



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

Focus: Soil Erosion and the Food Supply

Rwanda's population is growing and this has an impact on the natural resources such as land, water, and other non-renewable resources.

Some of the impacts of a growing population involve land degradation, soil erosion, the decline in soil fertility and the cutting of trees.

Erosion and land degradation have long been considered severe and a major reason for the food shortages in Rwanda.

The Rwanda Ministry of Agriculture says that almost one and a half million tons of fertile soils per year are lost due to soil erosion.

Many significant efforts have been made to fight against soil erosion.

This has included trees being planted around homes and field boundaries, as well as the use of terracing.

Still, the deterioration of the soil continues, and food availability becomes harder and harder.

Adjusting the hilly farms referred to as terracing, is not an isolated solution. This should be combined with the reinforcement of organic farming which mainly involves the use of organic fertilizers and sprays.

The Weekly for Rwanda Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

The Problem: Soil Erosion leads to Food Shortages

The Rwanda National Statistics Institute has reported that more than eighty percent of the cultivated land in Rwanda is protected against soil erosion. This was in 2013, and it was one of the measures that the government made with the purpose of increasing the harvest. Some of the anti-erosion policies which have been encouraged and practiced are the planting of trees where they'd previously been cut. The farmers have also been encouraged to adjust their hilly lands using methods called waterways and terraces.

But, some parts of the country still face challenges related to soil erosion. Mukashema Adrie, at the Rwanda Natural Resource Authority says that the Southern Province is on the top of the list. Soil erosion leads to low fertility of land, and which in return, leads to low productivity – and less food.

But the anti-erosion practices are

not the stand alone measure to increase the harvest. There are some other things which can be done.

This includes mechanical and biological measures. That is -- the use of manure or compost, which is important to restore and maintain the soil so that it provides the essential air, water and nutrients that crops need to survive. Manure and compost are readily available to many farmers.

The farmers can also use water retention systems in the fields in order to prevent the rainfall from washing away the topsoil. They can also plant crops of different kinds in the space between rows which is referred to as inter-cropping and do crop rotation which involves changing the types of crops you plant each season.

These methods combined, can help local communities fight against food shortages, by boosting their productivity with a healthier cultivable land.

Activities for Journalists

Rwanda is a hilly land. And most of the population lives off farming incomes. Journalists need to help farmers understand that farming is a business. They need to understand that they need to protect their investment – just like a factory owner makes repairs to his or her equipment to make sure the factory runs smoothly – the farmer must do the same – including protecting and improving the soil and land that he or she farms.

Soil erosion destroys land and farmers should work hard to take care of it.

The journalists have the role to play. They have to remind the farmers that food shortages occur as result of not taking care of the land. They have to show them that it is in their hands to do something.

Journalists have to show farmers that, even if taking care of their land makes them spend more money and energy in farming, it is rewarding to them in the long run. Reporters may have to explain to farmers why it is important to invest in their land.

If farmers have already adjusted their hilly lands through what is called terracing, they have to understand that this is not enough. They have something else to do, like the person who is cooking must add some ingredients in his/her recipe in order to have a delicious meal.

- As journalists, let's explain all these farming techniques to increase fertility to farmers, in case they don't know about them. Let's use the voices of farmers who already know about these techniques, to explain to others, as farmers tend to believe in their colleagues more than the experts.
- Let's then look for profiles of farmers who have practiced some of these methods and are happy with the results. They can share this with other farmers – describing how their harvest was before, what they changed, what they invested to make the changes – and ultimately -- how the final results compared to what they

were doing before. These role model farmers must tell their story.

- Explain and talk about crop rotation, the use of manure and crop waste and intercropping methods by doing vox pops with farmers. You can also have experts – such as agronomists and others – explain in detail what farmers need to do and how these challenges can be opportunities down the road.

Community Engagement

- a) Start conversation, talk about all these methods that are in place and why they are there. Remind the farmers that these challenges will ultimately bring about solutions.
- b) Do vox pops, invite experts and farmers, and engage farmers through call-ins and SMS.
- c) Broadcast the profiles of farmers who are doing innovative farming techniques – so they can be role models for others.
- d) Start the conversation and create awareness and bring about action.

Useful Links

<http://www.sustainabletable.org/207/soil-quality>
<http://statistics.gov.rw/publications/article/large-farming-plots-protected-soil-erosion-rwanda>
<http://www.rw.one.un.org/mdg/mdg7>
<http://fsg.afre.msu.edu/rwanda/erosion.pdf>
<http://www.irinnews.org/report/80189/rwanda-soil-erosion-affecting-farm-productivity>

Useful source of information

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 Soil Erosion and Land Tenure Regularization in Rwanda: A Historical Perspective/ 786-786_paper