

## Agriculture and Food Security in Burundi: European donors must help build the population's long-term resilience and agricultural capacity

Since 2015 Burundi has plunged in a security crisis triggered by President Pierre Nkuruziza's controversial third mandate in power and by numerous reports of human rights violations<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, since 2015, the country's economy has been spiralling down, with an important devaluation of the currency and a decline in the purchasing power of Burundian citizens. Extreme climate events in 2017 and 2016 have further worsened the situation, causing both disruption to local agricultural production and the displacement of the populations concerned. Climate-related displacements add to the population movements triggered by the political crisis, which resulted in about 430 000 people fleeing the country<sup>2</sup>, adding further pressure on agricultural land. The combination of the political and climate crisis has resulted in mounting food insecurity: according to the World Food Programme and to the Burundian government, 45,5% of households in Burundi were food insecure in 2017<sup>3</sup>. In March 2016, the European Union (EU), Burundi's main development partners, decided to trigger the political dialogue under article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, resulting in the suspension of all development aid disbursed directly to the government. Other European donors have reconsidered their engagement in Burundi in the domains of land and agriculture. In this Policy Brief the European Network for Central Africa (EurAc) reviews the developments in the land and agriculture over the past years and calls for the EU and Switzerland to strengthen their support to rural actors in the country.

### The political crisis is also a crisis of food security and agricultural production

Agriculture is the main source of food for 66,7% of rural households in Burundi, and it provides on average 71,5% of households revenues.<sup>4</sup> Although a landlocked and hilly country, Burundi has historically been relatively self-sufficient in food production importing only about 5% of the foodstuffs consumed in the country<sup>5</sup>. Over the past three years, a combination of climatic and political instability has put the food-production capacity of Burundian farmers under serious stress. In fact, Season B in 2017 was characterised by poor rain patterns and drought, particularly in the Eastern and Northern provinces of the country where severely affected agricultural outputs. On the contrary, season B in 2018 was characterised by heavy rains and flooding, although the effects on overall production may be offset by production of moisture-tolerant crops and by the relatively good harvest of December 2017<sup>6</sup>. Pests have also played a role in creating food insecurity, especially in the Congo Nile area, in the Imbo plain and in the Buragane region<sup>7</sup>. Although food production in the country is slightly improving, the situation varies in different areas, and low purchasing power still hinders food security<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, insecurity and political instability have also had an impact on agricultural practices. According to the latest *Emergency Food Security Analysis* (EFSA)<sup>9</sup>, 29,1% of households surveyed reported to have been affected by political instability since April 2015. Of this, 20,2% lamented

*The convergence of a political, economic and climatic crisis has resulted in mounting food insecurity for the Burundian population, especially in rural areas.*

<sup>1</sup> EurAc, [Authoritarian abuses and covert elimination of dissident voices in Burundi. What role for the European Union ?](#), Mai 2018

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, [Burundi Regional Refugee Response Plan](#), December 2018

<sup>3</sup> World Food Programme (WFP) & République du Burundi, [Analyse de sécurité alimentaire en situation d'urgence au Burundi](#), Mars 2017

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>5</sup> Beuret, J-E, Fino, D, *Aide au Développement et Conflit Armé au Burundi. Pourquoi Rester, Comment Agir ?*, Karthala, Geneva, 2009

<sup>6</sup> Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS NET), [Burundi Remote Monitoring Update](#), April 2018

<sup>7</sup> WFP & République du Burundi, [Analyse de sécurité alimentaire en situation d'urgence au Burundi](#), March 2017

<sup>8</sup> FEWS NET, [Despite favourable harvest, limited incomes continue to hinder food access](#), February 2018

<sup>9</sup> WFP & République du Burundi, [Analyse de sécurité alimentaire en situation d'urgence au Burundi](#), Mars 2017

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*

the increase in the price of basic foodstuff as the main consequence of political instability<sup>10</sup>. In fact, food inflation in the country oscillated between about 15% (in 2017) and 14,3% (March 2018)<sup>11</sup>. As foodstuffs represent the most important expense for most rural households, it is clear that a reduction of their purchasing power will also impact other basic expenses such as health and education, with impacts on the overall economy. Such important food inflation may be attributed to a number of factors, among which the government stricter policies on street vending in urban areas<sup>12</sup>, the effects of the political instability on cross-border trade (especially in the Northern and Eastern Province)<sup>13</sup> as well as the afore-mentioned climatic conditions in 2017 and 2018 agricultural seasons. The fall in the Burundians' purchasing power is also a result of the overall devaluation of the national currency following the country's falling agricultural production and the degradation of the relations between the Burundian government and its development partners<sup>14</sup> as well as of short-sighted monetary policies<sup>15</sup>.

