

Rwanda Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities and Business: ISSN 2708-759X (Print); ISSN 2708-7603 (Online). DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4313/rjsshb.v2i1.5>

The impact of subtle resistance to Regional Crop Specialization: the case of maize farming in Rugeramigozi Marsh-Rwanda

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Abstract

In the framework of the professionalization of the agricultural sector in Rwanda, a number of agricultural reforms including regional crop specialization, mono-cropping, use of improved seeds and chemical fertilisers among others have been initiated and have substantially contributed to the increase of agricultural products at the Rwandan local market. Even though the reform outcomes were promising, smallholder farmers had at the outset of the reform implementation opposed to the way crops were selected for their marshland and their reaction has influenced the reform implementation.

This article explores the experience smallholder farmers have gone through during the initiation of new selected crops for their marshland, their reactions to the use of the mandatory seeds and the impact of their reactions. Findings reveal that farmers' discontents have slowed down cultivating maize because their preferred crop – the rice – considered more profitable was disregarded. To deter the implementation of growing maize, smallholder farmers have used strategic defiance in form of subtle argumentation, strategic silence, strategic apathy or indifference, ironical strategy among others and the impact of their stratagems have led to the amendment of the decision of growing undesirable crop(s) in their marshland.

The latest data collected in October 2017 and January 2018 reveal clearly the blurred intentions behind farmers' reactions observed during the 2010 – 2012 research – they bring to light what they didn't dare to disclose then. This article shows finally that in any agricultural reform design, planners should consider all aspects upholding smallholder farmers' advantages and these are

identifiable only if they participate proactively in the reform planning and implementation phases.

Keywords: Smallholder farmers, regional crop specialization, everyday subtle resistance, public policy/reform implementation.

1. Introduction

Rwanda is among the rare African countries that are apparently boosting their economy but also facing challenges of land scarcity, overpopulation and historical interethnic conflicts and violence (Alinda& Abbott, 2012). As one of the key components of its economy, the agricultural reform-based comprehensive transformation (Republic of Rwanda_MINECOFIN, 2000) has been prioritized for about two decades. The reform includes land use consolidation, use of improved or hybrid seeds, use of chemical fertilizers, regional crop specialization also known as crop regionalization, to mention but a few.

Alinda and Abbott report that even though Rwanda is a small country among the most densely populated countries in Africa, its land remains scarce while it is vital for the survival of the majority of its population (Alinda& Abbott, 2012).Recent data show that although efforts have been made to reduce on-farm activities as the main source of income, still 58% of Rwandan population live on poor farm production due to a smaller farm size and the persistent practice of subsistence style of production (Republic of Rwanda_NISR, 2015).

Contrary to other agricultural lands (lowlands, slops & hills) matter how small in Rwanda, all wetlands are a state property, therefore the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) has full right to decide which crops have to be grown on them, and indeed, all tenants of restructured wetlands are requested to produce crops that the MINAGRI plans to increase the most, such as maize, rice, soya and voluble beans, banana, wheat and Irish potato among others.

After having reshuffled the wetland, farmers who are entitled to exploit it are required to organise themselves in cooperatives so that their representatives bridge the relationships between the MINAGRI, the private sector and farmers (Hahirwa, 2014, p. 130). The selection of suitable

regional food crops is done regionally. Regional food crops are selected by senior staff agronomists from the MINAGRI based mainly on two criteria: (i) officially required crops and (ii) make sure that weather conditions are adapted to the indicated soil (Ekise, Nahayo, Mirukiro&Mukamugema, 2013).

Even though rice remains the major food security crop (Alinda& Abbott, 2012), the rationale behind privileging maize countrywide was that the MINAGRI, its partners and scholars believe that maize is a rich calorie source (Fisher &Snapp, 2014; IFDC_MINAGRI, 2010) for both human beings and domestic animals. Based on the Crop Intensification Program (2008/2009) evaluation report, maize was given more importance because of its capacity to fulfil the gaps of food security at the local market (Nabahungu and Visser, 2013).

In several areas of the country, farmers have opposed to the introduction of the new single crop – maize –and the mandatory use of costly unfamiliar agricultural chemical inputs arguing that they were not informed about it beforehand (Hahirwa, 2014).

