



Tropentag, September 20-22, 2017, Bonn

“Future Agriculture:
Socio-ecological transitions and bio-cultural shifts”

Shifting from Subsistence Farming in Rwanda: Understanding the Effects on Food Access among Smallholder Farmers

CHANTAL INGABIRE^{1,2}, PATIENCE MSHENGA², CHRISTINE BIGLER³, MICHÈLE AMACKER³, ELIUD BIRACHI⁴

¹*Rwanda Agriculture Board/Egerton University (Kenya), Research/Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, Rwanda*

²*Egerton University, Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness Management, Kenya*

³*University of Bern, Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies, Switzerland*

⁴*International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Kenya*

Abstract

For over fifteen years, agricultural transformation strategies in Africa and specifically, Rwanda have focused on shifting from the largely subsistence to market oriented farming. This has been particularly taken as a key strategy to end poverty and food insecurity in the rural areas. As the majority of Rwandan farmers are smallholders, some concerns that the new production system may increase their vulnerability and risks to food insecurity have been raised. Although recent reports show that the level of food availability has increased in the country, farmers' dependency on food markets has also increased and surprisingly, cases of malnutrition still persist even in regions considered as the country's granary. The question is whether commercialisation of smallholder farmers would improve or worsen households' access to food and consequently affect their food and nutrition security. This paper used the Household Commercialisation Index (HCI) and the Household Food Insecurity Access Score (HFIAS) on a sample of 331 farmers to investigate the linkages between commercialisation and food security in Rwanda. Results showed that 32 % of the households could be categorised as market oriented famers. Regarding food access, the HFIAS calculations allowed us to classify 14 %, 18 % and 68 % households, respectively, as food secure, moderately food insecure and severely food insecure. Results of an Ordered Logistic regression showed that farmers with higher level of commercialisation were more likely to be food secure in terms of access. Other factors like land, access to credit, distance to market, and distance to the border (for cross-border trade) had a positive effect on the level of food security access. Male headed households were found to be more food secure.

Keywords: Commercialisation, food access, ordered logistic, Rwanda, smallholder