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Formal and Informal Potato Seed Supply Systems Analyses in Rwanda

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Abstract

The potatoes production in Rwanda is constantly increasing and it represents an important food and cash source for farmers. The potato crop, together with maize, wheat, rice, beans and cassava is one of the six priority crops on which the CIP (Crop intensification Program) is focusing since 2007. Its production is mainly located at high altitudes in the Northern and Western provinces. The Nyabihu, Musanze, Rubavu and Burera districts, due to their favorable climatic conditions, are the 4 most productive districts accounting for about 60% of the national potato production. However, because of the low quality seed use by farmers together with the low health soil status, yields remain low with an average of 11.6 t ha⁻¹.

The aim of the study was to clarify the current formal and informal potato seed supply system in Rwanda and understand how the certified seed production and the seed management was carried out by farmers considering the current seed policy.

Data was collected in the Nyabihu, Musanze, Rubavu and Burera districts from the end of June to the end of September 2016. In order to gather the agronomic and socio-economic data, formal-informal interviews with farmers and expert interviews were conducted.

Currently, the private sector is the principal actor involved in the minitubers production, having a market share of 71% while the public one has a 29% share. The actual production of minitubers could cover between 13–30% of the Rwandan national demand. However, due to a potato seed leak along the certification process and to a lack of actors who multiply lower seed categories into upper ones, the same figure is not reflected into the actual production of certified seed, which represents 5% of the national required demand.

In conclusion, in order to supply Rwandan farmers with high quality seed, the formal and informal systems must be complementary and mutually dependent. The certified seed production must be combined with the development of strong and target linkages (e.g. farmer field schools) along with the informal seed sector. The promotion of the integrated-participative approaches in breeding, seed production and distribution would help to increase the complementarity between the two systems.

Keywords: Agricultural policies, formal and informal seed systems, potato, seeds