

In Rwanda, more than 85 percent of the population's livelihood depends on small-scale agriculture. And the majority of primary school students—roughly 60 percent— will return to rural areas to make their living in ways, instead of going on to secondary or vocational schooling or university.

More than 85 percent of Rwanda's population depends on small-scale agriculture for survival. (Photo: Bernard Pollack)

With that in mind, in 2007, the organization [CARE](#) designed the [Farmers of the Future Initiative \(FOFI\)](#) , a three year project that integrates modern and environmentally sustainable agriculture training into primary school curriculum in Rwanda—making traditional schooling more relevant to the average Rwandan student.

The project started with 27 pilot schools in nine districts: Nyamagabe and Nyaruguru Districts in the Southern Province, Gatsibo and Nyagatare Districts in the Eastern Province, and Karongi, Rutsiro, Rubavu, Nyabihu and Ngororero Districts in the Western Province. Each pilot school received funding from CARE to invest in a school garden or farm. After one year, profits from the garden went back into the school's agriculture program while the other half was used to help another school, called a satellite school, start its own garden. By the end of the project there were 28 satellite schools, each with its own garden started with the help of another school.

While maintaining the school gardens, students experimented and were trained in farming techniques that emphasize the preservation of natural resources as much as they do crop production, such as agroforestry, intercropping, mulching and compost, and non-chemical methods of pest and disease control.

According to Josephine Tuyishimire, a FOFI project coordinator, the school gardens also benefit students' parents and their local community. As parents learn new farming techniques from their children, their neighbors also learned from them. "The population surrounding FOFI schools copied [the farming techniques] and replicated them at home."

One boy, an orphan from Cyanika primary school in Nyamagabe District, who is living on his own, used irrigation and intercropping techniques he learned at school to start his own small garden. With the help of a teacher at the school he gained access to a local market to sell his vegetables and eventually earned enough money to purchase his own land. With the additional security that comes with land ownership, he continues to generate more income by selling his produce.

Helping students to be self-sufficient is especially beneficial for young women who are often kept out of school, but who can be "empowered in this project," said Tuyishimire. "In the future they become self-reliant and less dependent on their male counterparts as breadwinners." And women share their knowledge with their children, "passing these skills to future generations" to create future farmers who are educated in a way that allows them to self-sufficient and well-fed.

To read more about integrating agriculture into primary school education see: [School Feeding Programs Improve Livelihoods, Diets, and Local Economies](#), and [How to Keep Kids Down on the Farm](#).

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