The top-down (Paudel, 2009) nature of the agricultural reform implementation has been the main reason behind their reluctance to implement the reform (Hahirwa, 2014). Yet, smallholder farmers' discontent with the way the process of regional crop specialization was arranged did not incite them to organize “collective open protests” (Alexander, 2010) especially because, were aware that the intention behind the implementation of agricultural reforms development in general and regional crop specialization in particular (Hahirwa, 2014) is a humane and socioeconomic acts to wards sustainable development (Elliott, 2012; Hahirwa, 2014).

They instead opted for everyday subtle acts of resistance referred to by scholars as masked, disguised, covert or hidden resistance (Seymour, 2006; Scott, 2008) or strategies of survival (Scott, 1985; Hahirwa, Camilla &Vinthagen, 2017). This kind of strategies generally arise when an individual or a group of individuals of lower class (Dubois, Rucker &Galinsky, 2015) claims certain rights through “everyday subtle resistance” (Scott, 2013) from an upper class individual/a leader or a group of upper class individuals/leaders (Scott, 1985, 1990, 2008, 2013; Hahirwa, 2014).

The aim of this article is to explore farmers' "experience of agricultural reform in Rwanda" (Hahirwa, 2014, p. 204), how the approach of reform implementation influences farmers' reactions (resistance) which, ultimately lead to some changes in reform design and implementation. The article presents evidences about the experience of smallholder farmers on agricultural reforms, regional crop specialization in particular and their reactions to the decision of mandatory implementation of growing maize alternating with voluble beans in the marshland where before the reforms smallholder farmers used to rotate a range of tubers and vegetables for everyday domestic consumption and occasionally sale of surplus products (Hahirwa, 2014).

The article is built on updated data collected in October 2017 and January 2018 restricted on Rugeramigozi marshland and its adjacent areas. The data that this article draws on were carried out with smallholder farmers exploiting Rugeramigozi marsh grouped in KIABR (KIABR stands for *Koperative Imparaniramusaruro w' Abahinzi-Boroziba Rugeramigozi* [or Cooperative of Agro-Livestock Farmers seeking to increase yield in Rugeramigozi]) cooperative, purposively selected cooperative staff, local authorities, agronomists and opinion leaders.

The next section includes concise theoretical discussion of everyday subtle resistance and public policy/reform implementation. The sections of methods and that of agricultural reform background in Rwanda will then follow. Thereafter, the section of empirical data highlighting smallholder farmers' experience of and reactions to regional crop specialization will be presented. This will be followed by a section of concluding discussion interpreting the empirical findings and highlighting the scientific contribution and economic implications of the study and finally a summarizing conclusion and recommendations will follow.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Everyday Subtle resistance

Everyday subtle resistance is notoriously difficult to detect and define due to its nature of discretion. Some definitions maintain that a person resisting needs to have an intent to challenge powerful individuals or institutions (Scott, 1985, p. 290), while others argue that an oppositional act can be understood as resistance even if the subordinate actor does not express an intent to resist (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004).

Scott classifies hidden resistance into two main categories. The first is where the act of resistance is a “clear message” (Scott, 2008). but delivered by a “disguised messenger” (Ibid. p. 55); for example, this can be a frightening message spread through tracts of land or sent to the employer or any other dominant person as a warning threat. The second is where the act of resistance is in the form of an “ambiguous message” (Ibid.) but delivered by an identified messenger; this is, as Scott argues a subtle form of aggression or warning message such as “implicit strategic advice” to the dominant (Ibid., 2013).

He also argues that this form of ambiguous messages is generally used through “euphemism”, “metaphor” (Scott, 2008) aiming at confusing the interpreter or the recipient of the message. This tricky way of resisting is often used in threatening circumstances where there is a risk of penalty or retaliation (Rowlands, 1998). Strategically, coping with inconveniences caused by mandatory implementation of reforms can be understood as everyday subtle resistance (Hahirwa, 2014), while the ambiguous message, be it verbal or non-verbal, is aiming at misleading or discouraging the implementation of the reform or making an attempt to influence the amendment of a decision made by an influencing individual/a leader in socio-political or economic systems (Scott, 2008; Hahirwa, 2014).

