

Agricultural Rehabilitation and Food Insecurity in Post-war Rwanda

*Assessing Needs,
Designing Solutions*

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Introduction: Politics of Intervention and Needs Assessment¹

'Rehabilitation' is a loaded term central to the interpretive grid through which impoverished regions and their people are known to more affluent communities and individuals (Ferguson 1994). Notions of underdevelopment, understandings of crisis and agreed-upon solutions derive from that same grid and its hegemonic scientific paradigm.

With reference to food insecurity and international agricultural research, the hegemonic Western approach overlooks the relationship between people and their knowledge, and between researchers and farmers (Fairhead 1993). The approach thus separates people from their environment. When it comes to identifying problems and thinking up solutions, it is invariably the scientific world ordering logic which determines what problems exist and what solutions will be on offer. The process mostly begins with a 'needs assessment' exercise, often guided by media images and rhetoric, through which outside agency workers liaise with local bureaucrats to arrive at perspectives and solutions which they (the outsiders) control. The practice is *quasi* universal. Thus, in the context of homelessness in Britain, Hudson and Liddiard (1993) argue that 'the way in which the client and the problem [are] defined [depends] less on the 'objective' characteristics of the client and more on the history, the political and the social objectives, the skills, the resources and the funding base of the agency' (Hudson and Liddiard 1993: 48).

Food insecurity in Rwanda in the immediate aftermath of the 1994 war and genocide is another illustration of how 'the problem' and 'its solution' are controlled not by 'the clients' but by a powerful hegemonic discourse which remains divorced from realities on-the-ground. What happened in post-war Rwanda illustrates how development interests feed upon 'the growth of ignorance' (Hobart 1993) - and Western ignorance about Rwanda is both vast and easily manipulated (Pottier 1995, 1996).

¹ I sincerely thank the people of Rwanda who have helped with this enquiry in August-September 1994. I extend thanks to SCF staff in London and Rwanda. The views here expressed are my own and not necessarily those of SCE.

In this article I first consider 'the problem' of agricultural resource base erosion and food insecurity in post-war Rwanda, and how it was perceived by Western experts and local politicians. I then look at 'the solution' put forward by the international agricultural research centres (IARCs): the 'Seeds of Hope' programme.

Emergencies are internationally interpreted as occasions for swift action, not as opportunities for critical reflection. In emergencies, therefore, it has become legitimate to ignore clients' views of problems and solutions. This leads to top-down approaches to crisis management. The habitual top-down approach that UN agencies and voluntary organizations take when assessing the needs of displaced people is aptly summed up by Waldron, who reflects on his work with refugees in Somalia in 1981-2.

... at the end of the 'emergency phase' of that event, it seemed clear to me that the agencies of the expatriate refugee regime - the UNHCR, WFP and PVOs - were administering life-sustaining essentials to the estimated 700,000 refugees **guided almost exclusively by the top-down, self enclosed logic of bureaucracy.** Food allotments to a specific camp, for instance, would be calculated by multiplying the official number of camp residents by the officially approved ration, despite the facts that (a) the actual number of refugees in camps was not accurately known, and (b) the actual food available for delivery seldom reached the official daily allotment.

(Waldron 1988: 155; emphasis added)

Humanitarian aid agencies regularly intervene, 'legitimately' they claim, on the basis of **very shallow knowledge** or even, as Waldron implies, by ignoring the knowledge that is available.

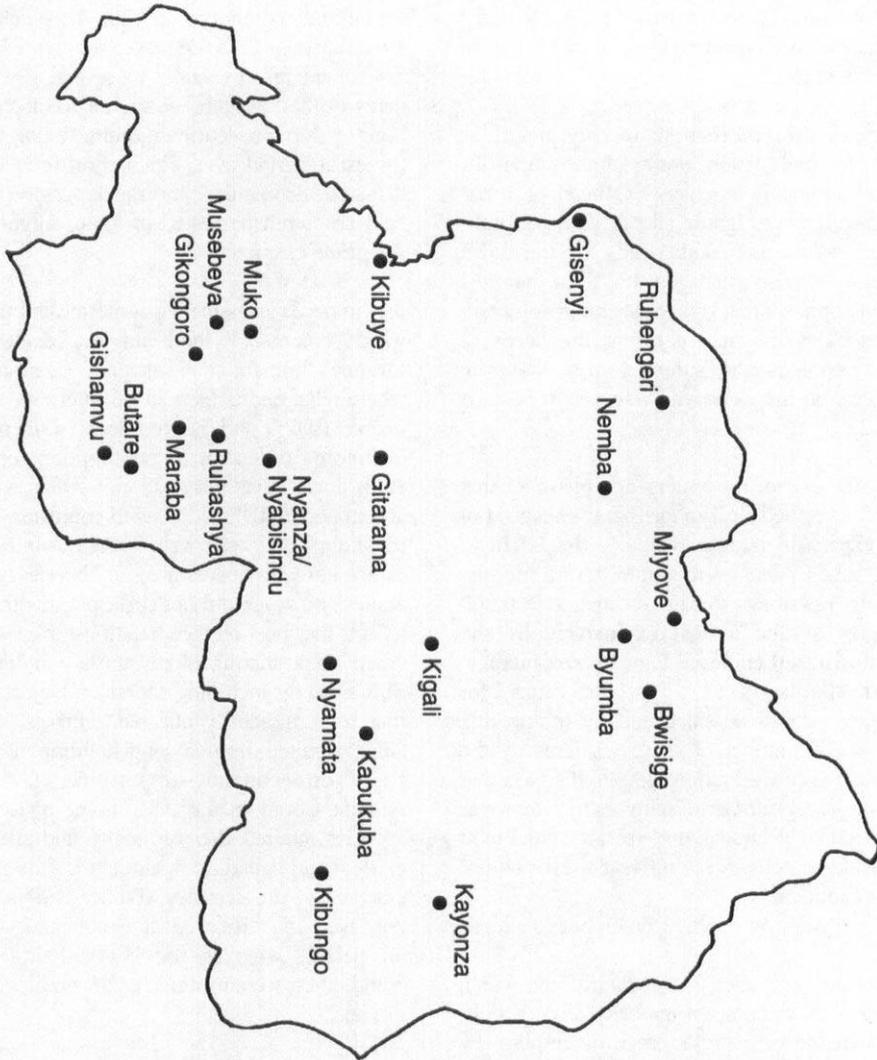
A similar situation is here reported for Rwanda in the immediate aftermath of the 1994 genocide and conflict, when FAO/WFP set out to assess food needs and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), which groups the IARCs, launched its 'Seeds of Hope' rescue plan. In early August 1994, FAO/WFP assessed needs on the basis of the self enclosed logic of bureaucracy, to use Waldron's terminology, i.e. on the basis of

official estimations of crop and seed losses. Importantly, those providing the information were gatekeepers acting on behalf of the new political regime, often former RPA soldiers unfamiliar with agricultural conditions in their new country (cf. Mujawamariya 1995: 33). As a result, the FAO/WFP assessment failed to refer to several key determinants of food availability, such as ecological variations within prefectures (administrative districts); the exact period over which short-term internally displaced people fled; and the 'longevity' of certain field crops not harvested on time, sorghum being the prime example.

