

THE POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS FOR ECOLOGICAL ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN RWANDA

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Introduction:

There is increasing use of chemical agricultural inputs in production compelled by the increasing human population and food insecurity issues. This has adverse impacts on the ecosystem biodiversity and overall human wellbeing. Africa has been under increasing focus to improve agriculture and food production systems to make them more resilient and sustainable while increasing productivity. This has necessitated a shift from conventional agricultural production systems to ecological organic agriculture systems. The Ecological Organic Agriculture (EOA) Initiative is aligned with various strategic documents that focus on increasing agricultural production and ensuring sustainable environmental resource management such as the SDGs, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) among others. The overall goal of the Initiative is to mainstream EOA into national agricultural production systems by 2025 in order to improve agricultural productivity, food security, access to markets and sustainable development in Africa. Rwanda is one of the target countries for this Initiative.

Objective of the study:

This paper focussed on identifying and reviewing key policies and institutional frameworks in Rwanda that support EOA. This review provides a strong basis for implementing the EOA Initiative in the country.

Rationale for EOA:

Organic practices promote sustainability as well as less pollution since inorganic fertilizer and pesticides are not used. Blasting farm land with pesticides kills all bugs and creatures around the crops, both good and bad, that can sustain a healthy ecosystem.

Methodology:

This study used both primary and secondary data sources. Secondary data was obtained from relevant publications and online resources/ grey literature through desk studies whereas primary data was obtained through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) in Rwanda. Snowball sampling technique was used to identify and engage the target population.

Key Findings:

- EOA is still at its infancy stage in Rwanda with no explicit support policies.
- The relevant policies identified support some aspects of EOA such as ecological and biodiversity protection.
- There are no established markets for ecological organic products in Rwanda and in the region. Producers rely on foreign markets for their products, which are not accessible by many.
- Even with the East African Organic Products Standard (EAOPS), it is not affordable by many producers.
- Different elements of support to organic farming are delivered through a range of sectoral policies: The Ministry of Agriculture through Rwanda Horticulture Development Authority (RHODA) and other institutions involved in the organic promotion. The Government supports organic certification through further programmes and measures including training of farmers on the EAOPS and how to implement it.
- NGOs and farmers' unions are also involved in building-up a network of extension support services for farmers wishing to convert to organic farming.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

EOA can be the solution to the incumbent national and regional development needs. There are institutional structures in Rwanda that have provided a basis for the development and implementation of policies to which the EOA principles can be anchored on and escalated. The following recommendations are proffered to speed up the adoption of EOA in Rwanda through policy and institutional frameworks:

- Enact a standalone EOA policy
- Establish effective markets for EOA products
- Encourage mainstreaming of EOA Initiative into government programmes and policies
- Develop cross-sectoral coordination and support mechanisms
- Develop organic standards that are easily implementable in the country
- The Government of Rwanda and other financial stakeholders should facilitate conferences and workshops to disseminate EOA technologies and innovation.
- More awareness campaigns need to be mounted to popularize EOA and its values to the environment and human wellbeing.