2.2 Reform/public policy implementation

Todtling-Schönhofer, et al.(2003) define policy implementation as “the operational process needed to produce expected outputs”. This definition shows how “policy implementation is a process within a cyclic complexity of steps, situating the actual implementation between the allocation of resources and the evaluation of results to be achieved” (Ibid. p. 12; Hahirwa, 2014, p. 32). The challenge that may thwart successful implementation could be the divergence between policy implementers and decision-makers, which may lead to the distortion of the actual goals of the policy (Hahirwa, 2014).

Another obstruction may result from the barriers that may impede the flow of directives and resources from the top to the bottom where the implementation takes place (Ibid.). Nevertheless, it is also argued that the involvement of several stakeholders (usually having divergent interests) may affect the outcome (Todtling-Schönhofer, et al. 2003, p.12). Focus on public policy

implementation process brings in conventional approaches including “top-down” (Lahiff, Borrás & Kay, 2007; Paudel, 2009, p.40; Püzl & Treib, 2017), “bottom-up” (Püzl & Treib, 2017), “their hybrid” (Paudel, 2009, p. 42; Püzl & Treib, 2017) and an “approach particular to developing countries” (UNDP, 2002; Lahiff, Borrás & Kay, 2007; Paudel, 2009).

In Rwanda, reforms as well as other public policies and programmes are implemented through “Imihigo” or an “annual performance contract between the President of the republic and districts Mayors” (Klingebiel, et al. 2016; Kamuzinzi, 2016; Kamuzinzi & Rubyutsa, 2019) – a policy implementation pattern encompassing cultural practice of “transparency”, “accountability” (Klingebiel, et al. 2016) and commitment to achieve self-assigned objectives in terms of “public service delivery” (Kamuzinzi, 2016) and other socioeconomic public policy implementation. Nevertheless, what the eye of imihigo evaluators doesn’t see, but yet exists, is that every day subtle resistance of the beneficiaries of reforms or public policies play an important role in regulating the achievement of the self-assigned imihigo (Hahirwa, 2014, p.139).

3. Material and Methods

This article builds on extensive fieldwork for the author’s PhD thesis carried out in 2010–2012 in six districts of Rwanda where agricultural reform was ongoing. It particularly focuses on Rugeramigozi marshland - one of the research sites located in Muhanga district (Hahirwa, 2014). Based on blurred intentions behind farmers’ reactions observed during the 2010 – 2012 fieldwork, with the 2017- 2018 updated data, the researcher intends to reveal the impact of subtle resistance on regional crop specialization.

As the study sought to reveal the impact of subtle resistance on regional crop specialization, qualitative method using long interview (McCracken, 1988) in-depth interviews (Lucas, 2014) and Focus group discussions (De Vos, 2002) was appropriate. In order to holistically understand the meaning farmers attributed to their reactions, the study used an overlapping strategy of multiple inquiries involving “phenomenological inquiry” (Creswell, 1998), which in fact, is appropriate to study lived experience and other kind of study that necessitate deep analysis and interpretation of the meanings interviewees attribute to their experience (Steward & Mikunas,

1990; Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998; Somekh & Lewin, 2005) and disguised intentions to deter pressure to growing maize (Hahirwa, 2014). As the researcher focused on a particular context of Rugeramigozi in its natural setting “case study inquiry” (Yin, 2009) was used as well.

The sample was selected through purposive sampling considering cooperative membership (De Vos, 2002; Somekh & Lewin, 2005; Creswell, 2009) with emphasis to farmers supposed to be relevant to respond to the scheduled interviews. The targeted KIABR cooperative was composed of 21 platforms and each had a number of members varying between 10 and 15 members. In the exercise of purposively selecting interviewees key informants among cooperative members have played an important role (Hahirwa, 2014).

Interviews and focus group discussions were carried out in October 2017 and January 2018 in Rugeramigozi marshland – an area situated between Kabgayi hill of Nyamabuye sector and Shyogwe sector both in Muhanga district, one of the eight districts of the Southern Province. The individual interview was carried out with six smallholder farmers, two cooperative administrative staff, two agronomists, two local authorities and four opinion leaders, and the focus group discussion consisted of a group of 9 farmers in each sector, and all were selected purposively. As quantified in the table below, six and eighteen smallholder farmers have respectively participated in the individual in-depth interview and focus group discussions.