The convergence of a political, economic and climatic crisis has resulted in mounting food insecurity for the Burundian population. According to the latest EFSA, 45,5% of Burundian households were food insecure in 2017, a figure that reaches 48.8% in rural areas<sup>16</sup>. Most food insecure households are classified as moderately food insecure (37%), while 8,5% were experiencing severe food insecurity (an increase of 2,9 percentage point compared to data in the 2016 EFSA), while 42,1% of households surveyed experienced marginal food insecurity – meaning that their level of resilience to shocks is limited and that their food security is at risk of worsening<sup>17</sup>. Within rural areas, the poorest rural actors with the least access to land, depending mostly on non-agricultural income-generating activities for their survival, are the ones showing the worse results overall in terms of food security, particularly in heavily populated areas such Gitega, Ngozi and Ryigi<sup>18</sup>. In order to respond to the deteriorating food security situation, in 2017 the government of Burundi started discussing the creation of an agency for the management of food stocks (*Agence Nationale pour la Gestion du Stock de Sécurité Alimentaire*), which was recently approved by the government and that should soon be operational<sup>19</sup> and could, if properly used, alleviate the spike on food prices. In 2016 the EU decided to suspend development aid to the country following the political dialogue as for art. 96 of the Cotonou agreement. Regardless of the suspension of direct aid to the government, the EU, through its delegation to Bujumbura decided in 2017 to disburse 38 million euro destined to projects aimed at reinforcing the resilience of the Burundian population, particularly in the nutrition and agricultural sector. The call has now passed the pre-selection phase, and programmes are expected to start before the end of 2018<sup>20</sup>.

## Population movements further increase the stress on land and food-producing households

The situation is further complicated by the important number of persons who are displaced, either internally or to neighbouring countries. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) about 430 000 Burundians are currently refugees in neighbouring Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)<sup>21</sup>. About 198 000 Burundians are internally displaced. Of these, 35% are displaced in reason of socio-political turmoil in the country, while the remaining have fled their homes to escape natural disasters<sup>22</sup>. In fact, most Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Burundi are currently refugees from climatic events. Such important population movements add further stress to the food production system in the country as Burundians leave their home behind to find shelter and sustain their livelihoods elsewhere. Moreover, political instability in the DRC has resulted in

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>11</sup> Institut de Statistiques et d'Etudes Economiques du Burundi (ISTEEBU), [Indices des Prix à la Consommation des ménages au Burundi](#), ISTEEBU, Bujumbura, Mars 2018

<sup>12</sup> Parfait Ghaman, [Les commerçants ambulants doublement saignés](#), Iwacu, March 2017

<sup>13</sup> WFP & République du Burundi, *Ibidem*

<sup>14</sup> Observatoire de Lutte Contre la Corruption et les Malversations Economiques (OLUCOME), [Communiqué de Presse N 021/OLUCOME/09/2017 Portant sur la Dégradation Continue de l'Economie Burundaise sans une Réponse Effective et y Relative](#), September 2017 ; Pacifique Cubahiro, [Le franc burundais, au rythme de la crise](#), Info Grands Lacs, June 201 ;

<sup>15</sup> OLUCOME, [Communiqué de Presse N 005/03/2017 Portant sur la Mauvaise Gestion des Devises du Pays](#), March 2017

<sup>16</sup> World Food Programme (WFP) & République du Burundi, *Ibidem*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>19</sup> Gouvernement of Burundi, [Communiqué de Presse de la Réunion du Conseil des Ministres du Mercredi 07 et et Jeudi 08 Février 2018](#), February 2018

<sup>20</sup> Délégation de l'Union Européenne au Burundi, [Mise à jour de la note d'information "Mesure d'Appui à la résilience des populations du Burundi"](#), April 2018

<sup>21</sup> UNHCR, [Burundi Regional Refugee Response Plan](#), December 2018

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*

refugees from that country seeking refuge in Burundi: in January 2018, for example, about 8 200 refugees crossed the border from the DRC into Burundi following violence in the Fizi territory in neighboring South Kivu<sup>23</sup>.

