

Refugees International

Rwandan Repatriation:

The Challenge for the Great Lakes Region

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This report, compiled by Refugees International from field dispatches by RI staff member Paula Ghedini, continues the series of periodic reports highlighting various issues surrounding the ongoing repatriation of Rwandan refugees.

The series focuses on particular areas for attention and improvement, often based on the perceptions of refugees, returnees, and those who never left Rwanda. Refugees International does not endorse the views of individuals whomay be cited in the following report, but hopes this series will provide useful insights to policymakers in UN agencies, donor governments, and NGOs as they attempt to meet the challenges of repatriation . Because any report runs the risk of being misinterpreted by refugees as militating against repatriation, Rwandan Repatriation will not be distributed to the field.

Rwanda's Prefectures

Rwanda is composed of ten prefectures. The variance among and between the prefectures, and within communes is dramatic. The Rwandan government, UNHCR, and NGOs all acknowledge the difficulty of incorporating these disparities into any plan of action aimed at the repatriation of refugees. Although all parties seem to agree that the refugee camps are not sustainable and would like to see the return of the 1.7 million Rwandan refugees, successful repatriation cannot be accomplished without considering the unique characteristics of each commune.

In this regard, Refugees International presents a sample of communes, which at this time, seem most amenable to repatriation. A thumbnail sketch of the climate and conditions for repatriation within each Rwandan prefecture follows this sample.

Prioritized Commune Repatriation

Considering the variance among different prefectures, not to mention among their particular communes, a comprehensive repatriation strategy must incorporate the particular needs and problems of Rwanda's diverse localities. The most promising approach would appear to be the repatriation of refugees in the same fashion in which they left Rwanda: commune by commune.

By launching a pilot project based upon a prioritized commune by commune approach three goals could be achieved: 1) the viability of applying a selective commune plan could be assessed; 2) refugees and residents could finally dispel (or confirm) fears, concerns, and opinions to which they cling, discouraging repatriation; and 3) aided by proximity and a concentrated focus, UN agencies, NGOs, and governments could develop a strong working

relationship, determine the best use of resources, and the most beneficial projects for each of Rwanda's communes.

Kibungo Prefecture

Birenga, Kigarama, and Rusumo Communes

Advantages:

* Rusumo is only 23% resettled; Birenga and Kigarama are only 40% resettled.* Land in Kibungo (particularly in Rusumo) is extremely fertile and there is a wide variety of crops that have traditionally thrived and been lucrative ventures, e.g. coffee, bananas, manioc, and potatoes.* Of the total 393,000 refugees from Kibungo prefecture, 111,000 are from Rusumo commune. Almost all are adhering to their original communal structure in Ngora; they are living together commune sector by commune sector, reestablishing their schools, government, and socioeconomic structures.* Ninety-one per cent of the housing is largely undamaged in Kigarama.* MINIREISO (the Rwandan Ministry of Rehabilitation and Social Integration) has already singled out Birenga and Rusumo as two target zones for reintegration and rehabilitation programs.

Concerns:

* There is a legacy of genocide in Kibungo (one of the highest massacre rates in Rwanda) which causes a tension and suspicion among all parties.* Kibungo's location along the border of Tanzania (and Rusumo, in particular, being closer to the Ngora camps than any other Rwandan commune) makes it susceptible to incursions by ex-FAR and interhamawe groups, and subsequent conflicts with RPA forces; the conflicts themselves are worrisome to both refugees and residents, but the possibility of RPA retaliation against Hutus living in the area is unnerving to all.* Paucity of international monitors and international presence. With any significant repatriation, at least three to five more human rights monitors would need to be stationed in Kibungo prefecture. Also, implementing NGOs should establish permanent residence in Kibungo, rather than commuting from other prefectures.* There is a very large and assertive RPA battalion in Kibungo prefecture and the role of the army in overseeing Kibungo's communes is intimidating. Rumors of harassment, physical harm, and the possibility of a replay of the Kanama incident instill fear in the refugees and deter them from returning.* In addition to the initial destruction resulting from the genocide, the rehabilitation of this area will require a great deal of work, resources, people and time because there is one and a half year's worth of neglect and damage throughout Kibungo. Some of this neglect can be attributed to the low population throughout the prefecture and a lesser international NGO presence than in some other Rwandan prefectures.* Many of Kibungo's local government officials are old caseload returnees. Refugees in the camps do not trust these strangers; when the Bourgmestre of Kibungo visited Ngora camps to ask refugees to come home, he was asked by refugees how they could believe him when they had never seen him before and he had lived in their prefecture for only a year.

