Agricultural Policy Synthesis

Rwanda Food Security Research Project/ MINAGRI

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FARMER ASSOCIATIONS, DECENTRALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN RWANDA: CHALLENGES AHEAD

By

Jim Bingen and Laurent Munyankusi

BACKGROUND: The *Agricultural Policy Outline* prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Resources and Forestry (MINAGRI)[1] calls for "a radical change of approach" to transform and modernize Rwandan agriculture through "the development of a modern agriculture" that abandons traditional subsistence practices and is better adapted to markets. The strategies identified to achieve this transformation include the promotion of more intensive agricultural practices through the increased use of agricultural inputs, "agricultural professionalization" that promotes high enterprise profitability, the promotion of soil fertility and protection, improved marketing initiatives and the reinforcement of agricultural research and advisory services, including a greater role for farmer cooperatives and associations.

Two other government policies reinforce the MINAGRI strategies. The recently published Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)[2] identifies the agricultural sector as a crucial area for growth and calls for "energetic public action" in collaboration with private and non-governmental development partners to encourage greater input use and "to assist in the provision of services and their monitoring." Similarly, the *National Decentralization Policy* reinforces MINAGRI policy in its focus on the "empowerment of local populations to fight poverty by participating in planning and management of their development process."[3]

In order to achieve these development objectives, the Government of Rwanda and its development partners must address several institutional issues in order to define a sustainable and cost-effective approach for assuring that a broad range of farmers has access to basic agricultural services. These services include production and marketing information, training to improve individual and organizational management capacity, such as skills in financial management and planning, conflict resolution, as well as credit, input and output marketing services.

This Policy Synthesis summarizes the findings from FSRP/DSA surveys designed to identify some of the key institutional issues surrounding the role of farmer associations in the delivery of, and access to agricultural services. Specifically, the surveys focus on the capacity of four actors – MINAGRI Regional and District Agents, NGOs, District Governments (the Mayors) and farmer associations and *intergroupements*[4] to provide farmers with

[1] République Rwandaise (2000). Les Grandes Lignes de la Politique Agricole (Agricultural Policy Outline). Kigali, Ministère de l'Agriculture, de l'Elevage et des Forêts.

[2] Government of Rwanda (2001). Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Kigali, National Poverty Reduction Programme, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.

[3] Republic of Rwanda (2000). National Decentralization Policy. Kigali, Ministry of Local Government and Social Affairs.

[4] *Intergroupements* are loose federations of associations. They are established either by farmers themselves or with

agricultural services that might help in the transition from semi-subsistence to commercial agriculture. As this synthesis paper indicates, some of these services have been provided on an irregular basis for many years through a variety of government, NGO, donor agency and private business efforts. Moreover, this paper highlights the strengths and weaknesses of these four key actors; it also identifies areas for improvement, and recommends ways for enhancing the efficiency and equity of services available to farmers through farmer associations.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS: Since the government, and especially MINAGRI, decided to rely upon a variety of public and private agricultural service providers in the 1990s, it has not had the policy and program information needed for effectively implementing its strategy concerning agricultural support services and the roles of NGOs and farmer associations. In order to provide some of this information and respond to this need, the Food Security Research Project designed four surveys. The first survey of fifty-one (51) NGOs identified the principal activities, collaborative relationships with district and provincial Ministry officers and the organizational capacity of both national and international NGOs to implement programs.[5]

The second survey involved two sets of discussions with members and leaders of nineteen (19) farmer associations in fifteen (15) districts and eight (8) provinces (see Map 1, at the end). These discussions addressed the background and history of each association, their activities and resources, organization, membership and leadership, as well as relationships with NGOs, associations and government agencies.[6] Paralleling these discussions, the third and fourth interview surveys were held with 14 District Agronomists and Mayors in order to identify their perspective on the roles of farmer associations and NGOs in agricultural development and on local-level relationships between MINAGRI and local government.

Profile of Surveyed Farmer Associations. The selection of farmer associations to be surveyed was based on two observations: 1) that most small farmer agricultural and rural development activities in Rwanda were being managed by NGOs working with farmer associations and federations of associations (*intergroupements*); and, 2) that national and international NGOs used different approaches in working with farmer associations. With these observations in mind, four national and four international NGOs were asked to propose at least two of their "success story" associations for the survey.[7]

Of the nineteen associations selected for the survey, nine were created prior to, and ten were created after 1994. Some of the pre-1994 associations were established as a condition for access to land and/or were encouraged by a donor-funded development project. However, most pre- and post-1994 associations were started in order to help meet the members' self-help needs.

