

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We have already explained that the character of this report, whose main objective is to present the results of our survey, is descriptive rather than analytical. In this last section, we will summarize the facts found in this survey and examine their implications. The main contribution of our research is to have clarified some recent characteristics of agricultural management by the peasants in Rwanda.

We directly measured the areas of fields owned by 43 households in two areas. The measured areas comprised all cultivated fields (including borrowed ones), fallow fields and wooded areas. If we use the terms of Table 1.8, the measured area corresponds to the "cultivable area" plus "woodland." The average area was 0.48 ha for 21 households in Mubumbano and 0.88 ha for 22 households in Ryamanyoni (Table 3.12). Our survey showed that the average area of landholding was much smaller than that indicated in the census of 1990. According to Table 1.8, the corresponding area was 0.81 ha for Butare prefecture and 1.43 ha for Kibungo.¹ One of the reasons for this apparently is the influence of the civil war. It is likely that the average cultivated area was reduced because of the turbulence in rural society.

Fields in Rwanda can be categorized into two types according to their location: those in hillcountry and those in wetlands (swamps). The distinction is important and clear in the minds of Rwandan peasants, as they have a different name for each type of field: the former is called *musozi*, the latter *gishanga*. The fields in hillcountry depend totally on rainwater, while water is available all the time in wetland. As this enables more intensive agriculture in the wetland, its economic importance is greater. The perception of the property, and therefore the way of acquisition, is also completely different. People consider that hill fields have traditionally been owned by decent groups. Thus, these fields are generally inherited through kinship. The wetland fields are, on the other hand, considered as property of the state. The development of wetlands has in fact been promoted since the colonial period by the government. That is why the peasants answer that their fields in wetland are "given" by the state (or by the "commune").

The method of land acquisition was clearly different between the two surveyed areas. As shown in Table 3.13, acquisition by inheritance was overwhelming in Mubumbano, while that donated (particularly by the state) was more important in

¹ Mubumbano sector is found in Butare prefecture. Although Ryamanyoni sector is in Umutara prefecture which was established after the census, the data for Kibungo prefecture are applicable.

Ryamanyoni. This difference can be mainly attributed to the effect of the civil war. The war caused a massive population movement. In particular, many “Old Case Lords”² fled to the eastern part of Rwanda, including Ryamanyoni. Such a massive influx did not occur in Mubumbano; although the peasants escaped temporarily from the turbulence, many of them came back afterwards to their homeland. The “Old Case” refugees returning to Rwanda settled, in many cases, on vacant land whose original owners had generally fled as “New Case” refugees, and continued to live there even after the return of the “New Case” refugees by sharing fields with them.³ In this case, the “Old Case” refugees and the “New Case” refugees generally divided the fields into two equal areas, and the ownership by the former was recognized by the land committee in the “commune.” As it was this governmental organization that guaranteed the “Old Case” refugees the possession of fields, the peasants consider themselves to have been “given” the land by the state. This is the reason why the proportion of fields acquired by “donation” was very high in Ryamanyoni: In Mubumbano, almost all of the fields, which the peasants regarded as “donated” by the state, were found in wetlands.

Our survey clarified another important characteristic about agricultural land use: the importance of purchased or borrowed fields.⁴ The proportion of fields acquired by purchase and borrowing exceeded 20% of the total land in both of the research areas. In general, such actions as buying, selling, borrowing and lending land are rare in Africa. In Rwanda, however, dealing of land is not exceptional at all. The peasants seem to struggle in order to acquire fields by various means under the condition of the general land shortage.

Is it pertinent to consider this phenomenon as a sign of the development of capitalism in rural Rwanda? The answer is yes and no. On the one hand, the frequent dealing of land surely gives the opportunity for rich farmers to gather land. The land may be concentrated in the hand of rich farmers through this process. On the other hand, there are some facts that make us hesitate to accept such unilateral capitalistic development in rural Rwanda. As Figures 3.2 and 3.3 show, the area of a field and the rent charged do not show a clear proportional relationship. The level of rent seemed to be generally low and rather arbitrary, especially in Ryamanyoni. There are a number of cases that the peasants borrowing fields without any payment. The occurrence of frequent land dealing may

² See Chapter II, footnote 11.

³ According to the “Arusha agreement,” the land rights of Rwandan refugees who were absent from the country during more than ten years are considered as invalid. This is the reason why many of the “Old Case” refugees had to settle anywhere they could find the land.

⁴ Bart [1993] has also pointed out this characteristic.

signifies the possible polarization in rural society, but it is not easy to prove whether such process is going on.

Table 5.1
Number of Household Heads Working as Casual Labor and
Employed Casual Workers

| | Mubumbano | Ryamanyoni |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Household heads working as casual labor | 35 | 42 |
| of which employed casual workers | 5 | 11 |
| of which not employed casual workers | 30 | 31 |

Source: Survey data.

Careful attention is also necessary when analyzing the data on employed labor. As shown in Tables 3.29 and 3.30, many households have employed casual workers and many also replied that they made money by employing casual labor. Does this fact imply the existence of a particular group that depends on casual labor for a living? Or does this simply imply the habit of labor exchange with small payment? Although much deeper observation is necessary to get a precise answer to this question, an interesting fact emerges. As shown in Table 5.1, the number of household heads who have worked as casual labor and simultaneously employed casual workers was not many. Among the household heads working as casual labor, only about one quarter in Ryamanyoni and one-seventh in Mubumbano were simultaneously employed as casual workers. It is thus likely that there is a group of families in rural society depending more on casual labor than the other groups.

It is, however, debatable whether the formation of such a social group has been the result of recent socio-economic changes. Vidal has stated that casual labor had been considered as work for the poor in pre-colonial Rwanda (Vidal [1974]). This means that those who depend on casual labor have existed since long ago. Nevertheless, it is certain that the size of such a group recently became more considerable, in parallel with the rapid population growth and severe land shortage.

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To sum up, our findings address two points: the general characteristics of Rwandan peasants and the regional uniqueness of rural Rwanda. As many researchers have so far insisted, the small peasant plays a dominant role in rural Rwanda. In general, their activity is agriculture mixed with small-scale animal raising. Moreover, Rwandan

peasants have some particular characteristics: most of them only have tiny fields, and the purchasing and borrowing of land are frequent. Secondly, casual labor is widely used in rural society. There is a group of families in rural society who depend heavily on the income from casual work. In addition, the impact of the population movement caused by the civil war in the 1990s was considerable. In particular, the composition of inhabitants has markedly changed. In the eastern part of Rwanda, the population is still moving even today.

As for regional characteristics, the contrast between Mubumbano and Ryamanyoni is clear. With the former, the landholding is extremely small even in the Rwandan context, thus hindering cattle raising. The peasants are so nervous about land degradation that they put household garbage on to the fields. Some of them were obliged to depend on casual laboring to earn money. In Ryamanyoni, as the land is relatively abundant, the activity of animal raising was more important. The peasants were generally not very much interested in soil conservation. After the civil war in the 1990s, a large number of refugees flowed into this area, having a considerable impact on rural society. The inhabitants of this area therefore vary in their origins. A new rural society is now forming.

In this preliminary report, what we can assert is limited. We do not want to state more than we can demonstrate. What is important is that the meaning of our data should be re-examined in a broader context. For example, the historical point of view is indispensable to understand the present situation of rural casual labor. A sociological or anthropological approach is necessary to analyze dealing in land, as the problem is surely related to that of social exchange and reciprocity. In order to understand the present situation of Rwandan agriculture and peasants, it is necessary to quantitatively and qualitatively elaborate the data, and at the same time to analyze the problem from various academic disciplines.