Byumba Prefecture

Murambi and Muvumba Communes

Advantages:

* Land is readily available; there has been virtually no resettlement in these two communes.* There have been favorable working relations among the local government and NGOs working

in Byumba; Byumba officials have actually initiated cooperative projects in several cases by approaching NGOs with ideas of what projects are needed and then expedited the bureaucratic process to accommodate NGO requests.* Security conditions have been relatively stable; although located along Rwanda's northeastern boundaries, Byumba has not generally been targeted by incursions from ex-FAR and interhamawe units..

Concerns:

Although low resettlement ensures availability of land, it also implies lack of residents; some refugees are wary of returning to a "ghost town" commune.

Much of the land has been damaged and housing destroyed because of the invasion of the RPF through Byumba.

There is not a significant international presence currently stationed in Byumba prefecture.

Byumba's rocky, hilly terrain is not the most conducive to farming.

Butare Prefecture

Kigembe Commune

Advantages:

* Very low resettlement rate; very little damage to shelter and land. (Only 12% of the housing was destroyed in Kigembe.)* The new communal government has a solid reputation for moderate politics and fair deliberation of disputes.* Land is very fertile; although much of the land had been neglected for over a year, recent returnees claim crops are growing back quickly and plentifully.* Kigembe reaped the benefits of a variety of commercial and agricultural industries before the genocide, many of which simply need rehabilitation and personnel to restart. (For example, a fishery, Rwanda's largest before the war, has been rehabilitated and is ready to begin operations again.)

Concerns:

* Butare is riddled with extremist forces: the prefecture-level government, the university, and the large RPA presence have often voiced extremist statements. Also, several politically motivated crimes have been committed against returnees, moderate residents, and political officials in various communes throughout Butare. For example, the former Bourgmestre of Butare was assassinated in March 1995.* Butare's location along the Burundian border makes it particularly vulnerable to the sways of escalating tension and volatile conditions in Burundi. Some Rwandan refugees living in Burundi have traversed back and forth across the border several times during the past year because of internal security conditions inside Burundi, destabilizing Butare.* Many NGOs working in the area are concerned with the lack of cooperation and hostile attitudes they encountered from extremist elements of the local government and population. Some have decreased activities and considered suspending programs in certain communes.

Gisenyi Prefecture

Karago and Giciye Communes

Advantages:

* Low resettlement rate; Karago and Giciye are approximately 30% resettled.* Gisenyi has a high concentration of NGOs.* Gisenyi has been designated by the Rwandan government as one of the preliminary target zones for reintegration and rehabilitation programs.* Many refugees and residents are comforted by the presence of UN human rights monitors and UNAMIR.* Gisenyi, while largely dependent on agriculture, also enjoys a wide variety of successful industries and economic endeavors. Gisenyi had a thriving tourist industry before the war; and its socioeconomic structure appears well suited for reintegration and redevelopment.* Gisenyi suffered the fewest massacres and least damage during the genocide; most of the housing is intact and much of the land is undamaged.* The land in Gisenyi is fairly fertile and the climate and conditions are amenable to farming; also good sources for water irrigation exist.* Due to the location of Inkamira transit center in Gisenyi, many UN and NGO warehouses are located in Gisenyi prefecture. Thus, distribution of resources for food-for-work and tools-for-work programs should be more expeditious.

