



Fostering food security in areas of extreme poverty through Integrated Farm Management: the case of Burundi

Aad Kessler, Niek van Duivenbooden, and Christy van Beek
(aad.kessler@wur.nl)

Extreme poverty in Burundi's rural area and tensions between families with limited access to arable land hinder development towards a more stable and peaceful society. Due to these tensions and a rapid population growth, agricultural land is currently subject to increased degradation and low agricultural productivity. A whole range of other limiting factors contributes to this, such as: poor seed quality, poor nutrient management combined with low soil fertility, inadequate agronomic practices, pests and crop diseases, poorly developed supply chains, health problems, difficult access to credit, and insecurity. Solving one of these problems will not solve the chain that eventually leads to low food production; it will simply move the emphasis to the next constraining factor. An integrated rural development approach is therefore required to break this vicious circle.

The project Fanning the Spark, a Public-Private-Partnership between Achmea Foundation, Alterra of Wageningen University and Research Centre, and HealthNet-TPO in Burundi started in September 2013 with an intervention in several rural villages in Gitega. The project's objective is to increase food production at village level, by means of investments in crop production, a family (income) insurance package that protects rural families against the financial consequences of catastrophic events (natural and health) and making micro-credits available. This will enhance farmers' workability and generate income from agricultural activities in order to break the poverty cycle and enhance food security. The insurance package comprises agricultural and health insurances, and will be jointly implemented with the sustainable agriculture component. The latter component focuses on Integrated Farm Management and the use of innovative soil management practices.

Farmer-to-farmer training and scaling-up are crucial components, and in the first phase of the project "innovative farmer groups" have a central role in the project. Each innovative farmer formulates and implements an Integrated Farm Management plan. This is a tool for farmers to plan, reflect and learn about sustainable land management, and particularly about the integration of all farm activities and how these contribute together to enhanced food security. Activities considered in these Integrated Farm Management plans are related to agriculture, livestock, infrastructure, agroforestry, soil conservation and training. The first results of the acceptance and impact of the strategy are now available, and in the next phase all innovative farmers will implement their plans and train fellow farmers to start planning their own Integrated Farm Management.