Bias in needs assessment also permeated the way in which emergency food aid was dealt with in Rwanda's 'humanitarian safe zone' (*Zone Turquoise*), where relief efforts focused on internally displaced people (IDPs) and not on local residents. The dichotomy rested on the assumption (or bureaucratic logic) that hosts do not suffer when they accommodate IDPs. (To avoid confusion, the IDPs to whom I here refer were living not in designated camps but with host families.) This clear-cut separation, however, did not correspond with the reality of the host-refugee relationship, which was based on a sharing of resources and life-worlds. This sharing, including the shared understanding that food insecurity affected refugees and hosts alike, resulted from a long-standing relationship based on economic opportunity for seasonal migrant labour in the IDPs' home region. Relief agencies ignored the reciprocity and sharing that existed and failed to include the hosts in their emergency programmes (Pottier 1994a). They perceived the displaced as problematic (as being 'in need'), whereas the hosts, living in their own homes, were regarded as un-problematic, not-in-need.

The origin of this dichotomy lies in the value-laden meanings carried by the words 'displaced' and 'uprooted'. As used within the discourse of the international community and in Western culture at large, such terms convey images of 'broken roots' and hence suggest an 'ailing' identity (Malkki 1992). This is another example of the power of Western hegemonic discourse. The suggested association occurs because Western notions of culture/stability routinely equate culture with a territorilized concept (Malkki 1992: 34).

Figure 1 Map of Rwanda



This deeply engrained approach to culture predisposes the international relief worker to see refugees as out-of-place, helpless victims. This involves denying the refugees agency, for instance through downplaying the existence of effective self-help strategies and the importance of refugee-host relations. Such strategies and their benefits are routinely overlooked (Hansen 1991; Leach 1992; Turton and Turton 1984). The denial then justifies that a bureaucratic logic of needs (a **quick, official estimation** of loss and damage) should prevail.

The present article argues that the FAO/WFP assessment of crop and seed losses adopted such an official view and, with media assistance, paved the way for what looked like a perfectly logical and legitimate intervention by powerful donors: the 'Seeds of Hope' programme backed by CIAT/CGIAR and the World Bank.

Agricultural Situation in the Immediate Aftermath of Rwanda's War and Genocide (July 1994-Early 1995)

To follow my argument it is useful first to present some principles of Rwandan agriculture and say something about conditions in the post-war era.

Agricultural biodiversity, one of Rwanda's most important economic resources, is linked to topography; linked to the fact that the country's food growing areas range from the (cooler) high altitude zones in the West to the (warmer) low altitude zones in the east. Three broad zones can be discerned: high, middle and low altitude. Within these zones, which can be broken up into some eight or nine agro-ecological zones, there is further diversity as each zone has soils that range from high to low fertility. Moreover, each area has its specific disease problems. It is in response to this wide range of agro-ecological conditions and in an attempt to reduce the risk of crop failure due to climatic irregularities and specific diseases that farmers strive to grow locally adapted seed. In the case of beans, a major crop, this spreading of risk has resulted in a strong preference for varietal mixtures. (Rwanda has over 200 known landraces.) Varietal mixtures 'effectively reduce disease severity and spread and may have further yield-enhancing effects

through the association of beans of different plant architectures' (Voss 1992: 34).

Other important crops in Rwanda include sorghum (for which, again, several varieties exist, all locally adapted), bananas (mostly for beer brewing), maize, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, cassava and taro. On the importance of sorghum, ICRISAT, the International Agricultural Research Centre (IARC) dealing with sorghum, has written:

Sorghum is an important crop in Rwanda, consumed both as a porridge and a beverage. The crop supplies Rwandans with about 20 per cent of their caloric and 17 per cent of their protein intake. Sorghum is grown in all regions of the country, with the area under the crop covering 150,000 hectares.

(*Rwanda News*, September 1994)

Harvest and seed losses, for beans as well as sorghum, feature prominently in reports on the agricultural devastation that hit Rwanda in 1994. Losses were declared 'almost total' and the long-term solution ('Seeds of Hope') was conceived on the presupposition that the lost seed needed urgently to be replaced with new, locally adapted seed. The urgency was not (and could not be) disputed. Put differently, the rehabilitation debate was couched in terms of a straightforward substitution of new seed propagated from suitable seed stocks preserved by the world's leading agricultural research centres (IARCs). Officially, the challenge was to do a thorough job - and to do it fast.

But was the situation that straightforward? My asking the question has to do with three facts: a) Rwanda is ecologically varied, which the architects of 'Seeds of Hope' were aware of; b) war and displacement did not affect all regions in the same way, which was never fully investigated; and c) post-war Rwanda was politically, socially and economically a different place from what it had been before the genocide. Not only had there been massive population displacements - 'new' refugees leaving Rwanda or becoming internally displaced, 'old caseload' Tutsi refugees returning; there had also been an influx of cattle estimated at well over half a million head. It is against the backdrop of Rwanda's **diverse** ecology, **diverse** war experiences and its vastly changed socio-economic reality that

I shall go beyond the internationally accepted wisdom that only the IARCs, networked through CGIAR, could replace the lost seed. I shall draw attention to the **differential impact** the tragedy has had on the agricultural scene. Differences will be spelled out both at the level of agro-ecological zones and within them. In addition, I shall argue that any discussion of sustainable agricultural rehabilitation will need to respond to some significant social, economic and political changes.

The article is in three parts. I start with the 'worst case scenarios' of agricultural destruction as portrayed by international development actors: politicians, medical experts, the media and agricultural interest groups. These portrayals share the perception of a near-total ecological calamity, about to bring famine and wipe out crop genetic diversity. In Part Two, I build up an alternative, more nuanced picture of the food and agricultural situation, based on findings by FAO/WFP (1994) and a food security assessment I carried out on behalf of Save The Children - UK (Pottier 1994a). I shall situate my understanding of agricultural rehabilitation within the context of Rwanda's changing political and economic realities. In Part Three I examine the track record of 'Seeds of Hope', the international programme launched to return (restore) appropriate seed to Rwanda. Here I shall draw from interviews with FAO and WFP personnel in Kigali.

1 Emergence of a Disaster Narrative with a Perfect Solution

1.1 How devastated was the agricultural sector? - first assessments, July/August 1994

Before entering the discussion proper, it is useful to remind that Rwanda has three growing seasons:

Season A, from September to January. Beans, sorghum (at high altitude) and maize are the main crops. In calendar terms, the season is referred to as falling in the following year. The season starting in September 1994 is thus referred to as the 1995A season.

Season B, from February to July. Sorghum (grown at mid- and low-altitude) is the main crop but beans and maize are also prominent.

Season C, from July to September. Although this is the dry season, cultivation in the lowlands and valley bottoms is possible, especially for sweet potatoes.

Note: Root and tuber crops (sweet potato, potato, cassava, taro/colocasia) are cultivated year round.

Early comments on the impact of the conflict on Rwanda's food production capacity claimed that the loss of harvests and seeds was virtually total. Almost instantaneously, it was revealed that there existed a solution: the 'Seeds of Hope' programme, a long-term international solution through which crop production and biodiversity would be quickly restored. This restoration, the programme's bosses pointed out, would prove far less expensive than long-term dependency on food aid.

As soon as the war finished, starvation was on the lips of many eminent visitors to Rwanda. Thus Dr Goemaere (**MSF, Artsen Zonder Grenzen**) warned of an unprecedented catastrophe.

Dr Goemaere, who visited Byumba, Kigali, Nyamata and Nyanza, was struck by the fields of sorghum, cassava and bananas ready for harvesting. If harvests were not brought in with urgency, we could expect famine on an unprecedented scale.

(*Het Volk*, 20/7/94; my translation)

Two months later, Professor Henri Vis, an expert on nutrition in Rwanda (*Vis et al.*, 1975), reinforced the famine warning when returning from a 20-day visit to Burundi, Eastern Zaire and Rwanda.