Most often, the members of the associations live near each other or they have fields in close proximity. The size of the associations ranges from 8 to 50 members, but averages 24 members per association. Only two are women's associations and only one is predominantly a men's association. Nevertheless, excluding these 3 associations, women on average comprise 65% of the members of the associations. Moreover, on average 53% of the members of all

encouragement from NGOs or government representatives in order to achieve some economies of scale for the delivery of services by NGOs or government programs to farmers or for farmers to gain access to agricultural supplies.

[5] The results of this survey are reported in Bingen, J., et al. (2001). Non-Governmental Organizations in Agricultural Development: Preliminary Survey Results. Kigali, MINAGRI, Food Security Research Project and Division of Agricultural Statistics. Also see Busokeye, L. (1997). Rapport - Synthèse sur le Dispositif de Vulgarisation Volet ONG. Kigali, République Rwandaise, Ministère de l'Agriculture de l'Elevage et FAO.

[6] Also see Kayirangwa, B. (1997). Dispositif de Vulgarisation sur Terrain. Volet: Organisations Paysannes. Kigali, FAO.

[7] "Success stories" were requested on the assumption that generalized policy recommendations could be drawn from the strengths observed and problems reported by these associations. The national NGOs included: ARDI, Centre-IWACU, ASOFERWA, and CSC-Gitarama. The international NGOs included: AAA, Care International, World Vision-Rwanda, and INADES. The associations are located in the following provinces and districts: Butare (Kibingo, Maraba); Byumba (Rushaki, Bungwe, Humure); Cyangugu (Cyangugu-Ville, Impala); Gikongoro (Karaba, Mudasomwa); Gitarama (Gitarama-Ville, Kamonyi, Ndiza); Kibungo (Mirenge); Ruhengeri (Kinigi); and Umutara (Kabare).

associations are literate at least at the primary school level. No association has a literacy level below 20%.

FINDINGS ON SUPPORT FOR FARMER ASSOCIATIONS:

1. NGO support to farmer associations is not evenly distributed among or within the provinces. As reported in the survey of NGOs, four provinces (Byumba, Cyangugu, Gikongoro and Gitarama) include districts with more than 20 NGO programs. The study districts in Butare receive programs from 15 NGOs while three provinces (Kibungo, Ruhengeri and Umutara) have districts with activities managed by fewer than 10 NGOs. The number of NGOs per district also varies widely within the provinces. For example, in Gikongoro, Karaba District has 13 NGO programs while Mudasomwa District includes eight programs. A similar situation exists in Gitarama where the Gitarama-Ville District has seven NGOs in comparison to Kamonyi with fifteen programs from NGOs.

2. Farmer associations rely on NGO programs and donor projects for their agricultural inputs and supplies. Associations either receive supplies (seeds, fertilizer, pesticides) directly from NGOs and donor projects or they have access to these supplies through an *intergroupement* warehouse established and maintained as part of an NGO or donor project. Only two associations report the purchase of supplies through private shopkeepers, and two seek access through coffee grower groups. As long as the NGO or donor projects are active, farmers appear to be satisfied with this NGO-mediated supply system. Only a handful of associations report difficulties in obtaining an adequate quantity of supplies either because of limited availability or because of their credit repayment problems during the life of these projects. Furthermore, in contrast to reports of sales of fraudulent products by private dealers, farmers have confidence in the quality the NGO-supplied inputs.

On the other hand, it appears that neither the NGO nor the donor projects have established a means for assuring supply continuity beyond the life of their projects. Consequently, when the projects end, the most frequent demand received by every district agronomist from farmer associations is for agricultural inputs.

3. Farmer associations look to the district MINAGRI agents primarily for two things: to answer technical questions and to resolve conflicts. Over one-half of the associations regularly seek technical advice (such as planting/harvesting techniques) from their district agronomist. About the same number also request the district agronomist's assistance in resolving land distribution issues or other conflicts. (In fact, agronomists indicate that their ability to provide advice or to intervene on behalf of an association is the principal rationale for encouraging associations to register with the Mayor's office. The agronomists state that they cannot deal with associations if they are not registered.)

District agronomists confirm receiving these requests, as well as requests for inputs, from associations. But they also report that associations regularly seek assistance with marketing and credit. In response, agronomists indicated advising the associations that they do not have access to inputs and cannot help with improving access to markets or credit.