Table 1. The sample size for data update

Selected sectors	Nyamabuye (Gahogo)	Shyogwe	Total
Interview with smallholder farmers	3	3	6
Interview with staff	2	-	2
Local authorities	1	1	2
Agronomists	2	-	2
Opinion leaders	3	1	4
Total	9	5	16
Participants to FGD with smallholder farmers	9	9	

Source: Designed by the author, 2018

As mentioned above in the introduction of this methods' section, all interviewed farmers in 2017-2018 and some opinion leaders are among those interviewed during the 2010-2012 fieldwork. The table below shows the summarizing sample size from inclusive tables of sampling process in the author's thesis (Hahirwa, 2014, p. 76, 78, 80, 81).

Table 2. The sample size for interviews and focus groups for 2010-2012 fieldwork

Selected sectors	Nyamabuye (gahogo)	Shyogwe
Number of Participants to FGD	9	9
Interview with farmers	24	14
Local authority and opinion leaders	5	4

Source: Adapted from (Hahirwa, 2014, p.76, 78, 80, 81).

The main strategy used to build trust with farmers was based on openness and frequent visits before the actual interview and discussion start. Through in-depth interviews, this strategy has particularly facilitated the author to understand the meanings smallholder farmers attributed to their subtle acts of resistance (Hahirwa, 2014).

4. Results

The rationale behind the refusal to grow maize and voluble beans

Participants in group discussions have given a number of reasons that incited them to gradually declined growing maize while the government through the MINAGRI had invested a lot in it and mobilized the population to accept it and grow it using both organic and industrial fertilizers or the latter only. The following is one of the evidences provided by a female farmer from shyogwe sector exploiting Rugeramigozi marsh during 2010 focus group discussion in Nyamabuye sector:

Growing maize on small plots is not a profitable business. When we realized that rice is more profitable than maize, we started claiming rice through our cooperative but as you may know change a decision from above is quasi-impossible but as unity makes strength, we hoped that we would win. We were actually, incited by farmers growing rice in a marshland situated in

Ruhango– a neighbouring district, where in only two harvests, those who had three or more plots have in a blink of an eye changed their lifestyle.

The above farmers' statements corroborate Nabahungu and Visser argument which stipulate that farmers were not prepared enough to reform implementation with clear objectives and feasibility and in addition to that the "intensive management of wetlands has been applied without accommodating local people's knowledge" (Nabahungu&Visser, 2013). Similar statement justifying dissatisfaction with growing the new compulsory crops was reiterated during the 2017 group discussion with some of the same farmers met in 2011 and 2012:

Banning the cultivation of food crops such as sweet potato has disturbed our everyday survival and substituting compulsory crops was not appreciated since they didn't make a difference among those who cultivated them before us. For instance, due to poor pricing and disappointing consequences of not selling their harvest expecting reasonable price but ended up by being spoilt by humidity and insects.

The evidences above reveal that small-scale farmers were, on the one hand, attached to their routines of growing tubers, vegetables and other consumable crops for everyday households' survival and on the other, they were not prepared enough to implement the requested reform due to their fellow farmers from Eastern Province who suffered important loss due low pricing and poor conservation of their harvest.

Other factors that have contributed to their reluctance to grow maize include costly non-organic fertilizers. Reluctance to invest in agricultural reform due to the uncertainty of unpredictable weather conditions, low pricing of the yield while seeds and industrial fertilizers were highly expensive (Hahirwa, 2014).

The introduction of maize to substitute sweet potatoes, vegetables and other traditional crops in Rugeramigozi marsh and all other factors mentioned above have fuelled the discontent among smallholder farmers. To deter this decision and avoiding troubles at the same time, smallholder farmers have opted for "subtle resistance" (Scott, 2013; Hahirwa, 2014) because they were striving to oppose an authoritative executor of reform implementation.

Farmers' stratagems that led to flexibility and amendment of decisions

The silence or strategic apathy

A small landholder farmer in Nyamabuye sector has argued that people choose to keep silent because their voice would not change anything in the planned reforms. However, others revealed that they kept silent just to defy the pressure of attracting them to comply with the decisions from above without beneficiaries' consent (Hahirwa, 2014). A female farmer from Shyogwe sector re-interviewed in 2017 illustrates the use of silence as a strategy of defying reform executors as follows:

Generally, farmers kept silent to avoid humiliation. Agronomists accompanied by local authorities were not ashamed to even consider some of them arrogant or ignorant especially when their arguments were divergent with theirs. With such intimidating attitude, other farmers preferred to keep silent.

