

Livelihoods Case Study

PEACEBUILDING AND LIVELIHOODS: MUSHROOM CULTIVATION IN RWANDA

COUNTRY: Rwanda

THEMES: Peacebuilding; Saving groups

BACKGROUND

Burera District in the north of Rwanda is a mountainous region near the border with Uganda. Following the genocide in 1994, fighting continued here until 1997 with insurgents coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Many displaced people returning to the area after 1994 found themselves without shelter or land on which to grow food. Those who have access to land grow crops, but find the soil is not very productive. Tensions between returnees and locals have led to fragmented communities, living next to one another but not working together to improve their living conditions. Limited access to water in this region results in some villagers walking 18 km to fetch lake water, which causes water borne diseases.

In 2001 the Moucecore project began working in Burera to promote reconciliation. By training individuals from the community, villages were encouraged to set up Solidarity Transformation groups (STGs). These groups start with savings as the core element of the group but also build in other activities such as collective problem solving. By 2006, over 700 people had established 40 STGs in the area, and communally they formed the Umugenge cooperative.

THE PROJECT

In response to the needs of the community, the Umugenge cooperative started the mushroom project in 2006 with the help of Moucecore. Household and crop waste purchased from the community are mixed with lime, sawdust and urea to produce mushroom mounds. These mounds or bags can then be sold for 400 Rwf (Rwandese franc), at a profit of 150 Rwf, to families to grow mushrooms themselves. The mushroom spores are sold separately and added to the mounds. The mushroom mounds do not require water, and therefore provide a reliable source of food without using scarce resources. Because up to 10 mounds can be grown in a 1m² plot, and do not require light, even the poorest families can afford land to farm. The mushroom harvest is ready in 2-3 weeks, providing a continuous nutritious food source.

The average family buys 100-200 mounds, each mound can produce up to 1.5 kg of mushrooms per week for 3 months, which can be sold for 1000 Rwf per kilo of mushrooms within the community, or 1500 Rwf elsewhere. After the harvest, mushroom mounds can be taken back to the factory to be recycled into new mounds, or used as a fertilising product for the land.

Following their initial success the community decided to build their own factory capable of producing up to 6000 mounds every month. This factory included facilities such as a sterilisation room, which reduces disease, and a demonstration room to teach others to grow mushrooms, so that other communities can learn this farming technique.

IMPACT ON BENEFICIARIES

- 736 Households within the Burera District now have an increased income (of up to 50 000 Rwf per month), which increased donations to the local diocese and helps enable children to be sent to school.
- A continuous supply of nutritious food has reduced the levels of diseases associated with malnutrition.
- Indirect beneficiaries include businesses, schools and health centres in the surrounding areas which can purchase the produce and benefit from increased income of the local community.
- Through communal savings groups, the community has also provided rainwater harvesting tanks which are a nearby source of clean water.
- Access to sanitised water has reduced water borne illnesses, and locally available water enables some children to go to school instead of collecting water.
- Cooperative groups have also worked to provide new houses for members, goats and clean toilets for their community.
- Moucecore training has encouraged people to minister and reach out to other communities, and now they live and work together without prejudice or discrimination.

“It is easy to talk about water, toilets and other things and improvements without talking about reconciliation. Everything is built on reconciliation.” - Caleb