

# THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE TERRITORY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BUKAVU IN SOUTH-KIVU (DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO)

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## Abstract

Though benefiting from a high potential, agriculture in Democratic Republic of Congo only reaches low performances and yields. In South-Kivu, small scale family farms are frequently scattered due to inheritance systems that give a share to all children. So, land becomes a scarce resource in a densely populated area. The socioeconomic and political elites benefit from this situation and accumulate land resources, while the churches are the heirs of former colonial concessions. Unfortunately, the land belonging to the large landowners is not valorized; it is often hired to small-scale farmers with less than 0.5 ha. These farmers use low quantities of inputs and are oriented towards subsistence agriculture. To valorize the high agricultural potential of this area, the solution is perhaps not a land reform and the distribution of plots to small-scale farmers, but to make agriculture more profitable and a wealth producer for the whole community. To do so, the archdiocese certainly has a role to play. The vision of religious authorities is that the priests should be real entrepreneurs and support all local initiatives which could be profitable for large groups of citizens. During workshops organized in 2021, people in charge of the parishes reported the agricultural activities which are already organized and the new opportunities they identified, proving that a bottom-up peasant movement could enhance rural development. Future agricultural practices should lead to sustainable agriculture, with high yields and better income for the farmers.

**Keywords:** *Subsistence agriculture, agricultural development, land resources, archdiocese of Bukavu, South-Kivu.*

## Introduction

The report of the World Bank on development in the world of 2008 is entitled “Agriculture to serve development” (World Bank, 2008). In developing countries, agriculture is considered as a growth factor thanks to its multi-functionality and its multiplying socioeconomic effects. In rural areas, the practice of agriculture impacts the peasant livelihood by its capacity to reduce hunger and poverty. It is why the interest in agriculture of large international institutions is obvious and expressed by many calls to mobilize State budgets and international public aid in favour of agricultural development policies (Ngalamulume, 2016).

In this context, since one decade, the Congolese government intends to create wealth in rural areas by developing the agricultural sector through a competitive family-type and industrial agriculture. It is proved that an increase of 10% of agricultural production can lead to a 7% reduction in the number of persons living below the poverty threshold (Ministère de l’agriculture et du développement rural, 2010).

Indeed, the huge agricultural potential of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is evaluated to 80 million hectares of arable land. The Congolese rural areas have at their disposal very large areas of arable land, on one hand, and more than 70% of the national population, on the other hand. So, the labour force is abundant and there is also a potentially large market for agricultural products. In addition, the DRC benefits from favourable climatic and ecological conditions. Nearly the whole country can benefit from a cultural season lasting more than eight months per

year. The hydrographic network is well-developed and allows the cultivation of a large variety of agricultural species, including staple food with two production cycles per year, cash crops and animal husbandry (RDC/PDL-145T, 2021). The agricultural sector plays an important role in the Congolese economy, employing 68.7% of the labour force in 2018. According to the data from the World Bank agriculture contributed in 2018 to 19.1% of the Congolese GDP (Vwima and Rushigira, 2020).

However, despite the great potential of agricultural activities, yields are very low. Only 10% of the potentially arable land is exploited, 3.5 million hectares are devoted to vegetal production, and 4.5 million hectares to animal production, while 28% of the 87 million inhabitants are in a situation of food insecurity and 4.2 million children are affected by malnutrition (FAO, 2019; RDC/PDL-145T, 2021). Though having huge natural and human resources at its disposal, the agricultural sector in the DRC is faced with a disastrous situation.

In such conditions, can agriculture still be useful to the DRC in general and South-Kivu in particular? Faced with this specific question, the central hypothesis of this study is based on the idea that a revival of the peasant movement would enhance agricultural activities and efficiently contribute to local development. The top-down development model is inefficient because of structural constraints, it appears preferable to put the focus on family farms in order to improve their profitability and so the living conditions of the farmers and the whole community.

In order to check the abovementioned hypothesis, the case of the farms settled within the boundaries of the archdiocese of Bukavu, in South-Kivu, is studied here. This paper seeks to evaluate the present role of agriculture in the improvement of living conditions in link with the family farms of the archdiocese of Bukavu. In summary, it is to see if the revival of the peasant movement does exist or not to make agriculture a factor of growth and development. Later, the analysis of this question could define the type of agriculture which could be the most efficient for rural development in the DRC.

For some economists specialized in development studies, the development of the DRC will be rural or will not be. Indeed, development is first due to the fact that a majority of citizens can profit from the positive impacts of the induced changes. Agriculture in the DRC remains the most important job and wealth provider. The dependency on this sector is even higher for the poorest rural households (Ngalamulume, 2016; RDC/PDL-145T, 2021).

