

SUCCESS STORY

Transforming Rwanda's Coffee Sector

National University of Rwanda/Michigan State University/Texas A&M University



Photo by Michigan State University
Rwandans sort coffee beans, an activity from the PEARL partnership.

In Rwanda, some 90 percent of the country's eight million people are engaged in subsistence agriculture. The 1994 genocide decimated Rwanda's economy and took a significant toll on Rwanda's agricultural universities. One crop in particular has aided Rwanda's substantial progress in stabilizing and rehabilitating its economy to pre-1994 levels—the coffee bean.

The Partnership for Enhancing Agriculture in Rwanda through Linkages (PEARL), which emerged to contribute to rebuilding the capacity of agricultural institutions in Rwanda, worked in areas including geranium oil, avocado oil, eucalyptus oil, cassava flour and chili pepper production, but it enjoyed particular success in the coffee sector.

Supported by USAID/Rwanda, HED (then ALO) awarded \$2,900,000 in 2000—increased to \$3,879,183 in 2003—to Michigan State University (MSU), with Texas A&M University (TAMU), for a partnership with the National University of Rwanda to improve teaching, research, and outreach capacity by developing faculty, re-designing the agriculture curriculum, and establishing a community outreach center.

In cooperation with the Maraba Coffee Producer Association, PEARL has sold 18 tons of bourbon coffee beans to Community Coffee of Louisiana and 19 tons to Union Roasters in London at a fair trade price. Since PEARL's inception, the partners constructed 25 new coffee washing stations throughout the Maraba, Karaba, and Gashonga districts. As the Maraba coffee growers received fair trade certification and began to grow shade-grown coffee, their specialty coffee has become a model for the Rwandan coffee industry which has been replicated countrywide with strong support from President Kagame. Its success received extensive media coverage, including The Chicago Tribune, CNN and TIME Magazine.

The fully operational PEARL Outreach Center in Butare serves as a focal point for outreach activities with the surrounding farming communities. Its facilities include an Internet café, documentation center, a meeting pavilion, and demonstration plots. The Center is staffed by 20 people, including a Center director, an administrator three agronomists, a socio-economist, an accountant, an information specialist, and a communication officer.

Results of this partnership:

- 16 Rwandan faculty and researchers from partner institutions received M.S. degree training at MSU and TAMU.
- They have all since completed their degree requirements and returned to Rwanda to resume their positions at their respective institutions.
- The partnership trained over 2,500 Rwandan women and over 3,800 Rwandan men in marketing, financial management, business management, business plan writing, and internet technology.