Women’s Small-Scale Bean Seed Business in Antanetibe Mahazaza, Central Highlands of Madagascar

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Rural women in Antanetibe Mahazaza, Madagascar, define wealth as the capacity of the household to send their children to school and to have a stock of rice for food. As rice is the staple food for Malagasy people, not to have to buy rice every day is perceived as a sign of ease. For married women and female-headed households, it is a huge challenge. Producing bean seeds with the collaboration of AMADEA NGO and the assistance of the National Research Centre FOFIFA constituted a big opportunity for them to improve their livelihoods. This paper discusses the progress made and gender issues encountered in conducting the bean seed business. Participatory assessments using focus group discussions, mapping, and drawing were used as methods for analyzing stakeholders, identifying and prioritizing gender issues (poverty, age, education, knowledge), and identifying determinant factors of success and risks. Variables that affect income were examined. The results highlighted women’s care responsibilities and their desire to bring wellbeing to their household. Women perceived education as a key success and empowerment factor. A gap was found between women leaders and group members on business management. Sustainability of the bean seed business beyond the lifetime of the NGO project was analyzed, and a strong linkage with inputs and markets identified. The strengths and weaknesses analysis of the women producers’ groups and their organizations allowed possible improvement to be identified. The improved model of this rural woman’s bean seed business will be scaled up at other sites in the Central Highlands of Madagascar.