The president of Belgium's UNICEF Committee, Professor Henri Vis, says he is "very pessimistic" about the situation in the Great Lakes region, where, he believes, famine may well be on its way.

Professor Vis has raised the alarm. "I have criss-crossed the countryside and have seen only few people working the land. The coming harvests have little chance of being sufficient. We are fast approaching food shortages and famine."

(*Le Courier de l'Escaut*, 29/9/94)

In the second week of August 1994, Rwanda's Prime Minister, Faustin Twagiramungu, expressed his pessimism on the subject of post-war harvesting. For the country as a whole, he declared:

'We have had no harvest this year and we will probably have none next year. Either people come back and start working again to feed themselves, or they can live on external aid. There are no other alternatives'.

(*La Libre Belgique*, 9/8/94)

The Prime Minister predicted that Rwanda would remain dependent on international food aid for about two years. The long time the recovery was expected to take reflected uncertainty about the speed with which 'new' refugees and IDPs would return to their homes. In the weeks leading up to the September planting season (1995A), several Kigali officials argued that agricultural recovery was impossible without the return of the refugees. Consequently, some agencies - UNICEF and the Catholic Relief Service (CRS), for instance - joined hands with the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) to provide incentives for refugees to come home and harvest (Pottier 1994a: 51).

Initially, 'new refugees' were central to the debate on agricultural rehabilitation and national food security, along with seeds, tools and livestock. September being the start of the first agricultural season, there was much concern over the neglect of on-farm activity. Not only were about half the farmers away from home, there was also a tremendous shortage of seeds and tools. The argument went that if Rwanda's food production sector was to recover, all four elements had to return. The lost seeds, animals and tools had to be replaced; the lost farmers, where they were still alive, had to return from the refugee or IDP camps. National and international experts agreed with Rwanda's new leaders, particularly with Hutu representatives, that the return of the refugees was essential for revitalizing the agricultural sector.

Throughout August 1994, there were reports of near-total harvest failure, anarchy and devastation. MSF-Belgium backed the view that Rwanda's most

recent harvest had virtually been lost. It was also doubtful that Rwanda would harvest in January 1995. Dr Réginald Moreels, then president of MSF-Belgium, declared after a visit to Rwanda:

'The only area where I saw people harvest was the no-man's-land between the French Zone Turquoise and the town of Butare. The rainy season starts in a month's time ... There is a risk that next year's harvest will be in doubt, too'.

(*L'Echo de la Bourse*, 12/8/94)²

Liberation, the French newspaper which exposed the role of France in the genocide, painted a similar, uniformly catastrophic picture at the end of August. Harvesting practically equalled anarchy. Moreover, the refugees were not returning even though the rains were imminent. Worse still, farmers who were at home seemed too lethargic or frightened to work their fields. The overall impression the humanitarian visitor to Rwanda was getting was one of total dislocation.

Since May, the Rwandan countryside has become a huge larder. The convoys of the exodus, first the Tutsi refugees, then the Hutu, the campaigning soldiers or those engaged in banditry, the villagers, all these people in their upside-down world roam around gathering sorghum for *fou-fou*, manioc for flour and avocado pears. The urban dweller is turning to cultivation. In Gisenyi, Kigali, Butare and Gitarama, towns where no business is going on, where no jobs can be got and no salaries earned, the people go to the hills where they hoe and uproot, frequently without possessing the required skills and knowledge. This only delays the disaster. In a country where stability is already precarious, it is going to be difficult to recover from one disastrous harvest, let alone two.

Up until now, three out of four farmers have still not returned to the countryside controlled by the RPF, which lies fallow as far as the eye can see. Half the farmers fled to the Zone Turquoise. This does not mean that those who stayed behind are working the fields. Nowhere

² Dr. Réginald Moreels later became Belgium's new Secretary of State for Development Cooperation.

does the farmer work, despite the fact that this month is the time for field preparation and planting, for beans and spring fruit, for summer maize and bananas. The rains are coming. In a few weeks' time it will be too late.

(Liberation, 26/8/94; my translation)

Importantly, the imminent-famine and eco-catastrophy warnings spread around the globe when the war was still ongoing and a 'needs assessment' could not possibly be carried out.

1.2 'Seeds of Hope' - the perfect solution

The famine-cum-eco-catastrophy scenario originally came from the architects of 'Seeds of Hope', a concerned group with a solution in mind. Holding the key to the proposed restoration, CGIAR offered the following **narrative** on the devastation.

less than 30 per cent of crops planted in this current season will be harvested. Most, if not all, of the harvest will be eaten to avoid imminent starvation. **It is extremely unlikely that seed will be retained for planting in October, 1994 and February 1995.**

The statement concluded:

Initially some planting seed will be provided by relief agencies and NGOs, either directly or as a spin-off from food aid. However, **growing conditions in Rwanda are sufficiently unique that varieties brought in from other areas will be poorly adapted, disease susceptible and thus poor yielding.** It is essential and urgent that adapted germplasm is introduced as quickly as possible.

(CIAT Circular, July/August 1994; emphasis added)

This statement, which has all the trappings of an environmental disaster narrative (see Roe 1995), was released some ten days before the Goma exodus! The war was still ongoing. The emphasis on external intervention and speed was **justified** through reference to the threat of imminent starvation and by assuming that Rwandan farmers were without initiatives of their own. Rwandan farmers were denied agency.

The solution lay in CGIAR's worldwide laboratories, where much of Rwanda's germplasm had been stored.

When CGIAR first exposed the extent of the environmental catastrophe, nobody was in a position to argue against it or to ask questions about whether the gloom-and-doom perspective would apply to all parts of the country and all segments of rural society. How uniform was the devastation? Had farmers really consumed their unique seeds? Was an external solution the only conceivable one? As 'Seeds of Hope' emerged as **the** solution, amidst considerable publicity, such important questions could not as yet be answered.

The difference between 'Seeds and Tools' (Phase 1) and 'Seeds of Hope' (Phase 2) was that the former activity was regarded as an emergency measure, whereas the second programme was more of a development (or rehabilitation) exercise, an attempt to restore Rwanda's farming systems and rich biodiversity.

'Seeds of Hope' was expected to provide a model for cooperation between institutions to bridge the gap between short-term emergency relief and reconstruction and development assistance to Rwandese nationals.

(Rwanda News, October 1994)

The architects of 'Seeds of Hope' regarded 'Seeds and Tools' (Phase 1) as no more than a temporary measure which would ensure farmers planted and reaped 'something' during the fast approaching season. People would receive seeds and plant them, but it was thought unlikely that these seeds would be appropriate for the specific micro-conditions under which they would be grown. Moreover,

Many of the relief agencies and NGOs concerned with restoring food production and security in Rwanda [lacked] technical and scientific insight into the complexities of crop production.

('Seeds of Hope' CGIAR Circular, July or August, p.1)

Despite the clear contours of the official CGIAR diagnosis and solution, scientists with first-hand knowledge and experience of Rwanda's unique seed

patrimonium struggled to accept the correctness of this standardized verdict. Through the vehicle of IDRC, Canada, they asked questions about the uniformity of the devastation and about the need for a **full-scale rescue package from the outside** (J.Voss: personal communication). They pressed for a proper needs assessment at the end of the war. But CGIAR chose not to investigate. Instead, the environmental disaster narrative was kept intact and re-released via the media some five months after the 1990-1994 war ended.

This is how the CGIAR establishment portrayed the agricultural sector:

Virtually all of Rwanda's seed supply has been eaten by the famished citizens or destroyed during the fighting between rival Hutu and Tutsi factions that left as many as one million dead and forced hundreds of thousands in refugee camps...