4. District MINAGRI agents are disadvantaged when compared to NGO and donor project supported technicians.
Five associations, three of which are in a district with one of the largest concentrations of NGOs, report little or no contact with the district agronomists. In these cases, the NGOs may be "displacing" the support that might otherwise be sought from the district agronomists. On the other hand, these reports confirm both the absence of a means of transportation for most MINAGRI agronomists and the increased difficulties they face in trying to cover the larger areas of the new districts.

The relationship between bilateral donor projects (that are not run through NGOs) and MINAGRI agronomists, on the other hand, appears quite different and thereby changes the relationships between associations and district agronomists. In three districts these projects work directly through and support MINAGRI. As such, the agronomists have access to transportation and can maintain regular contact with the registered associations in their districts.

5. District agronomists represent a point of continuity for MINAGRI services to farmer associations. District agronomists have been in their posts for an average of four years. In contrast, most

NGO projects appear to the associations to come-and-go or to last only two years. Thus, from the perspective of most associations, the agronomist post and individuals with even four years of service provide a measure of permanence and an opportunity for responsiveness that does not exist with the NGOs.

Furthermore, associations can expect to find comparable levels of technical expertise with district and NGO local-level agronomists. Both have an A2 (high school level) ranking. However, in contrast to the NGO technicians, MINAGRI agronomists do not have an equivalent level of on-the-job technical support from MINAGRI.

FINDINGS ON DECENTRALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT:

1. The government relies on NGOs and farmer associations for carrying out many activities, and yet does not have a way to know geographic distribution, much less the success or failure, of those activities. All of the provincial MINAGRI (DRSA) directors express concern and frustration over their inability to understand clearly the NGO activities in their provinces. Many readily acknowledge that MINAGRI personnel policies involving frequent DRSA director rotation impede efforts to gain more familiarity with development activities in their provinces. At the same time, however, most report that only a few NGOs make the effort to advise them of their programs or to respond to invitations for monthly planning meetings. Finally, since the NGOs must register with MINALOC, the DRSA directors sense that NGOs maintain closer relations with the Mayors. Interviews with the Mayors confirm this perception as most focus more on the development opportunities presented by multiple NGOs and much less on the need to coordinate various NGO activities.

The lack of consultation with the DRSA directors has led some NGOs to make some serious program mistakes. Some of these include efforts to introduce an inappropriate breed of cattle, or uninformed efforts at land management. According to the DRSA directors, even the briefest exchange of information might have prevented many of the mistakes.

2. Local-level MINAGRI and MINALOC officers have differing perceptions of their roles in rural development (even though they work with the same farmer groups). Most Mayors feel that the District Agronomist reports to, and is more interested in following directives from the DRSA directors than in developing a collaborative program in the District that might be different from MINAGRI policy. District Agronomists, on the other hand, wish the Mayors took more interest in agricultural development issues. This is especially important since the Agronomists perceive that farmers listen more readily to the Mayors than they do to the Agronomists. Thus, they feel that if the Mayors exercised more leadership concerning agricultural development, the farmers would quickly follow.

3. The new decentralized administrative structures – especially the Community Development Committees (CDCs) – are not yet integrated with agricultural development policy or programs. Many DRSA directors feel that the CDCs will provide the means for bringing some coordination to the multiple NGO programs, even while recognizing that the Mayors may seek to control the CDCs. On the other hand, the Mayors do not currently share this perception of the CDCs. For the Mayors, the role of the CDCs in empowering the local population to participate "in planning and management of their development process" involves training CDC members to manage and distribute separate sources of funding small projects.

FINDINGS ON THE STATUS OF FARMER ASSOCIATIONS:

1. Associations engage in multiple income-earning activities, but capital mobilization remains limited. Farmer associations have been established either as a condition for gaining access to fertile and better-watered land in the valleys, to engage in a common income-generating activity (including fishing), or to meet a social need. Once established, most associations have branched into a variety of income-generating activities such as grain milling, brick making, lumbering, carpentry, sewing and soap making. In addition, some of those with fields may rent out any equipment acquired, combine their produce for sale or sell agricultural supplies (usually in collaboration with other associations through an *intergroupement*). Most associations have discontinued the payment of dues, but some maintain a system of small fines for members who do not

attend meetings or fail to contribute to the weekly joint work days.

However, even those associations that have not recently been the victims of financial malfeasance report very little savings. Some associations simply do not generate significant collective income: for example, the collective field may be too small. More commonly, the collective earnings are divided among the members in order to meet jointly agreed-upon, but largely individualized instead of collective needs: purchasing goats, cattle, cloth or meeting a social need. As a result, the members of associations readily speak highly of the individual, but not the group, benefits of belonging to their association. Consequently, and largely based on the limited collective savings of the associations, the District Agronomists and Mayors do not see most associations as particularly "strong" or important actors in local development.