As for most of developing countries, the economy of the DRC is not yet transformed. The agricultural sector is the most important, while industries and services are relatively underdeveloped. However, the agricultural sector is mainly represented by very small informal farmers, with low productivity and under-capitalization and who are faced with many constraints. Many reforms which have been previously decided in the sector of agricultural policies remained inefficient (RDC/PDL-145T, 2021).

### **Material and Methods**

The analysis is based on secondary and primary data. The secondary data have several origins: official documents from the government of the DRC or from international institutions, scientific publications on the agricultural situation of the DRC or South-Kivu, reports of specialists in agricultural policy... The primary data come from two workshops organized on April 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup>, 2021, and November 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, 2021, which gathered the priests and the financial managers of the parishes of the Archdiocese of Bukavu at the “Amani center”, about how to reinforce capacities in the field of participative entrepreneurship. During these workshops, each parish indicated what are its priorities for its self-development. These priorities were either already implemented and able to grow, or new opportunities to be exploited. The approach was to:

- Identify all the agricultural activities cited as priorities by the parishes;
- Evaluate the percentage of parishes that give priority to agricultural activities as growth factors;

- Analyse the results in relation to the vision of the archdiocese of Bukavu.

### **Results and Discussion**

Diverse analyses indicate that several factors explain why agriculture is inefficient in the DRC, though the potential of the country is high. These factors are, notably: inefficient and badly coordinated agricultural development strategies, violent conflicts, weak road network, bad agricultural ways, weakening support from the State to agricultural activities, and too weak links between the agricultural sector and the nearly inexistent food processing industry. So, for example, the share of agriculture in the State budget is lower than 2% and the effective payment rate is lower than 20% (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development, 2010, 2013; Ngalamulume Tshiebue, 2016b). The marketing of agricultural products also faces many constraints: low storage capacities, numerous taxes, problems with the administrations and the police, high transportation costs...

During the last decades, many initiatives have been taken by the public authorities in favour of economic development. Among all these plans and programs having a focus on rural areas, the following ones can be cited: the Interim Plan for Agricultural Revival (1966-1972), the Mobutu Plan (1979-1981), the Minimum Agricultural Program (1980), the Agricultural Revival Plan (1982-1984), the Interim Economic Rehabilitation Program (1983-1985), the Quinquennial Plan (1986-1990), the Food Self-Sufficiency Program (1987-1990), the National Program for the Revival of the Agricultural and Rural Sector "PNSAR" (1997-2001), the Agricultural and Rural Development Plan (1991-2000), the Minimum Triennial Program (1997-1999), the Triennial Program of Support to Agricultural Producers (2000-2003), the Multisectoral Program for Emergency, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction "PMURR" (2002-2010), the Minimum Program for the Partnership for Transition and Revival "PMPTR" (2004-2005), the Document for Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy "DSCR" (preliminary version in 2004, first full document in 2006 and new version in 2011), the Note on Agricultural Policy (2009), the Sectoral Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (2010), the Law defining the fundamental guidelines related to agriculture (2011), the National Plan for Agricultural Investments "PNIA" (2013-2020), the Accelerated Presidential Program to Fight Poverty and Inequalities "PPALCPI" (2019), the Government Action Program "PAG" (2021-2023), the Local Development Program "PDL-145T" (2021-2023).

Unfortunately, most of these initiatives, with a political character, did not reach their goals. According to Ngalamulume (2011; 2016), different plans and programs qualified agriculture as "the priority of the priorities" only to mobilize the national and international opinion on the problem of Congolese agriculture and to attract some financial support, but did not contain any practical measure in terms of political will and real decisions. These plans and programs were inadapted and some even never went out of the offices.

The situation in South-Kivu is not better than the situation in the whole country. In South-Kivu, agricultural infrastructures are in particularly bad shape, agricultural credit is nearly inexistent, and the region is densely populated (Vwima and Rushigira, 2020). So, access to arable land is uneasy for most of the inhabitants. More than 80% of farmers manage very small family and traditional farms, with an area lower than 0.5 ha (TECSULT-AECOM, 2009; Bisimwa and Bashi, 2009; Lebailly et al., 2015; Vwima and Rushigira, 2020).