"Without seeds," said Ismail Serageldin, chairman of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, "Rwanda will not be able to plant next year and will have no harvest. Farmers will become beggars and millions of people would again depend on outside food aid." ...

(**International Herald Tribune**, 13/12/94; emphasis added)

Within the logic of the prevailing narrative, the **International Herald Tribune** referred to 'Seeds of Hope' as 'a plan to avert famine'.

A Belgian paper noted on the same day:

Rwandans have consumed the last seed supplies in order to survive the country's civil war.
(**Financieel Economische Tijd**, 13/12/95)

The crux of the matter is that CGIAR's press communiqués in mid-December 1994 came two months after FAO declared that the September planting season had been saved (see below). CGIAR stuck to its original vision of early July, thus ignoring, as I shall show, a number of corrections to the disaster scenario that had already been made. Moreover, disaster-image reinforcing media distortions accompanied the narrative. **Le**

Soir, for instance, commented on Mr Serageldin's statement:

The destruction caused by the civil war is so vast that the different varieties of beans and sorghum, and of maize grown as cattle feed, have virtually disappeared. Drought during the previous [agricultural] season has aggravated the situation, thus causing an overall reduction in the harvest of 30 percent. This could lead to famine in this formerly self-sufficient country of 7.9 million people. The CGIAR has decided to launch an operation named 'Seeds of Hope' which aims to provide seeds to at least 40 percent of Rwanda's farmers in 1995 and 100 per cent in 1996.

(**Le Soir**; 13/12/94; emphasis added)

Media claims about the agricultural crisis suggested a near-total disaster and, in the above example, a pre-war situation of national food sufficiency. The update in **Le Soir**, based on CGIAR information, was distorted. First, the extent of the harvest and seed losses had been **vast but not uniform** - which (by December) was already known. Second, the drought to which reference is made occurred in South Rwanda, where rains were late, but its occurrence was not nationwide. In fact, North Rwanda had enjoyed a good harvest despite the war. Third, to imply that the country was food sufficient before the war was incorrect.

2 Harvest and Seed Losses: A More Nuanced Picture Emerges (August to late September 1994)

Given the tenacity of the CGIAR narrative, it is pertinent to ask what efforts were undertaken to realistically assess the food and agricultural situation in the immediate post-war era.

The official task of assessing the food situation as soon as the war ended fell to FAO/WFP, whose mission concluded that not all prefectures had been equally affected. Nonetheless, the devastation was vast enough to get a huge international 'Seeds and Tools' operation under way in time for 'Season A'.

Shortly after the FAO/WFP mission was completed, a more nuanced picture of the situation emerged through my own work for SCF-UK and through a

collaborative reassessment of the situation in Butare. The SCF-UK assessment recorded the varied situation **within** prefectures, while revealing that certain regions (notably in the north and east) had harvested more than had been predicted. Leaving aside the situation in the IDP camps, **famine was not imminent in Rwanda** for those who lived at home, **but there was a need to address problems hitherto not highlighted**. In particular, the SCF study found that household food insecurity was not confined to the loss of 'seeds and tools', but included severe, possibly long-term disruptions to familiar seed supply channels and familiar livelihood strategies. Equally important, it became clear that seed losses were far from uniform.

I shall now summarize and comment on the two assessments.

2.1 The FAO/WFP Assessment

The FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment, which covered 9 prefectures between 9-17 August 1994, concluded for the country as a whole that food shortages were most severe, and coupled with a lack of purchasing capacity to meet basic food needs.

Prices of beans and cereals have more than doubled since the beginning of the year, reflecting more the scarcity of supplies than strong effective demand. In the case of roots and tubers, prices [had] increased by more than 200 percent, reflecting also the preference for cheap sources of food. Other evident indicators of the food difficulties faced by the population [were] the low prices of livestock, that farmers sell to obtain resources to buy food, and the widespread evidence of premature harvesting of roots and tubers observed by the Mission in the fields as well as in the markets

(FAO/WFP 1994: 11).

The survey estimated that some 2.5 million people, or half the estimated population inside Rwanda, had inadequate access to food and would require emergency food aid until the next harvest of January 1995. The food insecure included deficit farmers, vulnerable groups (orphans, the poor, the disabled, the elderly, in-patients) and displaced people.

The most food insecure areas, the FAO/WFP study established, were the prefectures of Byumba, where agriculture had come to a halt when the war started in 1990; Gikongoro, drought-prone and flooded with IDPs; Ruhengeri and Kigali, where the poorest workers and farmers were hit hardest. In contrast, the prefectures of Gisenyi, Gitarama, Butare and Kibungo (the latter a region virtually depopulated) appeared to meet the food needs of their present populations (FAO/WFP 1994: 14), but a large deficit of bean seed was forecast. These four prefectures, FAO/WFP claimed, had 'suffered least from food shortfalls as the population [had] had access to harvested and standing crops. The food deficit [was] negligible.' This was the first indication that the impact of the war had not been uniform.

The FAO/WFP report emphasised that swift international action to supply seeds and tools in time for Season A would make redundant the provision of large amounts of food assistance after January 1995. To ensure that distributed seeds would not be consumed, beneficiaries would receive full or partial WFP daily rations of 350 grams of cereals, 120 grams of pulses and 25 grams of vegetable oil (1,883 Kcal) over a period of five months, until the January 1995 harvests.

FAO/WFP estimated that US\$ 400,000 (or more) was needed for the first phase in the rehabilitation of the agricultural sector, a phase known as the 'Seeds and Tools' programme. After securing the necessary funds, FAO/WFP and other organisations bought seed in neighbouring countries and shipped it to Kigali for onward distribution inside Rwanda. Distribution was left to a multitude of NGOs, which caused confusion about actual requirements, distribution capacity and coordination. Not all NGOs came to the weekly 'Seeds and Tools' meetings in Kigali, thus making it difficult for UNREO, the coordinator, to build up and update a coherent picture of needs and deliveries.

When the FAO/WFP study became available, certain agencies (and the present author) became concerned about the positive verdict on Butare. (Later, in retrospect, I would also be puzzled by the negative image portrayed for Ruhengeri.) That Butare would not be an area of particular need was striking, because reports released just before the genocide (Caritas 1994, World Bank 1993) had

forecast a very grim future. The 1993 World Bank report had ranked Butare third on its poverty index of Rwandan prefectures (World Bank 1993). Concern over the FAO/WFP mission report led to a pooling of resources between UNICEF, SCF-UK, WFP, ICRC, SAB (**Service Agricole de Butare**) and the Butare prefecture itself, from which a more detailed, less rapid assessment of the food and agriculture situation got under way.

2.2 The UNICEF/SCF-UK/WFP/ICRC/SAB Assessment

For Butare, the re-assessment found that certain areas to the north, south and south-west of Butare town had been particularly hard hit, because farmers there had borne the brunt of two streams of desperate, hungry refugees. The first wave, mainly Tutsi refugees who feared being massacred by Hutu militias, had come through in April-June; the second wave had arrived in June-July when the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) moved towards Butare and the Hutu population feared retribution.

Assessing harvests and harvest losses in any immediate post-war setting is an activity fraught with methodological problems. Farmers may exaggerate losses (hoping for help), quantification is impossible, and there are precise local factors to be taken into account. In my experience of four Rwandan regions, how much a **commune** or a household had harvested depended not only on whether refugees had passed through, but also on when farmers fled and when they returned. A speedy return minimized losses and also offered the chance to harvest the fields of those who had not returned. Specifically - and this was crucial - households that had planted sweet potatoes before fleeing, had had a crop to return to. Provided the farm had not been raided by fleeing refugees, having a recent sweet potato field crop greatly enhanced the chances of staying reasonably food secure.

