



Empowering Communities and the Environment: Agricultural and Climate Resilience Initiatives by UEM Member Churches in Rwanda.

As climate change continues to affect rural livelihoods in East Africa, the member churches of the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) in Rwanda have taken decisive and innovative steps to both mitigate its impacts and empower the communities they serve. Through agricultural and environmental projects spearheaded by the Dioceses of the Anglican Church in Rwanda (EAR) and the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda (EPR), significant progress is being made in climate-smart agriculture, sustainable livelihoods, and inclusive community engagement.

Climate Smart Agriculture: A Holistic EAR Response.

The "Climate Smart Agriculture to Mitigate the Impacts of Climate Change and to Increase Farmers' Productivity in Rwanda" project is a flagship initiative of the Rural Development Inter-Diocesan Service (RDIS), which was established by the four EAR dioceses. This multi-faceted program aims to practically encourage people to live the gospel and build resilience among rural farmers by combining sustainable agricultural practices with modern technology and community training.

Funded partly by the UEM, the project focuses on increasing agricultural yields while conserving resources. Implemented in areas such as Kamonyi District (Mbayaya Pilot Farm and Training Center), the initiative features:

- Solar-powered irrigation systems (e.g., a 16-solarpanel water pump providing filtered water to crops)
- Crop rotation and diversification: cucumbers, green and red peppers, tomatoes, beans, cassava
- Integration of livestock to produce organic manure for soil improvement
- A cassava flour mill and plans for an animal feed mixing machine
- Regular training sessions for local farmers selected by church leaders and local authorities

The center harvests up to 330,000 RWF worth of green peppers per cycle, and the introduction of fast-growing cucumber varieties allows for up to three harvests per year. The planned overarching goal is to make the farm self-sustainable and a model for local farmers.

In addition, from a UEM contribution, RDIS has distributed solar home systems and upgraded stoves to rural families. Beneficiaries such as Claudine Nyiranizeyimana report a 50% reduction in firewood costs and improved conditions for children to study at night. These simple but profound changes not only reduce carbon emissions but also raise the standard of living across communities.

EPR's Tree Planting and Elderly Empowerment Project.

In Kigali's Bibungo Parish, the Presbyterian Church in Rwanda (EPR) has launched an inspiring post-COVID initiative to engage elderly people in tree planting activities. The project addresses both environmental restoration and social inclusion by giving elderly participants a renewed sense of purpose.



The group, which meets regularly for prayer, song, and training, includes 8 elderly men and 12 elderly women. They plant trees in pairs—one at home and one on parish grounds—and receive health education and medical check-ups.

Bagirigomwa Leonard, project facilitator, explains: "We didn't want to be separated during COVID, so we decided to stay together and support each other. Now, when we gather, we feel good again, like a family."

Participants express gratitude for the sense of belonging and purpose the project has restored. As one member testified, "When we meet, we feel happy. Without this group, we would just sit at home. Now we have hope and something to care for."

Conclusion: Local Impact, Global Vision, Holistic Mission.

These projects exemplify the transformative power of grassroots initiatives driven by faith-based organizations. By integrating climate resilience, community training, and inclusive social structures, the EAR and EPR are not only responding to ecological challenges but building a hopeful and sustainable future. Through continued partnership and cooperation with the UEM, these efforts represent a replicable model of how churches can serve as engines of both environmental stewardship and social renewal.

**Sarah Nephuth for the UEM Africa Department,
May 30th, 2025, Wuppertal**