

Ibishyimbo bishingirirwa
bikungahaye ku butare
CAB 2: NYIRAMATA
(mg 94,8 mu kilo)

Ibishyimbo bishingirirwa
bikungahaye ku butare

Agents of change in Africa

Increasing food security in Africa will require far-reaching changes. The African Food Fellowship brings together frontrunners from the African food sector so they can join forces and learn about food systems. ‘The Fellowship is an alliance in which the participants embark together on a journey towards a more sustainable food system.’

TEXT MARIANNE WILSCHUT PHOTO CIAT/GEORGINA SMITH ILLUSTRATIONS WUR/PETRA SIEBELINK

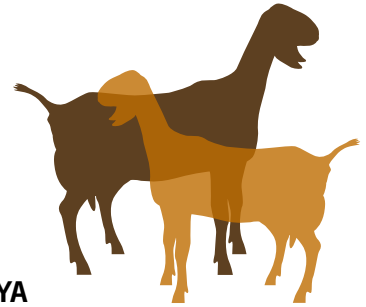
‘Projects that aim to enhance food security in Africa are often focused on technical or process-based solutions,’ says Joost Guijt, director of the African Food Fellowship and knowledge manager at Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation. ‘But who will implement such solutions and rethink what goals they are meant to reach? In order to put these plans into action we need a new generation of leaders in the agri-food sector.’

The African Food Fellowship was set up to bring this new generation together to exchange knowledge, experiences and inspiration about changing food systems. Its 10-month Food Systems Leadership programme brings together Kenyan and Rwandan professionals from many backgrounds such as horticulture, aquaculture and agricultural finance. Guijt: ‘The Fellows come from national and local governments, NGOs, businesses and other community or farmers’ organizations. In seven modules they gain insight into the broad context of

the food sector and learn to identify and analyse barriers to change. They also have to design an action plan based on their own idea for a transformation. They spend an average of four hours a week on studying and online training. There are a few in-person events in between. The Fellows do this alongside their job or voluntary work.’

‘We hope to train leaders in food system change. Angela Odero, one of our Fellows from Kenya, is an ardent campaigner against the sex-for-fish principle.’ The principle is an extreme example of power structures in the food system and is at work at some fish markets in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Women traders at these markets cannot obtain fish to sell without paying a high price: they have to have sex with the fishermen who supply the fish. ‘The Fellowship supports Angela Odero in gaining influence in her battle for equal treatment. With the help of the other aquaculture trainees in the Fellowship, she is working to increase her impact. By connecting professionals in the same sector

and offering them additional knowledge, the African Food Fellowship seeks to enable its Fellows to identify and break these patterns and powers so that the food sector can be more inclusive and sustainable,’ says Guijt. After following the leadership programme, the Fellows continue to collaborate in the Country Food Fellowships – one in Kenya and one in Rwanda. The Country Food Fellowships organize an annual Transform Food Festival, inspiration sessions and other ways of putting the Fellows in the spotlight, so that their work gets the attention it deserves. Guijt: ‘Enhancing each other’s network is very important. The Fellowship is literally an alliance in which the participants undertake a journey together towards a more sustainable food system. We have already seen a number of positive examples of Fellows who started companies or have earned scholarships and prizes – such as Grace Njoroge, who was included in the top 100 women in Fintech by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.’ >



The African Food Fellowship is an initiative of Wageningen University & Research and the consultancy firm Wasafiri, and is supported financially by the IKEA Foundation through University Fund Wageningen.

‘We are trying to find long-term solutions that can improve the food system,’ explains Nico Janssen, the agricultural livelihoods programme manager at the IKEA Foundation. ‘We are convinced that building and strengthening local capacity is key for enhancing a robust and sustainable food system. The Fellows are among the people who will have to implement that change and we are happy to support them.’

The third cohort of 80 Fellows from Kenya and Rwanda will start on the leadership programme in September. Guijt: ‘From the feedback we got from the two first cohorts, we decided to organize more in-person sessions instead of online ones to give participants more opportunities to meet and interact with each other. The programme keeps on developing: we are laying the track while the train is already moving.’