The Butare (re)assessment team noted important **internal differences regarding crop losses and seed availability**. Agro-ecological conditions

became significant. Besides having to cope with refugees, some areas had had to cope (as always) with the poverty of their soils. Butare may be situated in the mid-altitude zone, but its soils range from quite fertile in the north-east to very poor in the south and south-west. The decline of fertility along this north-east/south-west axis meant that poor areas visited by refugees stood little chance of keeping their food stocks and seeds.

The reassessment also concluded that major income generating opportunities had been lost. In the case of men, the losses included opportunities for seasonal agricultural work in Bugesera and Kibungo, areas now deserted and very insecure, as well as opportunities for casual work in Kigali.³ Women were equally affected as they could no longer secure seasonal work on the larger farms within the locality.

That farmers had lost not only seeds and tools but also vital livelihood strategies based on mobility (and hence adequate security, which was not guaranteed) was a conclusion which broadened the perspective on agricultural rehabilitation. As many farmers normally buy their seed (or part of the seed), they need income regularly. **The loss of incomes and livelihoods, as opposed to the loss of seeds and tools, suggested that rehabilitation would require more than the mere replacement of inputs and implements.**

This conclusion was also reached in the SCF assessment for other parts of Rwanda.

2.3 The SCF study (outside Butare)

The SCF study, carried out in two highland areas (Ruhengeri, Gikongoro) and one other area situated at middle altitude (Byumba), concluded that income-generating opportunities, usually available as seasonal agricultural work and small-scale trading, had been severely disrupted everywhere. It followed that efforts to reintroduce 'seeds and tools' (the focus of the official rehabilitation programme, Phase I) would need to be complemented with the restoration of livelihood strategies. This

³ In November 1994, ACORD mistakenly believed that Bugesera had been 'stable for relatively longer than other areas [because it was]... taken by the RPF in the early weeks of the fighting' (ACORD 1994: 1). Bugesera, the

site of horrific massacres, also in the run up to the 1994 genocide (Reyntjens 1994: 184-185), remained unsettled for a much longer period.

presented quite a challenge given the omnipresence of the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA), frequent reprisal killings and indiscriminate arrests.

In line with the FAO/WFP assessment, the SCF study (25/8 -25/9/94) confirmed the high vulnerability of Byumba, where agricultural production had been disrupted since the onset of the war. Agriculture in Byumba's border areas had been disrupted for some four years, while disruption in the 'demilitarized zone' had begun in December 1993. The study also confirmed the vulnerability of Gikongoro, which is food insecure even at the best of times. For Ruhengeri prefecture, on the other hand, the study suggested there was a need for nuance. Farmers living near the Kigali-Ruhengeri-Gisenyi road had suffered disproportionately from looting by refugees, but farmers farther inland had often escaped these ravages and, in any case, had fled their homes for short periods only. **These inland farmers had managed to keep crop losses down**, even though livestock losses had often been high. Transport opportunities between Ruhengeri and Kigali (still far from normal in September 1994, but better than elsewhere) ensured that the trade in Irish potatoes was picking up and that some cash would flow back into the area. This clearly aided recovery. On balance, the needs of Byumba and Gikongoro were considered much greater than those of Ruhengeri. The FAO/WFP portrayal of Ruhengeri as food insecure looked suspect.

I shall now summarize the principal findings of the SCF study, starting with the harvest-cum-seed situation for beans and sorghum. Next I shall make some general points regarding the wider socioeconomic framework within which agricultural rehabilitation has to be understood. This involves a look at labour and land, livelihoods, and vulnerable groups.

Beans

Market price increases in Gikongoro prefecture, especially away from the town, indicated how food insecure the area had become. The cost of basic foodstuffs in the region (then referred to as the **Turquoise** 'humanitarian safe zone') were much higher than the average of 200 percent suggested by FAO/WFP. Three-, four- and even five-fold increases were common, while in some areas the

price of preferred bean mixtures (for planting) had risen to ten times or more the price that had prevailed for the same season in 1993.

Initially I went along with the view that these exorbitant prices confirmed that adapted seed was indeed in danger of disappearing. Staying on in the area a little longer, however, taught me that high prices were more likely to reflect temporary, not permanent scarcity. To give just one example, beans suitable for planting in northern Gikongoro had become so scarce that their price has risen to 500 RwF per kilo. That price had been set by traders in Muko market (7/9/94) for varietal mixtures with a high concentration of the locally preferred *gitsimbayogi* and *nyirabukara*. Well beyond the means of even better-off farmers, the price suggested extreme scarcity. But the source of this scarcity could not be established beyond doubt as several plausible explanations existed: near depletion of the genetic stock (the CGIAR scenario); the collapse of the agricultural support system in Gikongoro prefecture; and/or tight border controls by the Rwandese Patriotic Army (RPA) which prevented the movement of produce into the zone. Interviews with farmers suggested the third option was the more plausible one.

In other areas too, farmers complained that their preferred bean mixtures were no longer available. Thus farmers in **communes** west and south of Butare town, where soils are poorer and where tens of thousands of refugees had come through, complained bitterly that appropriate bean seed was no longer available. In Gishamvu, for instance, only bean mixtures from Burundi were available. They did not contain the preferred local varieties (e.g. *rushingacumu*, *carolina*, *ubusosera*, *nyirabukara*) in sufficiently high concentrations. The loss of these locally preferred bean types did not mean, however, that the genetic stock was endangered. As farmers pointed out, the problem rather was that the supply of seed from Bugesera, on which they rely, had dried up (see Kabukuba market, below)

That **scarcity did not necessarily mean that the genetic stock was in danger** was also clear from discussions I had with farmers in Miyove, Byumba Prefecture (12/9/94). They, too, complained about the scarcity of their preferred varietal mixtures in the local market; mixtures that would normally

come from Mutara. Mutara mixtures are preferred because they include the varieties *nyirakabonobono* and *gikoba*. The mixtures available in Miyove in September 1994 had come from Ruhengeri and were judged not to be as appropriate to local soil conditions as the mixtures from Mutara. Potential buyers also objected to the prohibitive price of 120 RwF/kg. Having only recently taken up agriculture again, after living in camps for the past two years, Miyove farmers simply did not have the means to purchase the seed on offer. Bean seed from Mutara, however, was still reaching markets to the east of Byumba (e.g. Bwisige), but the overall volume of beans available for trade had been much reduced. Mutara beans no longer reached Miyove. The lesson I learned from this (and from similar experiences in other parts of the country, see below) was that **restoring biodiversity required more than a straightforward substitution (or reintroduction) of seed, it was also necessary to address the restoration of customary seed supply channels.** (An additional lesson was that so-called 'locally adapted' seed was often a mixture part of which was derived from outside the locality itself. See Pottier 1994b.)

In places where Mutara beans **were** available, as in Bwisige **secteur**, farmers complained that they lacked the money to buy the beans they needed for seed purposes, for **triage**. Some calculation is useful here. The Mutara bean mixtures normally contain only about 20 per cent locally adapted bean seed, which means that to obtain 1kg of seed, farmers had to buy 5kg of beans in the market. (This cash constraint reinforces my earlier point about the need to restore livelihoods.) Farmers in Bwisige lacked cash because they lived too far away from the main Kabale-Kigali road where ICRC/WFP distributed food aid. People in **communes** nearer the main road could choose to sell the donated food to obtain cash for seed, which many did. Food aid - especially rice - was sold to traders from Kigali.