Subtle argumentation

There were also some farmers who instead of keeping silent, dared to speak up. They talked about themselves or about their fellows but preferred to keep it anonymous. For instance, during a meeting organized in 2010 by the executors of agricultural reform implementation and the cooperative representatives where all farmers exploiting Rugeramigozi marsh were invited, one of the farmers – a male from Nyamabuye sector has politely explained their concern as follows:

We really agree with you that the agricultural reform is for better output so that food security is assured, but you should also understand that in the meantime small farmers continue to starve while they are growing maize [...] Imagine if people harvest only maize during the season B and do not have any other source of income to buy beans or vegetables for example, do you think they would survive? What is strange is that maize growers are even not allowed to eat fresh corn from their own field.

Based on the above quotation, farmers' reluctance to implement the proposed crop seems to be logical (Nzayisenga, Camilla & Schierenbeck) given that they were not prepared in advance (Huggins, 2009) on how to supplement maize flour with vegetables, for example, for balanced diet. During the 2017 interview, it was revealed that this kind of arguments have contributed to

the amendment of the decision of growing maize in Rugeramigozi marsh by local authorities in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI); they finally understood that constructing a modern dam would not only serve in irrigating farmers' rice plots but also growing fishes for balanced diet. In addition to that, a male farmer from Nyamabuye sector interviewed in October 2017, revealed that contiguous lands to the wetlands were since then strictly reserved for growing vegetables and beans.

Why subtle resistance?

During group discussions, opinion leaders and farmers indicated that the effects of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi have shaped the behaviour of Rwandans. That is for instance, being characterised by fear, trauma and lack of trust to whoever (Burnet, 2012; Hahirwa, 2014). This social phenomenon was generally manifested through silence, indifference or apathy, irony or subtle argumentation (Hahirwa, 2014). This social phenomenon was emphasized by a male farmer from Shyogwe sector in 2017 as follows:

The post genocide regime was instead stern characterized by strictness in whatever it does which rendered farmers more ironical.

As just mentioned, the use of irony instead of speaking out about what farmers believed or thought was justified by not only a stern regime but also the effects of genocide. The statement from the same group discussion with farmers illustrates it as follows:

The effects of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi have rendered Rwandans frightened and submissive but with gradual improvement in leadership characterized by fair-minded leaders, people have also gradually learned to become emancipated.

One of the opinion leaders – a male religious from Nyamabuye sector has revealed in privacy that most of farmers were ironical because during the period of the aftermath of genocide there was no trust between Rwandans in general and particularly between farmers and their local leaders who in general were loyal to the regime and therefore inflexible to tolerate any change in the predetermined policy or reform implementation process even if beneficiaries disapprove it.

According to him, the effects of genocide have transformed people's behaviour; this is why farmers were somewhat reluctant to show their actual position with regards to the initiated reform, particularly when their opinions would contradict the regime ambitions. He continues

arguing that nowadays Rwandans have improved a lot, they have gradually changed from reluctance to openness:

...However, nowadays after more than two decades since the end of the 1994 genocide, the majority of Rwandans are no longer frightened and this is witnessed when they dare reveal their position concerning an issue raised in meetings generally organized by local authorities, which justifies an improvement in decreasing the number of Rwandans characterized by fear that logically slow down the process of self-reliance and development.

In the Nyamabuye focus group discussion, a female farmer has also revealed that changes that are happening in Rwanda and among Rwandans are justified by a culture of flexibility, which is evolving among local leaders and policy makers while interacting with ordinary Rwandans or introducing a policy or a reform to them.

Indeed, things have changed not only on the side of local leaders but also among Rwandan population in general. In fact, farmers' audacity has strongly influenced the attitude of local leaders and the executors of reform implementation in particular. In the Nyamabuye group discussions, the same participant as above declared that:

It was unimaginable that decision makers and/or executors of [public] policy implementation could consult ordinary people, farmers for example, before starting the process of its implementation, but that is what is happening in agricultural sector nowadays.