2. The formal structure of a farmer's association is an inadequate indicator of viability. All farmers' associations have an organizational chart or structure of positions and officers, and all of those surveyed are registered at the district Mayor's office. Similarly, most associations have clearly defined term limits and procedures for changing officers, and association members can easily identify the preferred criteria for selecting association officers (honesty, openness, etc.).

Nevertheless, almost one-half of the associations (four established pre-1994 and five established post-1994) have experienced at least one incident of embezzlement on the part of their elected presidents. In each case, the associations have changed officers and re-started their economic activities. Equally significant, even in the absence of financial problems, five associations have changed officers pursuant to their organizational procedures. (Four associations have not been established long enough to have a second election of officers.) In short, over time farmer associations have developed procedures for assuring the accountability of their leaders.

3. Associations have not received training to improve their capacity. NGO support for farmer associations focuses on the distribution of agricultural equipment and supplies or in working with associations to improve land management through water control or terracing. Some NGOs may include some management training to complement specific activities such as operating an input supply depot. In a very limited number of cases, the leaders of associations have benefited from short-term visits to "successful" associations supported by the NGO in neighboring countries. In contrast to capacity-building programs supported in the past by IWACU, none of the current associations receive longer-term training for capacity-building (problem-solving, conflict resolution, etc.) from their NGO partners.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Given the uneven distribution of agricultural and rural development services, most of which are provided by NGOs, one of the key issues confronting the government concerns how the Ministries of Agriculture (MINAGRI), Local Government (MINALOC), and Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN) can begin to work more closely in order to assure broader and more equitably distributed development opportunities for the rural population. In the absence of more inter-ministerial collaboration at the national, provincial and district levels, not only will it continue to be difficult to develop an accurate picture of the state of agricultural and rural development throughout the country, but the realization of the development policy objectives of each ministry will be jeopardized.

The Rwandan government has emphasized the strengthening of services to farmers and rural households. Currently, this key policy objective is being met primarily through various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with donor funding, collaborating with local governments and farmer associations. The Ministries of Agriculture (MINAGRI), Local Government (MINALOC), and Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN), particularly through their local officers, should begin to work more closely in order to assure broader and more equitably distributed development opportunities for the rural population.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Develop the ministerial capacity for assisting, monitoring and assessing the contribution of farmer associations to development. In collaboration with donors, the government should explore how NGO programs might be designed to work more in support of, or directly alongside,

provincial and district MINAGRI agents. In this way, as an NGO program comes to an end, local-level MINAGRI agents might be in a better position to continue advising and working with farmer associations.

2. Strengthen local level capacity to diagnose what agricultural services are being developed and provided across the range of service providers, and where households, and particularly farmers, are not being served. The Community Development Committees (CDC) can play a big role in this, but agricultural development issues need to be well understood and the CDCs need to receive training on establishing priorities and leading local development efforts. The danger is for CDCs becoming simply another mechanism for distributing goods and services without developing local capacity to identify and implement coherent district level programs.

3. Promote training for farmer associations on management, marketing, conflict resolution, and other business and collective action skills. This is needed to ensure that the associations can prevent or minimize the damage from critical organizational crisis, such as embezzlement or conflict. Such training also helps develop the farmer associations beyond the original NGO base.

4. Strengthen farmer association links with private sector agents, particularly for input supplies, so that when NGOs pull out, the traders and farmers have the experience of working with each other in the provision of needed services. NGOs can incorporate this in the design and implementation, to ensure sustainability of the associations.

5. Provide policy directives that ensure district agronomists and NGOs work together on agricultural aspects. This would encourage NGOs to include district agronomists in training and activities, so that when the NGO project ends, there is continuity.

6. Convene national and provincial level inter-ministerial roundtables to identify current delivery of agricultural services and strategies to ensure sustainable systems for delivery. These roundtables would cover such issues as 1) the geographical distribution of activities and services; 2) the types of services provided; 3) training needed for extension agents and for other participants in the process; 4) with decentralization, an assessment of local capacity to meet service needs of farmers; and 5) methods for assessing needs and success. Given the role of NGOs and donors in this process, their participation will also be important.