I reached a similar conclusion for Butare prefecture, which, like Byumba, depends to a large degree on bean seed imports from outside, e.g. from nearby Bugesera. Many preferred bean mixtures in Butare contain some seed from Bugesera, the region with which an active flow of labour and produce is normally maintained. Unavailability of 'local seed'

had much to do with depopulation and the high insecurity in Bugesera.

Situated in the south of Kigali prefecture, Bugesera, a well watered and normally fertile region, had been described in the FAO assessment as 'very seriously affected by the civil war' and suffering 'very heavy crop losses'. With hindsight, these losses were not so much real as reflecting a shortage of farm labour. Some five weeks after the FAO/WFP Mission visited the region, I visited the market at Kabukuba (19/9/94) to find that the two most common local bean mixtures **were** available and sold relatively cheaply (45F/kg). With a significant number of people drifting back to Bugesera during the intervening period (late August) it became clear that **harvests were late rather than lost.**

The first bean seed mixture, ideal for planting in banana groves, was dominated by red and purplish beans (eg *mutiki*) and contained a good percentage of the small, peanut-like and much praised *imberege* bean. The second mixture, ideal for planting in valleys (or on hills when rain is insufficient), had an overall yellow-orangey tinge and contained plenty of *muhondo* and *ntabeza* beans. **Farmers were confident that harvest losses, while significant, had not impaired their capacity for meeting local seed requirements.** Farmers explained they had fled their homes in April and had returned only in late August, which was well past the normal harvest time for beans, i.e. June. Nevertheless, they could harvest enough beans so as not to endanger the local supply of seed for September-October. (As Rwanda's south-east remained seriously depopulated, farmers who returned home could help themselves to the crops of absent neighbours.)

Importantly, however, farmer optimism at Kabukuba market was not shared by merchants. They were concerned about the low level of trade, as a result of which they would fail to supply farmers elsewhere in the country, especially those living at the periphery of the normal sphere of trade. This included Gikongoro. Seed from Bugesera did reach markets in the northern parts of Butare Prefecture, as I observed in Nyabisindu, but farmers in **communes** to the west and south of Butare, were deprived. The merchants also expressed pessimism regarding the availability of seed in future years.

The very low population level might lead to a dramatic decline.

Finally, there were areas where seed availability had been little affected by the war. Ruhengeri was a case in point. In several parts of the prefecture, for instance at the *Centre de négoce* at Gakenke, near Nemba, which I visited at the end of August, farmers were optimistic about the availability of planting beans. This bi-weekly market had just started up again and thousands attended that day (30/8/94), compared with just a handful of people three weeks earlier. The revival of this important regional market, situated along the Kigali-Ruhengeri road, came at the onset of the 1995A season and showed up a **near-normal picture as far as the bean supply was concerned**. Notable was the presence of ample quantities of locally adapted mixtures from the nearby **commune** of Cyeru, which traditionally provides this market with beans. If market-goers had a request it was for more eating-beans (of the type ICRC/WFP distributed) to make sure the available seed mixtures would not be eaten before planting. The bean price, 80F/kg for both bush and climbing beans (against 60-65F the previous year), was considered high, but not high enough to suggest scarcity.

One important lesson for conducting needs assessments under post-war conditions is that such activities must be carried out at regular intervals. Regarding bean seed availability in northern Rwanda, for example, the few weeks in between the FAO/WFP assessment and my own had allowed new evidence to emerge. This new evidence countered the dominant/persisting disaster narrative.

By dwelling on the case of bean seed, the following messages should have been conveyed.

a) Seed scarcity in post-war Rwanda was not uniform, nor was it synonymous with the destruction of genetic stock. **Claims that genetic stock was virtually wiped out were clearly exaggerated**. The scenario conformed with what informed agricultural researchers had envisaged.

b) Efforts to restore on-farm biodiversity must take into account that many farmers rely to some extent on seed supplies from outside

their areas. Farmer definitions of 'locally adapted seed' do not preclude purchases from nearby areas. Rather the opposite may hold as farmers continuously experiment with new planting materials. Despite the difficult situation inside Rwanda, beans to be used as food/seed would circulate in markets, albeit on a reduced scale.

c) Restoring biodiversity must include the restoration of supply channels and, ultimately, the restoration of livelihood patterns and strategies.

For other crops, the SCF study reached the following conclusions.

Sweet potatoes

Disruption in the production of sweet potatoes was closely linked to the actual dates on which people fled from and returned to their homes. An important issue was whether farmers fled before or after planting dry-season sweet potatoes. Where farmers fled after planting, there existed a good chance that vine cuttings would be available for use in September-October.

Farmers expected a severe shortage of cuttings during 'Season A', yet most women farmers interviewed believed that the problem would be resolved by the second planting season, which started in January-February 1995. As details of the 'Seeds of Hope' restoration plan were already circulating, the SCF study concluded that one sub-programme - i.e. the provision of sweet potato cuttings planned for the 1995 'Season B' - would not be needed. This was later confirmed through a combined MINAGRI/FAO study (see below).

Cassava

Cassava production was disrupted as there had been little or no planting during the months of massacre and intensified war. In some areas, this could lead to a shortage of cassava in approximately one to one-and-a-half years' time. (How serious this problem would be was hard to predict, but it was unlikely to arise before 1996.) However, as weeding had been neglected, it was clear that harvests in the near future would also be poor.

Sorghum

As with beans, the precise timing of farmers' absences determined whether and how much they could harvest. The surprise factor, however, was that sorghum had proved a very resilient crop, harvestable well beyond its normal dates.

Thus in Kabukuba market, Bugesera, farmers spoke of sorghum as the field crop that had survived best. Returning in late August, farmers were still able to harvest sorghum with a minimum of loss. (Sorghum is normally harvested in June and July.) That the good field crop had also turned into a good harvest was obvious from the volume of sorghum that market traders were buying up for retailing elsewhere. Because of the good supply, the price farmers received was a low 16-17F/kg, with some producers complaining they had been paid as little as 10F/kg. Bugesera and many other parts of the dry, hot region of Amayaga (basically Eastern Rwanda) export sorghum to the rest of the country during this time of year, including Ruhengeri. (Being higher up, Ruhengeri has a different cycle for sorghum production and harvests in late February or early March.)

The main sorghum varieties grown in and around Kabukuba, and throughout Amayaga, are the local *hilongo* variety and the improved, fast-maturing *bagarumbise* normally purchased from ISAR, Rwanda's national agricultural research institute. The immediate future of ISAR (and hence the availability of *bagarumbise*) was uncertain as the station had been a target for mass killings during the genocide. Rehabilitation of ISAR, however, was part of the 'Seeds of Hope' plan.⁴ *Kilongo*, on the other hand, was in no danger of becoming scarce.

Varieties grown in northern Rwanda include three types that can be grown either on upland farms or in valleys. These are the favoured *muhimpundu*, which yields very well, *ndamuga*, which gives good results, and *amabereyingoma*. The farmers interviewed at Gatagara, Ruhengeri, explained that they fled their homes in March, which was immediately after harvesting, but they were unable to take much of the harvested sorghum with them. As they fled,

scores of refugees descended upon the area, looting whatever sorghum had been stored in people's homes. Again, though, it is important to stress that the situation varied from **commune** to **commune**. In Macaca, unlike Gatagara, not much sorghum was looted and enough sorghum seed preserved despite the poor yield that resulted from the inability to weed.

As a general rule, the sorghum crop in northern Rwanda (harvested, looted) had suffered more than the crop in the eastern part of the country (not harvested until much later; hardly looted).