Intractable cooperative leadership

Farmers were convinced that their non-violent attitude or subtle resistance has contributed a lot to changing leaders' attitude. Even though the majority of farmers can freely express their feelings and opinions, they still claim to be saddened by the cooperative leaders they elected themselves:

Although we are no longer reluctant to express our feelings when we find something wrong in whatever initiatives, be it in the management of our cooperative or the introduction of a new regulation, our cooperative leaders do not always take into consideration our prerogatives, especially in terms of pricing our yield. I would conclude, and I hope other members concur with me, that our cooperative leaders do not favour the interests of

cooperative members, but it is a matter of time, they will either change their attitude or will be dismissed.

This statement from a male farmer participating in the 2017 Nyamabuye focus group discussion, reiterates what was said during the 2010 interviews just some months after the relaunch of KIABR cooperative. Though cooperative representatives have regularly been replaced through fair elections, cooperative members have never trusted them because once they are elected other powerful people from private sector or public institutions dictate them what to decide on behalf of cooperative members without their consent. For instance, participants to the recent group discussion have revealed that the cooperative representatives are untrustworthy. Cooperative members presume that cooperative leaders work more for the interest of the private sector than for their cooperative and its members. This is mostly seen in pricing their harvest where the price of processed agricultural products at the market raises up to four times the price of unprocessed ones.

Flexibility and amendments.

It has been seven years since the researcher has, for the first time, met members of KIABR cooperative. The recent contact with the same farmers after seven years has removed the ambiguity and doubts vis-à-vis the meaning that they were attributing to their actions and reactions. During the October 2017 fieldwork, most landholder farmers exploiting Rugeramigozi marshland emphasized what they had said during the 2010–2012 fieldwork and revealed what they were expecting while resisting maize from its introduction in the marshland (Hahirwa, 2014). A female from Shyogwe participating to the group discussion organised in October 2017 said:

We knew that the process of reform implementation was unavoidable, and that crops were preselected based on well-designed criteria, but on the other hand we were convinced that other alternatives of our own choice targeting the most profitable crop could also be accepted. This is why we mobilized ourselves and smartly claimed to grow rice giving evidences of its profitability at the local market.

In fact, though the MINAGRI had, through regional crop specialization, planned to grow maize in Rugeramigozi marsh, it recognised that rice is at the same time a vital foodstuff and cash crop,

and this is why a National Rice Policy which looks forward to enhancing self-sufficiency of rice markets in Rwanda was developed (Alinda & Abbott, 2012). However, as mentioned earlier in this article, due to its weak streams, Rugeramigozi marsh was not selected among wetlands MINAGRI had planned for rice. The amendment of the ministry's decision was almost impossible because the construction of a modern dam to capture water from the streams was very expensive but this happened due to farmers' tirelessness in claiming the cultivation of rice instead of maize through subtle argumentation and other smart acts of resistance (Hahirwa, 2014). One of the participants to the group discussion illustrate it as follow:

Our request of substituting maize by rice was rejected in the beginning of our negotiations but we insisted and managed to convince our local leaders at district level who in turn supported us. This is why though the marshland did not have enough water to irrigate huge areas, the MINAGRI has accepted to build an expensive dam for irrigation.

This is how the [Kabgayi] dam was constructed and nowadays we are among the best rice producers in Rwanda.

In January 2018, the researcher went back in the field where he met two more opinion leaders. One of them emphasized that though there has been a certain improvement in the process of public policy and reform implementation through imihigo (a performance contract signed between the president of the republic office and district mayors), public policy planners and implementers should adopt a "proactive approach" (Friedman, 1989; Grant & Ashford, 2008) involving farmers in policy/reform planning and implementation processes to prevent notorious delay of reform (Hahirwa, 2014).

Indeed, just as other Rwandan culture-based initiatives using such kind of approach such as Gacaca, Ubudehe, Girinka... are promising to mitigate historical interethnic conflicts, prevent violent conflicts and curb poverty, it can also be used in the process of agricultural reform design and implementation to prevent uncertain "trial and error" (Thomke, 1998) approach susceptible to unnecessary delay to achieve the Rwanda Vision 2020 reform ambition of promoting "productive high value and market oriented agriculture" (Republic of Rwanda, 2012).