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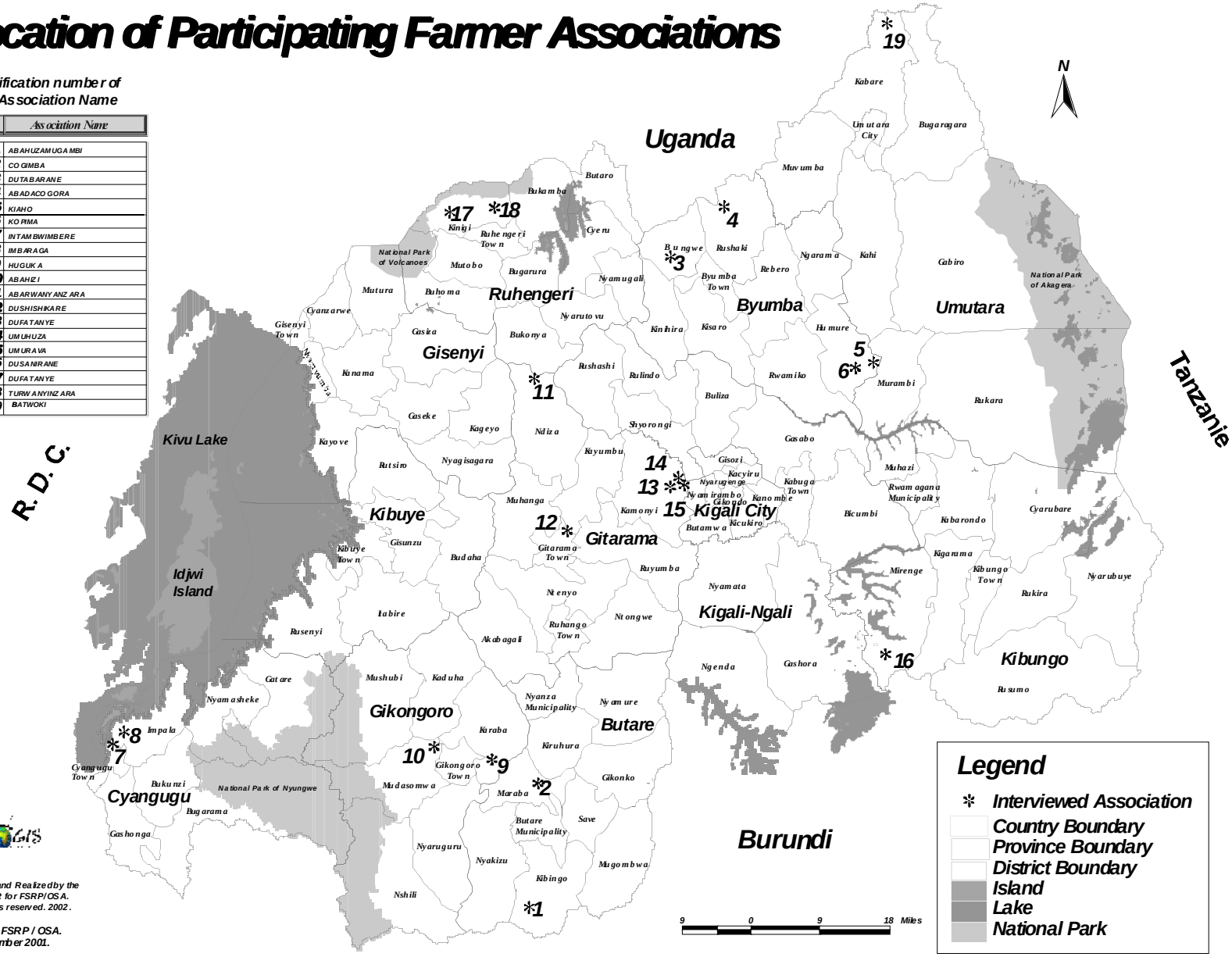
Bingen is a Professor, Department of Resource Development, Michigan State University, Munyankusi is a Research Assistant with the Food Security Research Project, Kigali, Rwanda.

Location of Participating Farmer Associations

Identification number of the Association Name

Number	Association Name
1	ABAHUZAMUGAMBI
2	COGIMBA
3	DUTABARANE
4	ABADACOGORA
5	KIAHO
6	KOPIMA
7	INTAMBWIMBERE
8	IMBARAGA
9	HUGUKA
10	ABAHZI
11	ABARWANYANZARA
12	DUSHISHIKARE
13	DUFATANYE
14	UMUHUZA
15	UMURAVA
16	DUSANIRANE
17	DUFATANYE
18	TURWANYINZARA
19	BATWOKI



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