Livelihoods and internal seasonal labour migrations

Farmers stressed that the **restoration of opportunities for seasonal wage work - which includes the restoration of internal migrant flows - is essential to the rehabilitation of the agricultural sector**. Taking up wage labour opportunities involves inter-zonal migration, especially by men, but this remained impossible as the end of the war had not ended the insecurity inside Rwanda. Along with the problem of lawfully sorting out access to 'vacant' farms, the restoration of opportunities for seasonal wage work was one of the more formidable challenges the government faced in the context of agricultural rehabilitation. To give an example from Gikongoro, farmers who were host to refugees in Musebeya **commune** explained they were helping relatives and friends from areas such as Bugesera and Butare, i.e. areas towards which the male hosts normally departed in September-October to take up agricultural work. In normal times, Musebeya's migrant men bring home not only wages but also food (sorghum) **and seed** (beans, sorghum, maize). A similar flow of labour takes place when Bugesera's coffee crops are ready to be picked.

Seasonal opportunities in agriculture had been disrupted in two major ways. First, the war and lingering insecurity had halted **inter-prefectural migrations by men** towards productive areas. As September-October is an ideal time for taking up

⁴ 'Seeds of Hope' has also been criticised by the Rwanda Government, FAO, and several NGOs for its failure to concentrate on **in-country** research, multiplication and

capacity building (Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, 1996: 44-45).

agricultural wage work, a vast number of men and their households were cut off from primary sources of income, even from sources of seed. Second, the absence of large(r) landowners throughout the country, many of whom had fled or been killed, had led to a **dramatic reduction in local wage labour opportunities, especially for women.** This means that both women and men had lost major sources of income.

Households reliant on seasonal agricultural wage work - and they are numerous - had suffered severe financial losses over at least one full year. In September 1994, this constraint was of the same magnitude as the unavailability of seeds and tools.

Vulnerable people

At the end of the SCF study, it was obvious that the category of vulnerable people, as outlined in the FAO/WFP report, needed to be expanded. To the sub-categories identified by FAO/WFP it was necessary to add: communities not reached by the aid organizations (e.g. in certain eastern parts of Byumba); communes affected by prolonged military insecurity (e.g. in Bugesera and south Butare); and widows who had lost husbands, property and their entitlement to access land.⁵

In mid-September 1994, the RPF administration in Butare prefecture compiled figures on widows, orphans and unaccompanied children. These figures were expected to run into several tens of thousands. Within the group of affected farmers, described by FAO/WFP as having suffered harvest losses and being denied adequate access to food and seeds, special attention should go to those farmers who had been host to internally displaced people. (The RPF-led administration is unlikely to do this as it argues that the population of the south-west helped to protect the perpetrators of genocide.) Another vulnerable group to be included are the non-pastoralist returnees who settled in Byumba. Being very resource poor and having to adapt to a more settled way of life, such returnees must be prioritized for assistance.

3 Season 1995A and its Effects on 'Seeds of Hope'

On 18 October 1994, FAO announced that the international 'Seeds and Tools' relief effort had succeeded. The communiqué said:

FAO estimates that by the end of October, 2 million persons in Rwanda will have been provided with seeds. FAO reported that the co-ordination of seed and tool distribution among NGOs has been good; however, transport of these items remains a serious problem.

(InterPress Service, 18/10/94)

The figure of two million persons reached had to be put into perspective, however, because the claimed success contrasted with the failure to persuade refugees and IDPs to return home. The figure of 2 million may well have included all those in need who lived **at home** inside Rwanda, which makes the achievement impressive, but not reached were the close to two million IDPs.⁶ In sum, the danger of another lost planting season was averted, but concerns remained. Above all, what had not been averted was the danger of hunger and famine for the country as a whole. Up to two million people inside Rwanda, living mostly in IDP camps, would not harvest in January 1995.

At the end of the 1995A season, before 'Seeds of Hope' would come into effect, the Minister of Agriculture reflected on the first post-war harvest. The picture, still somewhat bleak, nonetheless confirmed that the narrative/prediction of a total ecological disaster had been exaggerated and that a major food crisis had been averted.

... Since April 1994 three out of every four farmers have been displaced. The harvests last August-September have been largely insufficient. The December-January harvests have yielded between 47 and 55 per cent of a normal year.

According to the Ministry, cereal production is down by 64 per cent, legumes (then the only

⁵ For an excellent discussion of social vulnerability and land access in Rwanda in the late 1980s, see André (1995).

⁶ UNAMIR's estimate in mid-September was 1,967,960.

source of protein) by 70 per cent, bananas by 38 per cent, and tubers by 57 per cent.

“Losses vary according to prefecture,” Mr Iyamuremye explains. In South Kigali, Bugesera and South Butare, the damage is enormous: there is hardly anyone there, and so there is hardly any seed. In North Kigali, the situation is satisfactory ...

In the North, in Gisenyi and Ruhengeri, “the situation is normal. The population is present and cultivates. We are hoping for good harvests.” Right now, Ruhengeri provides Kigali with Irish potatoes. Byumba, where most of the fighting between the warring armies took place and where the population fled, has become repopulated ... “The people are back and enjoy excellent yields following the four year fallow that was forced upon them,” the Minister continues. Finally, although the population of Kibungo has fled to Tanzania, the banana groves still provide us with ample fruits.

Regarding the July [1995] harvests, Rwandan authorities are predicting yields between 60 and 70 per cent of what is normally harvested ...

(La Libre Belgique 15/3/95)

FAO/WFP (1995) confirmed the broader picture Iyamuremye sketched, but raised the agricultural performance to closer the 60 per cent mark. Times were hard, but with 2 million people still abroad, the achievement was not a disaster. The good harvest in North Rwanda, the second consecutive good harvest in fact, was most encouraging. The FAO verdict: ‘Total 1995 season A food crop production (excluding oilseeds, fruits and vegetables) is estimated at 1.4 million tons, which, in cereal equivalent terms is only 58 per cent of the pre-civil strife average’ (FAO/WFP 1995).

Although FAO/WFP recommended ‘protracted donor support ... in order to restore staple food production to pre-civil strife level’ (FAO/WFP 1995), it also emerged from assessments by NGOs, notably CARE International, that the availability of certain

crops in certain regions had been higher than expected. Assessing Season A harvests and its own role in ensuring their success, CARE (1995) questioned, for example, ‘the appropriateness of sorghum for future distribution ... in Rwanda...’ As part of its programme for emergency relief and recovery assistance, CARE had purchased sorghum for distribution in five prefectures. Subsequently, CARE estimated that most of the distributed seed had been consumed rather than planted!⁷ The high consumption rates (for which a number of reasons could be listed) indicated that farmers had their own ways of procuring suitable seed (CARE 1995: 6). Given the very low price of sorghum in Eastern Rwanda so soon after the war ended (see Kabukuba, above), the CARE finding is hardly surprising.

Equally revealing in terms of Rwanda’s capacity to procure its own seed, a needs assessment by MINAGRI/FAO in late 1994 concluded for cassava and sweet potatoes that a disaster scenario did not apply. MINAGRI/FAO then recommended that ‘Seeds of Hope’ drop these crops from its intervention programme (D. Donati: pers. comm.).

So what happened to ‘Seeds of Hope’?

Given that by December 1994 it was known that sorghum, cassava and sweet potatoes had survived as planting material, it is something of a surprise that CGIAR continued with its original disaster narrative: simple diagnosis, perfect solution. Equally puzzling is that CGIAR never carried out its own assessment, despite an initial promise that the programme would ‘assess diversity in Rwanda immediately after the civil war’ (Scowcroft, ‘Seeds of Hope’ **Circular**, 8/7/94) As it turned out, no such assessment was undertaken.

