



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

## Soil Conservation

In Rwanda, land is one of the resources with a high percentage of people living off farming incomes. It's estimated that each family cultivates almost half a hectare of land. This means a lot of land is being used for farming – and it often leads to soils becoming unproductive due to overuse.

Various farming stakeholders recommend that Rwanda invest in land management structures, soil fertility management, soil erosion control and training farmers in preparing their hilly lands for fighting against erosion. What they make are called radical terraces. If all these measures are used – the health of the soil is likely to improve – and that translates to higher crop yields – more food and more money for farmers.

With the Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture in Rwanda Phase II in 2012, erosion protection infrastructure was applied to more than 70% of land by introducing terraces. In different districts these have proven to be successful techniques.

There are also other conservation techniques that needs to be associated with what has already been done, in order to maximize soil fertility and productivity such as regular crop rotation, no burning of crop residues and so on.

# 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: Lack of Knowledge about Conservation

In recent years, the government of Rwanda has implemented several ambitious programs to increase the productivity of the agriculture sector.

The vision of the government is to modernize agriculture and livestock to achieve food security. The most important way to achieve this vision is to have Rwandans take action. It will mean changing the way many farmers raise their crops and livestock. Today they have to do agriculture and livestock as a business. And at the same time, they have to think about practicing agriculture using environmental-friendly methods in order to conserve the fertility of land and then have more productivity.

Soil conservation is among the best measures to maintain soil fertility. Soil conservation refers

to the prevention of soil erosion and soil degradation – caused by deforestation and heavy rain.

Unfortunately, farmers do not have sufficient knowledge about improved techniques for soil conservation, or they do not believe in them yet.

These techniques include regular crop rotation and no burning of crop residues and cover crops. Crop residue and cover crops help the soil to retain moisture and protect it from erosion and nutrient loss.

The Rwandan government has policies in place to conserve the land, but farmers often are not aware of these practices. In addition, the benefits may not be immediate – which may cause some farmers to ignore them.

## Activities for Journalists

Protecting the soil is an issue that should be everybody's concern. The government of Rwanda has done a lot, but there are still gaps between the policies and the information that farmers have about those policies.

The government has tried to carry out some awareness campaigns, and the agronomists are helping farmers put in practice the agricultural policies. But things are not implemented well when farmers do not believe in it.

That's where the role of journalists is important: translating complex policies into a language that farmers can understand and support.

Media has to talk about the benefits of soil conservation techniques by explaining it in a way that farmers can understand it.

- Why will farmers be better off if they practice soil conservation techniques? Will they have bigger and better crops?

Journalists have to make sure that farmers themselves talk about challenges resulting from not applying conservation methods. They might not know that they are referring to conservation, but they will know what the challenges are:

- Do farmers face challenges when practicing conservation farming? What are those challenges?
- Talk to extension officers and ask them to explain how farmers might overcome those challenges. Talk to

farmers who have overcome challenges related to conservation farming, and share their profile and testimonies through radio shows.

- Your radio station may also help the community understand what soil conservation is all about by producing a series of programs focusing on some of the techniques of soil conservation like crop rotation, cover crop and so on.
- Journalists may interview an agricultural officer on the techniques and benefits of soil conservation.

Some of the benefits of soil conservation could include an improvement in soil fertility which improves water penetration; reduced weed populations over time and increased production.

### Useful Links

1. <http://study.com/academy/lesson/soil-conservation-fighting-soil-erosion-with-sustainable-soil-use.html>
2. [http://greenliving.lovetoknow.com/Ways\\_to\\_Conserve\\_Soil](http://greenliving.lovetoknow.com/Ways_to_Conserve_Soil)
3. [http://www.rw.undp.org/content/dam/rwanda/docs/operations/Projects/Environment%20and%20energy/RW\\_EE\\_Sustainable\\_land\\_use\\_and\\_management.pdf](http://www.rw.undp.org/content/dam/rwanda/docs/operations/Projects/Environment%20and%20energy/RW_EE_Sustainable_land_use_and_management.pdf)
4. <http://betuco.be/rwanda/Agroforestry%20,%20mineral%20fertilization%20and%20land%20husbandry%20in%20Rwanda.pdf>

### Useful source of information

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