Unlike policies or programmes for poverty reduction such as Ubudehe and Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) among others, which were basically designed and implemented

encouraging ordinary citizen to participate in the implementation process, the agricultural reform implementation was compulsory without prior consultation of beneficiaries (Hahirwa, 2014).

Regional crop specialization process – an arrangement of selecting crop(s) suitable to the soil variation and the environmental factors to each area of the country – did not involve farmers. This resulted in discontents among them when they were invited to accept the agrarian reforms. Depending on the type of the introduced crop(s) in a specific farming area, farmers reacted in various ways. Only some farmers reacted openly against the introduced new crop(s) but the majority chose a delicate way while expressing their opinions using a kind of subtle argumentation or ironical statements, strategic silence, indifference or apathy, etc. (Hahirwa, 2014).

Such kind of resistance is not unique for smallholder farmers the researcher met in Rugeramigozi marshlands. A number of other scholars in the field of sociology, anthropology and political sciences such as Foucault (1978); Scott (1985, 1990, 2008); Lilja (2007); Fernandez & Rodrik, (1991) ... have revealed the presence of different forms of resistance in different communities. To emphasize this assertion, the researcher refers to Foucault (1981) belief that “resistance is present everywhere in power networks...” (Foucault, 1980; Leaver, 2019, p. 160).

In this article, the reform implementer/executor is in a position of power since s/he enforces the agricultural reform prepared, endorsed and published at high level of political instances. However, as Foucault (1978) argues “where there is power, there is resistance...” (Foucault, 1978) but the form of resistance depends on the existing form of power and other psychosocial and cultural dimensions.

Even though Lukes (2005) maintains that “power is productive and makes development possible” and Gaventa (1980) believes that “power creates obedience and powerlessness”, this article shows that subtle resistance is very influential in a situation of exercising power over common people – or the smallholder farmers in the context of this article. The results from this article corroborate the above assertion, where through their subtle strategies, smallholder farmers have managed to influence the cancellation of growing maize in favour of rice (Hahirwa, 2014).

A very recent example of subtle resistance (Scott, 2013) is found in *The New Times* – a Rwanda’s Leading Daily – where just after that the government had decided to allow users of public transport to sit without social distancing the users reacted against the new public transport tariff. In actual fact, this Rwanda’s Daily newspaper has, on 15 October 2020, published an article underlining that people had through social media networks reacted against the new Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authorities’ (or RURA) public transport tariff claiming that they are higher compared to the tariff before the COVID-19. Subsequently, people’s discontent expressed through social media networks has suddenly influenced the readjustment of the new tariff in public transport where RURA has withdrawn it and adapted it to pre-COVID-19 tariff (Kuteesa, 2020). That is indeed, the outcome of subtle resistance as a disguised/hidden power (Scott, 2008).

When smallholder farmers’ rights to decide what suits their interest are violated, particularly, when they are in a weak position and the person in power is stubborn, they generally choose a delicate way to cope with the situation (Scott, 1985, 1990, 2008; Hahirwa, 2014). With regard to the reform implementation of growing maize in Rugeramigozi, even though farmers were under pressure to accept it, they were sceptical about its outcome and therefore reluctant to implement it (Hahirwa, 2014). Since they were in a subordinate position they have opted for using non-violent and subtle acts of resistance to smartly attempt to undermine the stubborn reform implementers who were imposing them to accept growing, according to them, unfavourable crop (Hahirwa, 2014).

Based on the latest 2017 and 2018 data, the reality in Rugeramigozi marshland was that the rationale behind smallholder farmers’ attitudes vis-à-vis the imposed crop was to dissuade its implementation, but didn’t have any political intention to bring down the decision makers who endorsed the reform implementation. However, the amendment of the decision to grow maize in favour of growing rice through constructing a modern dam to make possible rice cultivation is the result of the smallholder farmers’ subtle acts of resistance (Ibid.).

