



Long-term civil unrest has forced the long-suffering citizens of Burundi to identify closely with food aid. However, when emergency aid was lacking, constant hardship obliged people to acquire survival strategies, such as growing resilient subsistence crops like the common bean. Their ability to continue planting this often neglected crop during the darkest periods became their lifeline.

The Pan-Africa Bean Research Alliance (PABRA) saw the demand for beans in Burundi, and recognized the crop's adaptability and potential. It kick-started its bean improvement efforts in the late 1990s by developing suitable varieties and improving local ones, generating markets for farmers' extra produce to earn income and, more recently, introducing climbing beans in the country. To boost the bean production process and facilitated by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT, its Spanish acronym), PABRA linked up with Burundi's national program: the Institut des Sciences Agronomiques du Burundi (ISABU).

Beans are a preferred legume in the diets of many eastern and central African countries. They are Burundi's third leading crop, after banana and sweet potato. Until now, 80% of Burundi's bean production was for home consumption. Today, there are emerging markets for yellow, red kidney, and white beans.

"Farmers rely heavily on the national program to help with production in terms of techniques and equipment," says Capitoline Ruraduma, Coordinator of the national bean program. "This enables them to maintain their livelihoods, which depend so much on the crop." She adds, "As a member country of the PABRA partnership, we can now assure farmers that the crop can be used not only to sustain their livelihoods but also to improve them."

Knowing that beans are a source of nourishment and income, and to ensure the production of sufficient amounts of high-yielding and agronomically superior beans, farmers in Burundi follow three systems: climbing beans grown in monoculture; bush beans grown in association with tubers, cereals, or bananas; and mixed cropping of bush and climbing beans, bananas, and maize.

These improved production practices were adopted as farmers worked directly with ISABU, through participatory approaches that enabled them to state their preferences. Bean seed is also now readily available through both formal and informal channels. Informal seed production—which makes up 90% of seed accessed by farmers—is from farmers' reserves, local markets, and imports from neighboring Tanzania; while the remaining 10% is from ISABU and some small-scale farmers. Burundi has no private sector actively involved in bean seed production.

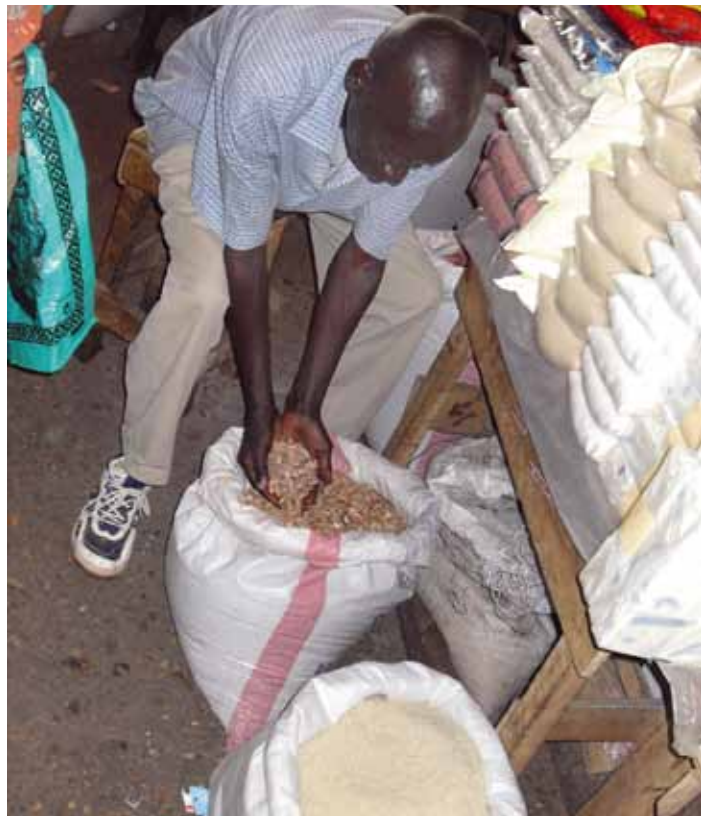
The president of the Tugwizibigega Farmers Association, Jacqueline Hakizimana, speaking at a PABRA forum held in Ruramba Village, Mwaro Province, said, “Before collaborating with the ISABU’s Bean Research Program, beans were a neglected crop. Now, however, we produce so much that we have enough for both food and to sell.” She adds, “We’re thankful to ISABU and its partners like PABRA for their assistance.”

In 2010 alone, 80,000 bean farmers produced 140,000 tons of seed, which reached markets across six provinces. Their produce was sold in packets that ranged from 300 grams to more than 5 kilograms, enabling other farmers and consumers with little income to access them. This situation was attributed to the high adoption rate of high-yielding climbing beans, which are suitable for Burundi’s limited arable land.

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Beans and rice sold hand in hand.

