environmental stewardship becomes a cornerstone of community resilience. In Bugesera District's Gashora Sector, the impact of deforestation and firewood dependency has long posed a serious challenge. Women, in particular, have endured the burden of traveling long distances to collect firewood, often at great personal risk. In response, GER-Rwanda distributed 65 eco-friendly charcoal stoves, offering a life-



changing alternative to traditional cooking methods. This intervention not only reduced reliance on firewood but also improved household efficiency, allowing families to reclaim time for economic and social activities. As men recognized the benefits of these changes, household chores became more equitably shared, reinforcing gender balance in domestic responsibilities. Despite

these advancements, the demand for additional eco-friendly stoves remains high, underscoring the need for upscaling of such initiatives.

Large-Scale Reforestation Efforts

In Gasabo District's Nduba Sector, community members come together during *Umuganda*, Rwanda's traditional communal workday, to plant 50000 trees, a symbolic act of renewal and commitment to reversing deforestation. Similarly, in Ruhango District's Musamo Sector, 50,000 seedlings are being planted in *Urufatiro rw'Ubumwe* (The Foundation for Unity), a forest named by the local community. These efforts go beyond afforestation; they represent a powerful intersection between environmental conservation and social cohesion. Meanwhile, in Bugesera

District, where prolonged dry spells and water scarcity threaten livelihoods, another 50,000 tree seedlings are being cultivated in community nurseries for reforestation.

Cultivating Environmental Awareness and Advocacy

Environmental conservation extends beyond tree planting, it is about fostering a deeper understanding of biodiversity and climate resilience. GER-Rwanda recognizes that meaningful change can only be achieved when communities are educated on the importance of preserving natural ecosystems. To this end, ongoing workshops and advocacy campaigns have been initiated to raise awareness about the role of forests in mitigating climate change, reducing soil erosion, and safeguarding water sources. Schools are integrating environmental education into their curricula, local leaders are engaging in policy discussions, and religious institutions are promoting environmental stewardship as both a moral duty and a survival strategy.

Reviving Indigenous Knowledge and Protecting Biodiversity

A resurgence of indigenous knowledge has further strengthened community ties to the environment. Traditional practices are being revived, helping people rediscover the cultural and ecological significance of native trees. This movement includes efforts to restore extinct tree and bird species, ensuring biodiversity conservation for future generations. GER-Rwanda's work in these areas has been made possible through the generous support of Save the Rainforest-Sweden, whose contributions have enabled local communities to implement ambitious conservation initiatives.

Measuring Impact and Scaling Up Success

On January 23, 2025, GER-Rwanda, in partnership with SAVE THE RAIN FOREST –SWEDEN, ACORD Rwanda, convened a participatory evaluation meeting in Bugesera District to assess the progress of the Feminists for Climate and Environment Alternatives (FACE) project. The meeting brought together community representatives to reflect on achievements, challenges, and the next steps. Innocent Musore, representing GER-Rwanda, expressed gratitude to the project's funding partners and reaffirmed the initiative's core pillars: expanding sustainable income opportunities, promoting inclusive decision-making, increasing climate awareness, and advocating for gender-sensitive environmental policies.

The discussions highlighted transformative success stories. In Juru Sector, a small compost-making group of six members grew to 106 participants, demonstrating the economic benefits of sustainable agricultural practices. One farmer, equipped with knowledge and training, cultivated high-yield tomatoes, generating RWF 2.5 million, enough to pay for school fees and reinvest in her farm. In Mayange Sector, kitchen gardens flourished, ensuring families had access to nutritious food even during droughts. In Gashora Sector, a woman who once struggled to meet basic needs leveraged compost-making to establish a profitable vegetable business, which

enabled her to buy a cow, build a house, and advocate for clean water access, inspiring other women to seek financial independence.

Strengthening Community-Led Conservation Efforts

The introduction of improved cooking stoves significantly reduced household firewood consumption, alleviating financial strain and curbing deforestation. Women reported increased productivity as cooking time decreased, allowing them to participate in income-generating activities. The safer stove design also minimized the risk of household accidents, particularly for children. As a result, gender roles within households evolved, with men actively contributing to domestic responsibilities.

Beyond individual success stories, entire communities began to shift toward sustainability. GER-Rwanda's beneficiaries emerged as vocal advocates for tree planting, biodiversity conservation, and responsible waste management. Stricter regulations on tree-cutting were enacted, reducing deforestation rates. Waste disposal improved through widespread adoption of composting and plastic management initiatives. Empowered women leveraged their leadership roles to successfully advocate for improved water access, prompting new plans to install water infrastructure in underserved communities.

Addressing Challenges and Securing Long-Term Impact

Despite the remarkable achievements, significant challenges persist. Limited awareness of environmental issues continues to hinder widespread adoption of sustainable practices. Access to compost-making materials remains constrained by seasonal fluctuations, and water scarcity poses an ongoing threat to agricultural resilience. Financial constraints further limit the expansion of successful initiatives. To ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts, GER-Rwanda has outlined a clear strategic roadmap: integrating gender and environmental considerations into district-level planning, expanding knowledge-sharing platforms, strengthening partnerships to improve water accessibility, and mobilizing additional funding to scale up initiatives. The vision is clear, a future where conservation, resilience, and prosperity are inextricably linked.

Moving Forward: A Call to Action

As GER-Rwanda continues its mission, the lessons learned and the successes achieved serve as motivation for even greater ambitions. The organization remains steadfast in its commitment to peacebuilding and livelihood enhancement through ecosystem conservation, not only in Rwanda but also in post-conflict regions globally. Though challenges remain, each tree planted, each stove distributed, and each mindset transformed brings us closer to a more sustainable and resilient future. We are committed to support the peacebuilding and improving livelihood through a holistic transformation approach. www.globalr.org