Concerns:

* Security conditions in Gisenyi are tenuous at best. The escalation in violence since 1994 is alarming. The frequency of incursions by ex-FAR and interhamawe units, and attacks by RPA is disturbing to residents and refugees in nearby camps.* Other communes in Gisenyi are being rapidly repopulated, thus land tenure disputes or overcrowding could spill over to cause prefecture-wide problems.

Preconditions for Pilot Projects

* Increase international presence: installation of NGO offices and personnel, expansion of UN human rights teams, strengthening of UNHCR's role both within the prefectures and with corresponding regional offices.* Concentrate international resources, equipment, and personnel in the area to expedite the reintegration and rehabilitation process.* Keep focus of goals and projects limited; formulate and implement programs at the commune or even commune sector level, utilizing local residents and returnees as assessors and motivators.* Expand funding and programming to implement grassroots development projects and small industry enterprises. Key activities would include: skills training programs, micro-enterprise projects, small credit schemes and cooperative industries.* Invite joint coordination and active participation of local government and commune residents.

Prefecture Sketches:

Butare

A prefecture located in southwest Rwanda, Butare's 1994 pre-genocide population was 825,000 persons. As of October 1995, its population was 413,000. UNDP estimates that 150,000 of Butare's residents were killed during the genocide. Its three largest communes, Kigembe, Ntyazo, Nyakizu, currently house the following numbers of residents respectively: 15,000, 38,000, and 40,000. Prior to the genocide, these communes, respectively, were home to 53,000, 60,000, and 54,000 residents.

Approximately 196,000 refugees originate from Butare, 121,000 from five communes: Kibayi, Kigembe, Muganza, Nyaruhengeri and Shyanda. As a result of Butare's location along the Burundian border, most refugees from Butare fled into the neighboring country. Of the Rwandan refugees in Burundi, 70 - 75% are from Butare (136,000).

Kigembe, the commune in this prefecture most prepared for repatriation, remains underpopulated. Of the total 29,000 refugees from Kigembe commune, over 28,000 are in the camps of Burundi. An additional 12,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kigembe live throughout Gikongoro prefecture. As of October 1995, there were no land tenure disputes in Kigembe and only 12% of the housing was destroyed, both of which make it a prime location for resettlement. In addition to the availability of land, Kigembe is also an attractive commune for repatriation because the land is fertile and, before the war, Kigembe had the biggest fishery in Rwanda which has recently been renovated and reopened. Kigembe's water systems are being rehabilitated, encouraging agriculture and development within the commune.

Byumba

Byumba lies in the far northeastern corner of Rwanda along the borders of Uganda and Tanzania. In 1994 there were 846,000 residents living in the prefecture; as of October 1995, there were only 308,000. According to UNDP, 50,000 were killed during the genocide.

Byumba has the second highest number of refugees in the camps: a total of 235,000. Of the refugees from Byumba, 125,000 are in Tanzania and another 108,000 are in Goma, Zaire. Despite its distance from Goma, many of Byumba's residents fled to Zaire in order to escape the advance of RPF forces from Uganda.

Over 113,000 of the refugees from Byumba are from three communes: Kivuye, Murambi, and Muvumba. Of these three, two communes remain virtually unpopulated. As of October 1995, Murambi was home to 76 residents, and Muvumba to 60 residents. Respectively, these communes had prewar populations of 93,000 and 64,000.

Byumba, like Kibungo, suffered severely during the genocide and the subsequent RPF advance into Rwanda. Refugees in the camps are reluctant to return to Byumba because land has been overrun, many homes destroyed and, to date, resources are either insufficient or inaccessible. The longer areas such as Byumba, are neglected the more difficult the prospect for resettlement becomes.

Cyangugu

Cyangugu borders Zaire and Burundi in Rwanda's far southwestern corner. Green and lush with a picturesque view of Lake Kivu, Cyangugu is one of the most scenic of Rwanda's prefectures.