This article demonstrates that non-violent subtle resistance can lead to flexibility of the reform planners and executors in a particular context of post interethnic civil wars and genocide (Ibid.). In fact, when the decision makers or any other leading individuals who generally favour the top-

down perspective, involves the smallholder farmers in reform/policy planning through participatory action research (Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p.89), they incontestably promote “democratic power” (Hind, 1997; Henry, H., 2005) which, eventually smooth the process of policy/reform implementation (Hahirwa, 2014). Non-democratic power with its strict top-down perspective may also lead to the achievement of policy /reform implementation (Lukes, 2005) but without necessarily resolving the actual problem of ordinary people or smallholder farmers in the context of this article (Hahirwa, 2014).

Based on the update findings from Rugeramigozi smallholder farmers, one would conclude that unlike the statement that there are still restrictions on how freely people can speak (Hasselskog & Schierenbeck, 2015; Nzayisenga, Camilla & Schierenbeck, 2016) which, according to these researchers, may influence research results, the post-genocide era which was characterized by fear, reluctance and indifference to implement post genocide government initiatives has overtime changed significantly from a period of apathy to that of emancipation and commitment towards self-reliance and development. This was confirmed by smallholder farmers’ statements about their emancipation while interacting with researchers or arguing with local authorities and other civil servants who daily work with them in the community.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Smallholder farmers and other participants to this study are aware of the advantages that farmers can get once they properly implement agricultural reforms. Their awareness is based on the information they got from different sources including sector or district agronomists through meetings organised after *umuganda* (community work) or other meetings at cell or sector level, cooperative or any other well-informed persons with whom they have connections, especially successful smallholder farmers who graduated from a lower to upper *ubudehe* socioeconomic category or farmers with huge model farms.

Critical issues emerge when farmers are either not clearly informed about the advantages of the introduced new crop or they are aware of its advantages but prefer to grow a more profitable one. As all swampy lands are State property, the selection and distribution of suitable crop for each region of the country and marshlands in particular are determined by experts working for or hired by the ministry. If the predetermined crop doesn’t correspond to farmers wishes, then

discontents arise among farmers. In such case, they generally don't refuse the offer openly because they don't have property rights. They are marshland leaseholders and are susceptible to lose their plot(s) once they refuse to comply with the agronomist or authorities' stipulations.

The majority of smallholder farmers believe that since they also belong to the State, they have right to exploit State's lands. This is why they think their resistance is legitimate, but they prefer subtle acts or other smart acts of resistance as a precautionary measure to prevent any adverse situation. The consequences of such disguised defiance are numerous but the most critical are reform implementation delay, food scarcity and its consequences on farmers' health and food crops consumers in general.

To conclude this article, the researcher dare to say that what was hidden and ambiguous to the researcher during the 2010-2012 fieldwork was clear with the 2017-2018 revelation. On the one hand, the researcher finally discovered farmers' intention behind their acts and the meaning they attributed to their disguised behaviour and on the other, the amendment of growing maize privileging rice has made smallholder famers feel emancipated and therefore, honour Rwandan leadership for its flexibility.

This article revealed that in the process of reform/policy preparation, planners don't consider all aspects upholding smallholder farmers' advantages because they rely on their expertise targeting government long term strategies without farmers' opinions. Thus, this article recommends the following:

Farmers should be fully involved in the preparation of the agricultural reform.

To prevent farmers' discontents that would lead to unnecessary delays of reform implementation, a prerequisite Participatory Action Research involving farmers in the process of agricultural reform planning and implementation is recommended.

Therefore, the agricultural reforms should be research based and, although they are considered unprofessional, farmers should participate as researchers under the facilitation of professional agronomists and both should feel equal. This would create a mutual understanding environment between the facilitator and learners and would strengthen farmers' ownership of the reform.

Farmers should be involved in the experimentation of seeds to determine beforehand an appropriate soil for each. This would limit unnecessary delay due to trial and error approach during the implementation stage.

Training of all farmers on how to apply fertilisers, pesticides and adequately safeguard seeds and yield against humidity should be a priority.

In addition to their technical expertise in agricultural sciences, agronomists should be trained on how to train adult farmers using theory of adults learning or andragogy theory.

The researcher suggests further researches in resistance through social media networks and their impact on policy planning and implementation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author acknowledges the invaluable contribution of all participants in this research specifically the selected farmers exploiting Rugeramigozi marshland who accepted for the second time to contribute to this research, and local authorities and opinion leaders from both Nyamabuye and Shyogwe sectors who also shown invaluable assistance during the fieldwork.

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