After a successful start, in 2022 the IKEA Foundation decided to extend their support for the initiative for another five years with a contribution of 8.8 million euros. Janssen: ‘Our ambition is, hopefully with help from other financiers, to expand the initiative to other countries across Africa. In the long term the Fellowship has to be able to support itself with tuition fees and contributions from local governments.’ Guijt is positive about that. ‘The Minister of Agriculture in Rwanda herself asked us to implement the programme in Rwanda, an example of government commitment to changing the food system. Hopefully other countries will follow.’ ■

www.africanfoodfellowship.org

SULEIMAN KWEYU, KENYA

‘Small-scale farmers form the backbone of our economy’



‘Just one goat can make a big difference to a disabled farmer in Kenya Kakageme County,’ explains Suleiman Kweyu, the founder of Agro-Kenya, an NGO that trains and supports smallholder farmers with a disability in western Kenya. ‘Goats provide milk and their young can be sold. Compared to cows, goats are easy to manage. They don’t need

much land, they mature fast, they are not very disease-prone and they reproduce fast.’ Agro-Kenya provides the farmers with goats and training on keeping goats. Kweyu: ‘A lot of these farmers lost an arm or a leg while working as contract labourers in the sugar cane factory. These disabled workers are often dependent on their families because there is a social stigma around disability. Farming goats can help them gain financial independence.’

Together with 30 other Kenyans, Kweyu was selected to participate in the African Food Fellowship in 2021. Kweyu: ‘It was a good opportunity to connect with other professionals in the food sector. From another Fellow who works in aquaculture, I learned a lot about fish farming – knowledge which I’ve been able to share with some of the farmers we work with. In return I have been able to share my knowledge, experience and network in relation to the goat project with other Fellows.’

As the son of a smallholder farmer, Kweyu, who has a Master’s degree in Financial Economics, is highly motivated to improve the lives of marginalized farming communities. ‘Approximately 60 per cent of all the food consumed in Kenya is produced by smallholder farmers. They are the backbone of our economy. If you help this group, you can increase food security in Kenya.’ Via LinkedIn and other platforms, Kweyu is still in touch with the other Fellows. ‘Even though we haven’t been able to meet up in person a lot, the connection is still strong. Sharing knowledge is so important.’



VALENTINE UWASE, RWANDA

‘I have learned how to analyse the food system’



Flipper will see the light of day soon. Flipper is not a helpful dolphin, but an app that connects farmers and buyers in Rwanda. ‘The middlemen in the supply chain often make more profit than the farmers,’ says Valentine Uwase, the creator of Flipper. ‘Via this software, buyers will be directly linked to farmers.

Buyers will be able to see how many

potatoes, tomatoes or other crops, farmers have ready for sale. For the farmer, the app makes it easier to negotiate the price directly with the buyer.’

In 2021 Uwase was part of the first group of Rwandan Fellows of the African Food Fellowship. ‘I have benefitted greatly from the input of other Fellows in developing this app,’ she says. Uwase works in Kigali as Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning manager at Land O’Lakes Venture37, an International NGO. ‘We focus on improving the business operations of agricultural cooperatives in Rwanda. We provide training in governance, business development and finance. We also do a lot of research in the cooperative sector and annual performance assessments, which I coordinate. I’m used to doing research, but the Fellowship really taught me how to analyse the food system as a whole, with prognoses and scenarios.

‘An important motivation for me to apply for the programme was that I wanted to contribute to improvements to food production. It can be increased and farmers must learn new techniques to help them farm in a more climate-proof way and make a bigger profit. In my view, more inclusiveness, strong collaboration and more information-sharing are crucial to achieving that. The Fellowship is instrumental because it brings together young professionals from the food sector with different backgrounds so they can learn from each other.’



BRIAN NEZA, RWANDA

‘I am working on a plan for getting more young people involved in agriculture’



Permanent soil cover, minimum tillage, and crop diversification are the key principles of what is known as conservation agriculture, explains Brian Neza. He is project manager of a programme run by the Peace and Development Network in Rwanda, which helps smallholder farms to improve their climate-smart agricultural practices. Neza also works as a trainer in Farmer Field

Schools. ‘In these schools, groups of farmers learn about conservation agriculture, soil fertility, pest control and post-harvest handling and storage. We also address financial literacy with lessons in budgeting, as well as explaining how communal financial initiatives such as village savings and loans associations work.’ For Neza, who is currently working on his dissertation for an MBA, this wasn’t enough. ‘I know how to work with smallholder farms, but I want to take it a step further. That’s why I applied for the Fellowship. I want to know more about a systematic approach to enhancing food security.’

Neza is one of the 31 Rwandan Fellows of the second cohort of the African Food Fellowship which started in November 2022. ‘We need more people in the food system who look at the bigger picture. Who have more insight into how the market works and how farmers can adjust their production accordingly. What I like about the programme is that it brings together people from different countries and walks of life. I wanted to be somewhere where my ideas get challenged and where there’s room for discussion. Apart from addressing complex issues such as how do we bring about a shift in power in the food industry, I also learn how to improve soft skills such as communication. For the Fellowship I’m now working on a plan on how to involve more young people in agriculture. If we want to improve the food system in Rwanda, we must make it more accessible and appealing to young people because they are more accepting of change and technological advancements.’