



Burundi

Tilling the land again

FAO and EU

Unlocking rural potential

The European Union and FAO are working more closely than ever before. Partnership has strengthened both organizations in achieving their shared goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

“In a country where nine out of ten people depend on agriculture, rural development is crucial.”

Eric Donni, Delegation of the European Commission to Burundi

“From 1993, when civil war broke out, up to now, agricultural production grew by just one percent. In the same period, the population rose from six to eight million people. That means a net loss in food production of almost 25 percent.”

Jean-Pierre Renson, FAO, Burundi

“By the end of 2008, Burundi might be self-sufficient in cassava again. And that, I think, is really a success.”

Eric Pitois, European Commission Humanitarian Aid department



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Struggling to overcome the ravages of civil war, Burundi is making remarkable headway in restoring its most important sector, agriculture. FAO and the European Union have been beside Burundians every step of the way. Rural development is at the heart of the EU's involvement in Burundi, and FAO is the EU's natural partner in the work.

Back to farming

The EU and FAO assist Burundi in setting up emergency and rehabilitation operations to tackle hunger, aggravated by recent years of drought and lethal plant viruses. Meanwhile, innovative approaches increase crop yields, repairing the damage of more than a decade of civil strife.

Projects are underway to help local producers grow high quality bean and maize seeds and cassava and potato planting material. The objective is to foster a steady and affordable flow of seeds and cuttings for those farmers who need them most.

Seed fairs offer an original way to distribute the seed. Organized by FAO and its partners, with the support of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department, the fairs give poor farmers an opportunity to buy seeds with vouchers.

Perhaps the biggest challenge of all is to reach out to Burundi's minority Batwa people. Now that hunting, the livelihood of their forebears, survives only as a ritual in their traditional dances, Batwa face the dramatic prospect of finding a new way of life. Some switch to growing vegetables for market and their own consumption, assisted by the EU and FAO.



Video, audio, photos and articles on agricultural rehabilitation, seed fairs and Burundi's minority Batwa people are available here: www.fao.org/newsroom/en/field/2007/1000687/index.html



Planting cassava again

In 1989, an aggressive strain of plant virus, known as Cassava Mosaic Disease, began a devastating march through Africa's Great Lakes region. The virus decimated harvests of a staple crop, cassava. In Uganda, food shortages led to local famines.

For a region already burdened by conflict and drought, the losses were disastrous for poor farmers and their families.

The urgency of developing disease-free cassava and getting it to the people who needed it most led to an unlikely but highly fruitful alliance of genetic researchers in their laboratories and agronomists more accustomed to the rough life of emergencies.

Scientists of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture in Nigeria developed a series of virus-tolerant cassava varieties; FAO used several for a regional campaign against the virus, set up with funding from the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department.

Following rapid multiplication and distribution of the cassava cuttings, the operation quickly reached its final stage: mass distribution of disease-free planting material to the population, principally to returnees who, thanks to the region's relative peace, are finally able to till their land again.



Video, audio, photos and articles on the fight against the cassava virus and assistance to farmers in Burundi are available here: www.fao.org/newsroom/en/field/2007/1000693/index.html

Burundi programme in numbers

- Since 2001 the EU has given €12 200 000 towards FAO's emergency rehabilitation programme.
- In 2006 alone, FAO provided around 100 000 households with seeds and tools so they could resume farming.
- Almost 250 000 families were expected to start growing healthy cassava again in 2007.
- Four seed fairs now serve over 7 000 farmers.



In 2003 farmer **Ernest Nduyman** → dreamed of getting married. But Cassava Mosaic Disease destroyed his crop – and his marriage plans. Now back farming, Ernest hopes to raise enough money to marry his girlfriend Nadine. But who was the lucky lady back in 2003? "It was Nadine," Ernest says, smiling. "She has waited for me."