The Archdiocese of Bukavu, in the South-Kivu province, covers the town of Bukavu, the territories of Kabare, Walungu and Idjwi, the collectivities of Luhwinja and Burhinyi in the Eastern part of the territory of Mwenga, and the Southern part of the territory of Kalehe. The archdiocese is mainly rural. More than 80% of its population practice subsistence agriculture (Ngombaniro, 2018). Being an institution, the archdiocese appears among the large landowner of the region. However, unable to valorise its land capital, like the other large landowners, it rents out the land to landless peasants in local conditions (Mushagalusa, 2021).

Finally, it appears that the Congolese agricultural sector is abandoned by the public powers. Though qualified as a priority, the agricultural sector is rather a “neglected priority” (Gene, 2011). However, hope is not lost. Though faced with many constraints, agriculture can be considered within the scheme of a peasant revival movement as a solution for rural development in the DRC. The small-scale farming in the archdiocese of Bukavu, in South-Kivu, constitutes a case study.

Concerning the Archdiocese of Bukavu, two workshops were organized in 2021. They defined the priorities of the parishes. Among the different activities already implemented, generally at a small scale, can be cited the production of staple food (cassava, potato, rice, banana, corn, soybean, sorghum...), vegetables (cabbage, onion, carrot, leek, beans, tomato...), processed products (banana wine, corn, soybean, sorghum), “industrial products” (palm oil, pineapple, coffee), plantation of trees (Eucalyptus, Cupressus), wood processing for construction products, storage facilities... on the vegetal production side. For animal production are cited cattle, dairy cows, pigs, goats, sheep, rabbits, beekeeping and fish. One parish also produces biogas. The opportunities which were identified are also numerous. On the vegetal side can be cited to extend the cultivated area of arable land, modernize agricultural practices, extend the area for banana and pasture, improve the production of vegetables, plant trees for wood, to plant fruit trees (avocado, lemon, mango...), to restart coffee production, to produce pine apple, to build a mill to produce flour. On the animal side, there are ideas to raise cows, begin pork production, build infrastructures for poultry and laying hens, raise goats and rabbits, produce honey, build ponds, raise fish in Lake Kivu, buy a farm for the production of milk and cheese, to process pork in order to get sausages, bacon... Two parishes also had the project to open a canteen to sell food products (archdiocese of Bukavu, 2021; 2022).

All the parishes were asked about the importance they give to agriculture: 50% of urban parishes answered that agriculture is their priority, while 90% of the rural ones answered so. So, it clearly appears that the priests and the people working for the Archdiocese of Bukavu support economic initiatives in the field of agriculture in order to enhance rural development.

Referring to the role played by monasteries in the general development of Europe during the Middle Ages and later, the Archbishop of Bukavu himself encouraged the parishes to take charge of their welfare by saying: “The time of dependency is over... You priests, you are entrepreneurs. As such, you will organize and plan how to valorise our patrimony, our soil... We even have a lake, waters, all what is needed to become entrepreneurs and go further” (Archdiocese of Bukavu, 2021). This vision is the same as the one of Ka Mana (1991): “It is now the time of the participation of the churches in the promotion of national wealth, the creation of enterprises, the promotion of efficient investments for the prosperity of all”.

In South-Kivu, the churches are the owners of the former large industrial plantations. Faced with the problem of difficult access to land for poor peasants, Fuhara (2012) and Ndjadi *et al.* (2019) think that the land should be redistributed. However, it is not the position of the archdiocese of Bukavu because, with uncontrolled demography and the traditional inheritance rules, this will finally lead to smaller and smaller unprofitable farms. The position of the catholic church is then to support the development of peasant movements encouraging farmers to be involved in cooperative initiatives and to participate with all the stakeholders in the development of the economy.

### **Conclusion**

The capacity of Congolese agriculture to grow and to reduce poverty is structurally undermined. In fact, this situation compromises its contribution to rural development and food security for the whole Congolese population. However, in the archdiocese of Bukavu, 90% of rural parishes consider agriculture as a priority for their development. The vision of the religious authorities is to promote a progressive transition from subsistence agriculture towards sustainable

agriculture, waiting for the development of better infrastructures and the creation of a solid system to finance agricultural investments.

The solution is not to go directly to intensive agriculture using new technologies and large quantities of inputs and being only market-oriented. This type of agriculture is often harmful to social equity and to the environment and has hidden costs for the community (De Schutter, 2013). It is also more excluding and could not lead to a significant reduction of extreme poverty and hunger (Ngalamulume, 2016).

Finally, the solution is probably to promote sustainable agriculture like the model recommended by Schumacher (1973), who is the inventor of the expression “Small is beautiful”. Agricultural innovations should be based on local traditional techniques, and not on costly imported technologies. Local initiatives should be encouraged in order to generate more income for a maximum of families, and so stimulate the bottom-up way of development.

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