Two questions now come to mind: Why did CGIAR persist with the narrative? And what happened to the programme? I shall deal with the second question first, reserving the other one for the conclusions.

⁷ Consumption rates were estimated at: Byumba (57 per cent), Gikongoro (84 per cent), Gitarama (79 per cent), Kibungo (63 per cent) and Kigali (58 per cent).

The story that needs to be told now is that 'Seeds and Tools' (Phase 1) was a successful operation which made the mega 'Seeds of Hope' programme virtually redundant. In addition, farmer resourcefulness had been underestimated, while 'Seeds of Hope' had exaggerated in its prediction of vast genetic erosion resulting from a short war.

The crux of the matter is that 'Seeds of Hope' had been conceived on two flawed assumptions.⁸ First, the claim in July 1994 that germplasm would be lost on a significant scale was exaggerated. Germplasm does not disappear just like that; the timeframe of the Rwanda disaster had been too short for loss of germplasm to occur. Especially in the case of beans and sweet potatoes, farmers turned out to be more resourceful than had been anticipated. Food aid and 'Seeds and Tools' distributions in August-September 1994 had also helped farmers to conserve seeds. Second, the germplasm collections preserved in laboratories outside Rwanda (in some cases over a thousand kilometres away from the areas of origin) turned out to be not-quite-like the germplasm found *in situ*. Because of the lack of interaction with soil, laboratory preserved germplasm was no longer 100 percent identical to the (evolved) on-farm samples found in Rwanda today.

The collections returned to Rwanda were also, allegedly, too small to be useful for seed multiplication. Some 100 bean varieties, for example, were handed over to the **Service de Semences Sélectionnées (SSS)**, but only four major types came in quantities large enough to be useful for multiplication. Of these four varieties, three (K20, A221 and H75) were thought not to be very well adapted to conditions in Rwanda (D. Donati: pers. comm.). Donati singled out K20 as a bean which, even if productive, was insufficiently resistant to viruses. His main point, which conforms with views in the Ministry of Rehabilitation (MINIREISO), was that the benefits of 'Seeds of Hope' would have gone principally to commercial interests outside Rwanda. 'Seeds of Hope' had been a case of 'the cat chasing its tail'.

Conclusions

When Prime Minister Twagiramungu stepped down in late August 1995, he revealed how the RPF expertly exploits the guilt with which the international community is burdened.

'That the international community did not prevent the genocide has hit her deep in the stomach,' analyses Twagiramungu. 'She feels guilty and in debt to the RPF - which did end the genocide - and eases her conscience with a variety of aid programmes.'

(De Standaard 14/9/95)

Although 'Seeds of Hope' was an example of the kind of aid Twagiramungu referred to, it is doubtful that it would have been based on guilt. Rather, CGIAR regarded the Rwanda crisis as a perfect opportunity to justify 25 years of germplasm collecting around the world. Importantly, this opportunity came at a time when international genebanks were under attack.

For CGIAR, 1994 was a crossroads year. As an ODI briefing paper reveals, by 1994 IARCs had slipped from the top of most donors' agendas. For a variety of reasons - e.g. agricultural expansion being blamed for deforestations worldwide, fears that private capital would gain control of much of the world's germplasm, and others - CGIAR had seen its core funding fall by more than 20 per cent in five years. When the Rwanda human disaster became evident, CGIAR was facing a 'crisis of direction and support' (ODI, September 1994).

CGIAR's decision to go ahead with a mega seed replacement programme for Rwanda preceded the FAO/WFP (1994) assessment and was made on the assumption - never investigated! - that the loss of genetic material was vast. That the programme might not be responding to real need was of no concern to the programme's architects. They had the means to intervene, so they would go in and do the job. A proper needs assessment would have required quite a modification to 'Seeds of Hope' as conceptualised by CGIAR⁹ - so it was better to remain ignorant.

⁸ This information is based on interviews with Francesco del Re (WFP) and Daniel Donati (FAO) in Kigali, in August 1995.

This reminds of famine situations and the particular logic that when agencies (with media help) portray the people affected as helpless, they can then justify their intervention and reproduce themselves through it. There is then no need to wait, no need to ask questions about how the affected population might cope in the absence of outside intervention. In the face of famine, the international community (and media) pay scant attention to local coping strategies. Instead, they focus on helplessness - helpless victims whose survival can only be secured (the logic continues) through international relief (D'Souza 1988). Whilst such victims exist, there are also others who attempt to survive through their own efforts. More to the point even, coping strategies, as De Waal (1989) has shown for Darfur, may be misread by observers. In short, outsiders who come to the rescue have a poorly developed capacity (read: inclination) for understanding how affected populations are themselves trying to cope. By ignoring local attempts to cope, outside agencies can formulate their own (standardized) version of events and offer their own standardized rescue package.

The same mechanism - misread, standardize the diagnosis, standardize the response - is at work in the context of ecology and forestry in Africa, where it is now understood that dramatic landscape changes easily result in diagnoses and prescriptions that do not correspond to the realities and perceptions of those affected. The professional failure to investigate local meanings of landscape change results in a standardized 'packaging' of environmental problems and a universal, equally standardized approach to solutions (Leach and Mearns 1996: 19 - 20; Ferguson 1994). The practice inculcates the view that stewardship over natural resources is a state responsibility which can be delegated to expert elites, national and international (Roe 1995: 1066).

It was the same in Rwanda. The way the Rwanda agricultural crisis has been portrayed and sustained via the media has made the people of Rwanda seem totally helpless and dependent on external aid.

Whilst this characterization may have helped to unlock international funds at a time when the new government was desperate for such funds, the rescue package for agriculture (and the media messages in support) unmistakably perpetuated the image of Rwanda as a helpless country.

That famine was averted in the aftermath of the war and genocide had much to do with the international 'Seeds and Tools' effort, I do not deny this. But famine was also averted through the efforts of the people of Rwanda themselves and through efforts by the RPF who, aided by UNICEF and the Catholic Relief Service (CRS), mobilized the population for the purpose of harvesting and planting. Farmers' individual efforts to procure the right seed for their farms went unrecorded, yet contributed in no small way to the aversion of famine conditions. Farmers had been resilient and resourceful, knowing full well how to get by under difficult circumstances.

Immediately following the war, the international community failed to appreciate the diversity of conditions inside Rwanda's food production sector. Available seed supplies were never investigated, nor was any attention paid to the **differential impact** the war had had on and within Rwanda's prefectures. This underreporting enabled the international aid world to 'package' Rwanda as a country whose devastated agriculture could not recover without the kind of technical, apolitical intervention the West (read: CGIAR) had in mind. It could therefore be argued that 'Helpless Rwanda' was created to help legitimate the very existence of a super power which sought recognition for its services.

See following page for a postscript to this article and references.

⁹ Initially a budget of US\$ 1,800,000 was made available for the programme, about half of which came from USAID. Further funding was secured from the governments of Australia, Britain and Switzerland and

the aid organization World Vision (*New Scientist* 27/8/94). At a later stage, the World Bank stepped in with additional funds.

Postscript

The purpose of this article was to reflect on Rwanda's agricultural needs and their assessment in the immediate aftermath of the 1994 war. It is not therefore an evaluation of the entire 'Seeds of Hope' programme, which began in early 1995. Despite its critical edge, the article must not be read as involving criticism of the 'Seeds of Hope'

initiative itself. In terms of its vision, concern and goodwill, 'Seeds of Hope' was/is highly commendable. It is my hope that the same foresight and action will be applied in future emergencies, but with more emphasis on assessing farmers' post-war needs and more sensitivity to how these are represented internationally.

J.P.

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