

Summary

INVESTING IN AGRICULTURE IN BURUNDI

IMPROVING FOOD SECURITY AND CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN FARMERS

Paula San Pedro

Intermón Oxfam

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Burundi has alarming levels of food insecurity for a country dependent on agriculture. The work of women farmers is at the core of agriculture in Burundi, but they have few rights and very limited access to resources. Investment in the primary sector is essential, and in order to contribute to the country's development, agricultural spending must be directed to where it is needed most. The best way to do this is with the full participation of farmers' organizations and civil society. Now that Burundi's government has pledged to increase the agricultural budget, it must not waste this historic moment to achieve significant progress for the country.

Summary

Burundi has all of the factors which make agricultural investment essential. Agriculture is the sector that contributes most to gross domestic product, using 90 per cent of Burundi's labour force and earning 90 per cent of export revenues. Despite the country's dependence on the primary sector, agriculture has not been modernised and continues to rely on mainly subsistence farming, employing unreliable and inefficient technology.

Land is key to the survival of most of Burundi's population, but is increasingly fragmented, highly eroded, scarce and not very fertile. Burundi is the second most densely populated country in Africa. Population growth and long years of conflict have almost completely deforested the country. This already delicate situation could be made worse by the constant flow of returned refugees and the potential movement of displaced people.

These factors explain why Burundi finds itself at the bottom of the list of countries for most development indicators. In 169th place out of 177 countries, according to the Human Development Index, 68 per cent of the population live below the poverty line, and it is the fifth poorest country in the world. These data are repeated in terms of food security: 72 per cent of the population suffer food insecurity, 63 per cent chronic undernourishment and 52 per cent of children under five are chronically malnourished.

Women farmers are especially vulnerable. Despite their burden of agricultural responsibility, they have no rights. According to customary law, they are not allowed to own land or livestock. Without these assets, illiterate and poor, the woman farmer becomes the weakest link in the production chain, with very little chance of her situation changing.

For this reason, investment in agriculture has become crucial for the country. Investment in agriculture could spearhead development and be the driver for growth in other economic sectors. The government has understood this and has made agriculture a priority. There is a commitment to increase spending on agriculture to at least 10 per cent of the national budget, as pledged in Burundi's accession to the 2003 Maputo Declaration. The commitment remains to be turned into reality.

But increasing the agriculture budget is worthless unless it is a high quality investment.

The needs are immense, so prioritising the most vulnerable areas and groups in the sector is all-important. Farmers' organizations and civil society groups are in the best position to identify the main challenges to be addressed. The government needs to open up forums for debate, so that these groups can participate in drafting agricultural and budgetary policy. Unfortunately, until now these processes have been characterised by a lack of transparency as well as being highly centralized and non-participatory.

The research report on which this summary is based examines why it is urgent and essential to invest more and better in agriculture, especially in the fight against food insecurity and to improving the quality of life of woman farmers. It analyses the role of civil society in decision-making processes. The report's conclusions include a series of recommendations for public institutions, donors and civil society.

The government and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock should:

- Raise primary sector spending to at least 10 per cent of the national budget in the short term. It is essential that this increase is both real and of quality. This will only be the case if the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock is able to improve its capacity to absorb the budget. The government needs to comply with donors' conditions: strengthening decentralized public institutions; reducing state bureaucratic obstacles and providing the ministry with adequate means and competent personnel. The quality of the investment will depend on whether policies and funds are deployed to the most vulnerable sectors of the population and the most marginalized geographical areas, and that the concerns of farmers are addressed.

- Ensure that the National Investment Plan for Agriculture is in tune with the needs identified by civil society, where the woman farmer is a key player;
- Effectively and urgently resolve the land problem, especially for women, displaced people and returnees. To this end, a strong regulatory authority is needed, with clear policy and the resources to regulate land ownership;
- Reduce dependence on external donations, although this will not be achieved until the economy grows at a faster and more constant rate;
- Develop a comprehensive response to food insecurity. This should include policies and strategies that tackle the volatility of international food prices; that increase land productivity; that reduce demographic pressures; that offer stable employment; that increase resilience to climate change; that establish mechanisms that mitigate the consequences of natural disasters and that boost other economic sectors. This strategy can only be undertaken with a deployment of resources that fit the needs;
- Decrease the marginalization of women farmers. A strategy should be developed that identifies the most vulnerable groups and geographical areas and tackles their main problems. The strategy's costs should be funded by the ministry's budget. Parliament should finally pass the draft Succession Law that acknowledges women's equal rights to land ownership;
- Put into place the necessary means, both institutional and economic, to ensure transparent and participative development of the policies and the agricultural budget. This would include the participation of farmers' and civil society organizations in negotiations; and
- Allow parliament to assume its responsibility and exercise a controlling and monitoring role over the Executive.

Multilateral agencies and bilateral donors should:

- Support agricultural programmes in Burundi, especially those aimed at increasing land productivity;
- Focus their efforts on addressing food insecurity by backing the government's comprehensive strategy and providing resources;
- Raise the profile of women farmers and press the government to put them at the core of its agricultural policy;
- Seek alternative mechanisms to ensure that non-compliance of donors' conditions imposed on the government do not have a negative effect on the population;
- Support farmers' and civil society organizations to develop their full potential, offering them the tools and resources; and
- Press the government to include civil society in the processes and negotiations on agriculture and give them voice and space.

Farmers' organizations and civil society organizations should:

- Press the government to improve access to information and so guarantee transparency, monitor spending and establish the basis for a participatory process;
- Rapidly and effectively develop their capacity to demonstrate that they are a united and key voice in the agricultural sector;
- Improve coordination and go into partnership with women's organizations which are a key ally in the agricultural sector;
- Maintain the public campaign on agricultural investment. In order to achieve greater impact, they should seek out new partners and develop a long-term focus; and
- Participate in the monitoring of the implementation of the national agricultural budget, including as part of the monitoring committee.

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psanpedro@intermonoxfam.org

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