Cyangugu's current population is approximately 80% of the total prewar figure of 557,000. The populations in Cyangugu's three largest communes have almost reached pre-genocide totals: Bugarama is 71% resettled, Gatara 88%, and Karengera 78%. Some contend such encouraging resettlement figures are skewed by a high number of old caseload returnees, an assertion supported by UNDP estimates that 75,000 of Cyangugu residents were killed in 1994 and there are still large numbers from Cyangugu living in refugee camps.

Of the approximately 59,000 refugees from Cyangugu, most fled to, and remain in, Zaire because of the prefecture's close proximity to the border: 38,000 in Bukavu and 17,000 in Uvira. Bugarama commune alone still has over 10,000 refugees living in Zaire, almost all of whom are in Uvira.

Massive repatriation to Cyangugu could prove difficult, especially with regard to land tenure. For example, since Bugarama is 71% resettled, the return of more than 10,000 refugees from Uvira could ignite land disputes.

Gikongoro

Gikongoro is situated between Cyangugu and Butare prefectures, and borders Burundi. In October, the total resettled population of 329,000 residents was 65% of that prior to the war. According to UNDP figures, approximately 100,000 were killed in Gikongoro during the genocide. The three largest communes in Gikongoro have been almost fully resettled: Mugasombwa is 92% resettled with 50,000 residents, Muko 79% with 40,355, and Nshiri 90% with 44,370. Currently 27,000 refugees from Gikongoro remain in camps, 99.6% of whom are in Bukavu, Goma, and Uvira.

Gisenyi

Gisenyi lies in the upper northwest corner of Rwanda along the Zairian border. Despite suffering the least number of casualties during the genocide (25,000 according to UNDP estimates) Gisenyi remains one of Rwanda's least resettled communes. By October 1995, only 57% of 1994's prewar population of 795,000 had returned. Though, as a whole, the commune has a low resettlement rate, two of Gisenyi's three largest communes have been substantially resettled (Kanama 87% and Kayove 71%). The Rwandan government is actively resettling old caseload refugees in the third, Mutura. However, there are over 29,000 refugees in Goma who are from Mutura commune. With regard to Gisenyi's most resettled communes, refugees and current residents alike worry about the availability of land in the event of significant returns by new caseload refugees.

Of the 171,000 refugees from Gisenyi most, 164,000, remain in the camps in Goma, Zaire.

Gitarama

Gitarama prefecture is located in central Rwanda between Kibuye prefecture to the west and Kigali (urban) to the east. According to UNDP, 50,000 civilians were killed in Gitarama during the genocide, yet the prefecture has regained 88% of its prewar population figure of 894,000. By October 1995, the population of Nyamabuye, one of Gitarama's largest communes, was 17% greater than 1994 estimates. Much of this resettlement, however, has been by old caseload refugees who were in Burundi, many of whom are living in houses belonging to refugees and IDPs who have not yet returned. Approximately 46,000 refugees from Gitarama remain in Burundian and Zairian camps.

Kibungo

Kibungo, the third largest prefecture in Rwanda, borders Tanzania and Burundi. Kibungo, traditionally one of Rwanda's least populated prefectures, suffered 100,000 casualties during the genocide according to UNDP figures. Current resettlement figures are low; only 45% of 1994's population of 705,000 has been resettled. Kibungo's three largest communes - Birenga, Kigarama, and Rusumo - are underpopulated; respectively 40%, 40%, and 23% resettled.

A resettlement figure of 40% for Kigarama is misleading. According to UNDP, 16,000 of Kigarama's 31,000 residents are old caseload returnees, and an additional 11,000 are IDPs from other prefectures. Apparently, many of the refugees and displaced chose to resettle in Kigarama because 91% of the commune's housing is in good condition.

Rusumo commune, located on the Tanzanian border and closest to Ngara, is well-known for its fertile lands, and traditionally produces one of Rwanda's largest banana crops each year. Though 25% of the houses in Rusumo were destroyed and another 20% damaged during the genocide, according to the UNDP construction materials are available for shelter rehabilitation and construction.

