



Tropentag, September 10-12, 2025, hybrid conference

“Reconcile land system changes  
with planetary health”

## The symbolic importance of the banana economy for an improved livelihood for rural households, in Burundi

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### Abstract

Banana cultivation is a cornerstone of rural livelihoods in Burundi, particularly in the northern provinces of Ngozi and Muyinga, where it contributes significantly to household income, food availability, and ecological sustainability. This study evaluates the economic and food security role of banana production among smallholder farmers, using data from 583 rural households. Employing descriptive statistics and Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), the research identifies the key socio-economic and agricultural variables influencing income adequacy and dietary diversity. The analysis highlights bananas as both a staple food and a critical cash crop, often sold through formal and informal markets, and as a contributor to soil fertility and agroecological resilience. However, despite their importance, many households remain economically vulnerable, underscoring the need for better production systems, improved value chain integration, and diversified income sources.

The MCA identified six dimensions explaining 43% of the total data variability, which significantly exceeded the threshold for random distributions, allowing meaningful classification of household profiles. Dimension 1 revealed a clear divide between households with high food security and productivity and those with severe food insecurity and low outputs. Dimension 2 further refined household classification into three productivity-based groups. Dimensions 3 and 4 exposed demographic and economic disparities, with older, female-headed and larger male-headed households showing higher vulnerability, while younger, smaller households displayed better calorie production and income adequacy. Dimensions 5 and 6 highlighted contrasts in banana production focus, market orientation, and household structure, identifying groups that rely heavily on bananas, sell more commercially, or face acute insecurity with limited agricultural resources.

Overall, the study confirms the multifunctional role of bananas in supporting rural livelihoods, but also reveals deep socio-economic divides shaped by household characteristics, agricultural practices, and market access. These findings support targeted interventions to enhance food security and promote agricultural diversity, particularly for vulnerable groups such as female-headed households and younger farmers in resource-poor settings.

**Keywords:** Banana production, Burundi, food security, income adequacy, influencing factor, rural households

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