## Land represents both a source and a way out of conflict: the EU and Switzerland must build on the achievements of the past years

The most recent population movements may be seen as the latest episode of a longer history of displacement and land contestations in Burundi. Previous experiences in Burundi show the link between land conflict and population movements, as it was the case for refugees who left the country following political turmoil in 1993 and 1962, whose land were systematically occupied by neighbours and other producers in search for land. Notwithstanding the dispositions in the Arusha Agreement of 2000, which set criteria for the repossession of returnees' land, few of those who returned were able to access their land. In fact, after the institution of the *Commission Nationale Terres et Autres Biens* (CNTB) in 2002 returnees and new occupants found different ways to settle land claims: some entered amicable land-sharing agreements with the new occupants or had to resign their rights altogether, while few were able to retrieve their original property. However, since 2009, it has been possible for Burundians to appeal land-sharing arrangements entered under the CNTB. The CNTB is also the only organization that has so far produced a survey of land conflicts in Burundi, which in 2008 it estimated at 43 514 cases over 20 municipalities. Although this is not a comprehensive figure it signals the prevalence of land conflicts in Burundi<sup>24</sup>. **Incertitude around land and population movements have also contributed making displaced persons and host populations the most food insecure groups in the country<sup>25</sup>.**

European donors are well aware of the importance of the governance of the land sector in Burundi for the country's food security, for its social stability and for its economic development<sup>26</sup>. In fact, the EU, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands have been actively supporting the Burundian government in the domain of land management. In this context, the role of Switzerland has been crucial. The Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) was for ten years the leading donor in the land tenure sector in Burundi. The Swiss government has been financing a programme in support of decentralized land governance, has been contributing to debates on a national land reform through support to the establishment of a legal and policy framework, and has been actively engaged in discussions on the topic with other development partners and international donors, as well as with the government. The EU intervened in Burundi through its support to the rule of law, supporting decentralized land offices in a total of seven municipalities. Moreover, the EU also supported the German GIZ through a programme aimed at identifying and improving the management of state-owned land. The Netherlands have also been involved in the land sector through their development agency and the support to land tenure with the aim of improving food security.

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**However, international support to land governance in Burundi, both through support to national land reform and decentralized initiatives, has been waning.** The EU-funded GIZ programme has come to an end. Switzerland has also ceased its activities on land in Burundi, although they will continue to participate in discussions on land tenure and may provide technical interventions to development partners working in the same domain. With regards to the EU, the suspension of development aid under art. 96 of the Cotonou Agreement has logically meant the end of programmes contributing directly the state budget.

While it may seem logical that structural interventions in land governance issues come to an halt in the context of political and social crisis, there is also a strong argument for donors to keep supporting civil society initiatives in the land sector, and in particular supporting grassroots initiatives that tackle land-related conflict. In fact, land tenure is linked to conflict through a double relation. On one hand, land tenure is often at the roots of violent conflict. On the other hand, insecure access to land often leads to decreasing farmers' investments in productive inputs, which can

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), [Bulletin Humanitaire Burundi](#), Décembre 2017 – Janvier 2018

<sup>24</sup> Republic of Burundi, CNTB, *Etats des lieux des problématiques foncière au Burundi. Etude sur la problématique foncière et les solutions alternatives face au défi de la réintégration*, Bujumbura, September 2018

<sup>25</sup> WFP and Government of Burundi, *Ibidem* .

<sup>26</sup> EurAc, [Land, development and conflicts in the Great Lakes region. For a renewed engagement by the EU and Switzerland in land governance in Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC](#), Décembre 2017

lead to the degradation of natural resources and to poor outcomes in terms of production, which may be conducive to increased food insecurity and poverty. Therefore, land issues often lead to the creation, and the multiplication, of conflicts at the local level. Small-scale, tenure-related conflicts are often ignored when large-scale conflicts emerge. However, “[t]hese struggles, often over access to agricultural resources, can establish pockets of discontent, reduce food production significantly, and fare up into greater conflicts”<sup>27</sup>. **Therefore, in conflictual contexts, it is crucial for development donors to invest in land governance in order for rural producers to be able to sustain their livelihoods and to avoid smaller-scale conflicts fuelling larger violent action.**

## **Between a rock and a hard place: supporting the Burundian people while sanctioning human rights abuses**

Since the Burundian political crisis erupted in 2015, the Burundian population has seen its economic conditions decline significantly. Food insecurity has been on the rise over the past three years, and multiple population movements have put significant stress on producers’ most important resources: land. Moreover, a series of climatic shocks put to test the capacity of Burundian farmers to produce enough food for themselves and for their families. In short, a conjuncture of political and climatic factors has resulted in one of a worrying humanitarian crisis. Although humanitarian agencies have been pooling resources, without much success<sup>28</sup>, to address the needs of the displaced Burundian population, there is a need to go beyond emergency interventions and to act to support the resilience of the population in the country in continuity with the interventions financed by donors so far in the country.