Though six other prefectures had higher populations in 1994, Kibungo produced more refugees than all others; of the 393,000 total refugees from Kibungo, 111,000 are from Rusumo. The majority, 231,000, of the refugees from Kibungo are currently in Ngara, another 112,000 in Karagwe, Tanzania.

Kibuye

The prefecture of Kibuye which lies along Lake Kivu on Rwanda's western border suffered 100,000 casualties during the genocide, according to UNDP estimates. In October 1995, Kibuye was home to 349,000 people, however, before the war the commune housed 510,000 residents. Today 47,000 refugees in Burundi and Zaire are from Kibuye; 33,000 are in

Bukavu.

Kibuye's high resettlement rate (68%) masks sharp differences in resettlement among the communes. Mabanza and Rutsiro communes are 85% and 95% resettled, respectively; while Gitesi, the second largest commune, was only 56% resettled by October 1995. One probable explanation for the reluctance of refugees to return to Kibuye is the land's infertility. Only hardy crops, such as potatoes, manioc, and cabbage can grow throughout much of Kibuye.

Kigali (Rural)

Rural Kigali is a large prefecture in south-central Rwanda along the Burundian border. During the genocide, UNDP estimates that 125,000 civilians were killed in the prefecture. Based upon a prewar population of 988,000, Rural Kigali has been only 65% resettled. Rural Kigali's three largest communes Bicumbi, Kanzenze, and Ngenda are 66%, 63%, and 84% resettled respectively. About 164,000 refugees from the prefecture remain in camps; 139,000 are in Goma.

The commune of Kanzenze, in particular, the town of Nyamata, was one of the communities hardest hit by the genocide. An estimated 80% of the housing was completely destroyed in some sectors; 1,300 houses need reconstruction. Two sectors in Kanzenze have been designated as old caseload resettlement sites by the government of Rwanda but are in need additional support.

Although 91% of Kanzenze's population subsists on agriculture, land quality has badly deteriorated during the past few years. Coupled with the shortage of housing, the shortage of arable land may prove problematic in Kanzenze.

Kigali (Urban)

Urban Kigali, or Kigali Ville, the urban and political center of Rwanda, consists of the capital city and its surrounding neighborhoods. This prefecture has always been highly populated, and consequently, property and resources have always been in high demand. It has been difficult to assess the number killed in Kigali Ville during the genocide; a highly concentrated population in the city, large mass movements, and the heavy repopulation of the capital have prevented a reliable estimate of those killed during 1994. Kigali Ville housed 252,000 residents in 1994 and

figures already indicate that over 190,000 live in the prefecture today. The majority of Kigali Ville's residents live in the prefecture's largest commune, Nyarugenge, which is 93% repopulated, with a total population of 119,000, as of October 1995.

This high resettlement rate is deceptive; much of the resettlement in Kigali Ville has been by old caseload returnees. As of October 1995, there were still 31,000 refugees from Urban Kigali in Burundian, Tanzanian, and Zairian camps; 27,000 are in Goma. Many of the residents from Kigali Ville in Goma, however, are those who may be implicated in the genocide and, thus, are not likely to repatriate.

Ruhengeri

Ruhengeri borders both Uganda and Zaire. Ruhengeri is composed of 16 medium-sized communes with average pre-genocide populations of 40,000 to 50,000. Ruhengeri suffered fewer massacres than other prefectures, with only 25,000 deaths. Ruhengeri's population of 810,000, as of October 1995, is 98% of prewar estimates. One reason for such significant levels of resettlement is the land's fertility.

Resettlement in Ruhengeri prefecture has been evenly distributed among its communes, however, recently the security situation has deteriorated greatly due to insurgencies by ex-FAR and Interhamawe, and subsequent RPA activity.

Over 167,000 refugees from Ruhengeri remain in camps; 164,000 are in Goma. Their return could prompt land disputes throughout the prefecture.

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