**This puts European donors, and particularly the EU, in a difficult place.** In fact, in 2016 the EU suspended development aid directed to the Burundian government. **EurAc** supports such measure, and in fact has repeatedly called for the EU to use the suspension of aid to send a strong signal to the Burundian government that its most important development partner will not stand-by while gross human rights violations take place in the country<sup>29</sup>. However, in 2017 the EU, through its delegation to Burundi, decided to fund programmes for 38 million to support the resilience of the Burundian population, focussing on agriculture for nutrition and food security. **EurAc** welcomes the EU’s decision to support the Burundian population while making sure that development aid money is not funnelled through the state coffins. While such projects are still being discussed, it is important that they do not focus uniquely on relieving emergency situations. On the contrary, they should help build long-term resilience in the agricultural sector. This means reducing food assistance to a minimum, while helping farmers access basic productive inputs such as pest-resistant seed varieties and fertilizers (and especially chemical fertilizers), as well as access to credit. Given the long history of conflict in the country, local civil society often already has a long history of supporting agricultural production in conflict situations<sup>30</sup>. The EU should capitalize on such experiences and support such organizations, both financially and technically. Doing these while respecting the provisions under art. 96 is certainly difficult but it is far from impossible, and should be pursued whenever it is viable, at the risk of depriving the population of international support when it most needs it.

However, long-term resilience in terms of food production cannot be achieved without taking land into account. While it is evident that, given the political situation, the EU should not finance the Burundian government for any attempt at comprehensive land reform, it is important that the EU supports civil society organisations in defending the results achieved through EU support to decentralized land management, and particularly with regards to local mediation of land conflicts, including between IDPs and host populations.

In this regards, **EurAc is concerned by the cessation of the activities in the land domain by the Swiss SDC.** Having been at the forefront of land initiatives in Burundi over the past ten years, the SDC may leverage an unique expertise both at the thematic and geographic level that is unique. It is reassuring that the SDC will still be present in the country providing technical assistance to its development partners but given the situation in the country, it is crucial that donors gather the largest support possible to the Burundian population.

<sup>27</sup> Messer, E., Cohen, M. J., [Breaking the link between conflict and hunger in Africa](#), IFPRI Policy Brief, 2004

<sup>28</sup> UNHCR, [UNHCR appeals for US\\$391 million for ‘forgotten’ Burundi refugees](#), fevrier 2018

<sup>29</sup> EurAc, [Authoritarian abuses and covert elimination of dissident voices in Burundi. What role for the European Union ?](#), Mai 2018

<sup>30</sup> See for example the experience of the *Organisation d’Appui à l’Autopromotion (OAP)* during the 1990s in the province of Bujumbura Rurale, documented in: Beuret, J-E, Fino, D, *Aide au Développement et Conflit Armé au Burundi. Pourquoi Rester, Comment Agir ?*, Karthala, Geneva, 2009

### **EurAc calls on DEVCO and on the EU delegation in Bujumbura to:**

- Directly support rural producers organizations that assist farmers with both technical and financial assistance. Priority should be given to long-established organisations, with proven political independence and capacity both in terms of technical support and human resources. This should be focussed on the provinces that are experiencing the most alarming food insecurity.
- Ensure that future interventions include measures directed at supporting the productive capacity of the most food insecure groups, including displaced persons, foreign refugees and host communities. This should include the provision of agricultural inputs, of pest-resistant seed varieties and of technical assistance.
- Ensure that programmes in the agricultural sector focus heavily on practices aimed at protecting soils from erosion and extreme climate events, such as agroforestry, terracing, and the production of organic fertilizers, which represent the first line of defence against extreme weather events and which are the source of most internal displacements. The "*Mesure d'Appui à la résilience des populations du Burundi*"<sup>31</sup> could already include initiatives of the kind.
- Foresee future financing for programmes aimed at land tenure-related conflict resolution and mediation, including grassroots mapping and community assessments of land rights, particularly in the context of internal and external population displacement.
- Provide technical and financial support to civil society-led initiatives aimed at developing new approaches in land and agriculture, particularly to those civil society coalitions working to link land-tenure and agricultural issues in an integrated and coherent way.

### **EurAc calls on the Swiss Development Cooperation to:**

- Reconsider its decision to withdraw its support to the land sector in Burundi. It is crucial that Switzerland remains engaged in this domain, in reason of its experience on the topic. While technical assistance to other donors is important, Switzerland must make sure that the durability of its projects is ensured notwithstanding the difficult political situation.
- Carry out an independent evaluation of the programmes on land tenure implemented in Burundi, and share it with other development partners and Burundian civil society in the appropriate forums.

<sup>31</sup> Délégation de l'Union Européenne au Burundi, [Mise à jour de la note d'information "Mesures d'Appui à la résilience des populations du Burundi"](#), Avril 2018

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