Rwanda

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Abstract:

It's been some fifteen years since Rwanda experienced a civil war and genocide which ripped the fabric of its society to shreds. Its political systems have recovered to the point where law and order are now the rule rather than the exception, and economic growth has been notable for such a conflict-ravaged society (CIA World Factbook 2011). Rwanda features a multi-party republican system, and its constitution was re-written in 2003 in an attempt to better address the unique needs of a post-conflict society (African Capacity Building Foundation 2003). There is some debate over the effectiveness of this constitutional reform, as some view the political reform process leading to the new constitution as a veiled attempt by the party in power, President Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front, to minimize political opposition (International Crisis Group 2002). The new constitution also afforded the president a broad spectrum of powers, which he argued to be necessary to restore order to a chaotic environment. Political organization in Rwanda is often along ethnic lines, thus political competition always carries the risk of re-igniting civil war in Rwanda. Before the Civil War, much of the farming practices that occurred in Rwanda were very unorganized. In places like in the west of the country, in cities like Kibuye, there was wide speculation over land ownership, like creating even more animosity during the civil war. Since the Civil War thousands of Rwandan citizens have been displaced, population density has increased, and a shortage of land for subsistence farming has become a reoccurring problem (Huggins 2008). Despite advancements in technology, Rwandan farmers have not been able to cope with increases in land use and the reduction in size of the average family farm. The overused farm land yields poorer crop production because the soil becomes less fertile (Verpoorten 2009). The main mineral that has been depleted in Rwanda’s soil is phosphorous (Mukuralinda 2010). This is a dire concern, because phosphorous is a key mineral in Sub-Saharan agriculture for crops like Maize, which is a major crop in Rwanda. Despite government attempts at instituting programs such as “Vision 2020” in order foster the commercialization of agriculture the rural population continues their unprofitable crop specialization in brewing bananas, thus severely limiting any economic growth (Okech 2005).
While Rwanda may be suffering from political oppression and a lack of freedom of expression, its economic situation is much the opposite. Amazingly for a country only recently been torn asunder by civil war, Rwanda is doing well for itself in terms of recovery to post-conflict economic status. Equality, however, is an important issue, as economic inequality may have been one catalyst of the civil war (A Kamola 2007).

However, despite Rwanda’s amazing recovery, it’s level of economic development was quite low to begin with. Today, Rwanda qualifies for HIP (Highly-Indebted Poor Country) status and receives a great deal of financial aid from donor nations and organizations, along with debt cancellation and deferment from the International Monetary Fund. Its economy is mostly dependent on agricultural production, an unpredictable, oil-dependent and low-yield source of income. Tourism also brings in foreign currency as the country has magnificent parks and wildlife preserves, but tourism is also unpredictable and can take a downturn as oil, and therefore transportation costs, rise in the future. (CIA World Factbook 2011).

In sum, Rwanda features a system of government with a very strong president, wherein very little political opposition is allowed, for fear of sparking more ethnic conflict. Its economy has recovered to pre-conflict levels, but as those levels were never high to begin with, it has a long way to go before being considered a successful model of economic development for central African states.

**Hunger:**

The major edible crops of Rwanda include beans, sweet potatoes, manioc and bananas. Beans and sweet potatoes make up 50% of the average Rwandan’s diet. There is a strong seasonal fluctuation in food availability, as there are generally two-to-three cropping seasons. Some land is used up by cash crops, such as coffee, tea, and sugar cane. The pre-war government implemented programs to promote “commodity-crops” like wheat, corn, potatoes and rice. This was designed to fight off the heavy dependence on imports and foreign aid. Modern dairying has been used since 1990s but due to the expansion of cattle herding, Rwanda has resorted to deforestation. Environmental problems have occurred due to the removal of forest for herding land. Historically, Rwandans have never been able to store food up to fight off droughts (Ford 1990).

Rwanda faces an overpopulation problem. It is the most densely populated country in continental Africa. Despite advancements in technology, Rwandan farmers have not been able to cope with increases in land use and the reduction in size of the average family farm. The overused farmland yields poorer crop production because the soil becomes less fertile (Verpoorten 2009). There is also very little room left for Rwandans to expand to. As Rwanda’s forests have been reduced by 80% over the last 40 years and the government has cut protected land in half since 1994. This is largely due to the lack of resources and widespread poverty plaguing the nation (Rutagarama and Martin 2006). There are still lasting effects from the Rwandan Civil War and Genocide on food production. The war ravished the land and made farming difficult. Natural and social resources, such as community wells and irrigation systems, were destroyed. Also, due to the over 250,000 land mines (about 25 per square mile), land use for farming and herding is reduced even further (Cohen and Pinstrup-Andersen 1999). As recently as 2006, Rwandans have been forced to eat grass and weeds to survive. A large famine struck the food-producing region of Bugesera in southern Rwanda. Instead of seeking aid from international food aid programs such as The World Food Program and the International Federation of the Red Cross, many Rwandans starved. Rwanda’s neighbors Burundi shared the effects of the famine but sought and received aid. Rwandan officials initially dismissed the reports of famine due to the desire to promote the idea that Rwanda is a healthy, self-sufficient nation (Ingenlaar 2010).

One of the main producers of bananas in the East African Great Lakes Region, bananas occupy twenty-three percent of Rwanda’s arable land and over fifty-percent of annual crop production (Okech 2005:149). Though once a profitable subsistence and cash crop, since the 1994 genocide the Rwandan government has grown dissatisfied with banana production and the increase in crop specialization. Prior to the genocide farmers harvested several banana varieties ranging from cooking, dessert, and brewing, however in recent years brewing bananas have come to dominate the nation’s four major agricultural sectors. Used in the brewing of beer at local levels, farmers have stressed the importance of the crop’s annual rather than seasonal income and its “lack of management attention” while simultaneously ignored the negatives of this monocrop system. A contributing factor to food insecurity, the government testified that “brewing bananas have been seen as a contributing factor to malnutrition, drunkenness, and poverty in the rural areas,” a result of their limited nutritional value (Okech 2005:159). Additionally the continued cultivation of this crop has left the soil exhausted decreasing soil quality and thereby preventing the farming of the cash crops potatoes, maize, and cassava (Ansoms 2010:108) Even more monocropping increases the risk of disease as seen by the bacterial disease Banana Xanthomas Wilt which has affected numerous brewing banana plantations causing an rise in hunger and poverty levels (Green Pepper 2010:88).

**The Impact of the Rwandan Genocide on Hunger:**

Many of the problems Rwanda faces in regards to food production are consequences of the Rwandan genocide of 1994. After more or less 800,000 people were murdered by the Hutu, those who lived in Rwanda after the genocide faced whole completely different lives. Because thousands of people had to flee their homes to avoid being killed, all of their land was uninhabited for long periods of time and most of their livestock either died or wandered away. After the civil war when people returned to their homes, many were either destroyed or inhabited by others and they had no way to prove that where they had been living was actually theirs. Many simply just went to the Lumasi valley, which was once covered with crops, like maize, away. After the genocide, many Rwandans had to completely start their lives over.

**Depletion of Nutrients in Soil and the effect on Hunger:**

A problem recently challenging Rwanda’s food-making capabilities is the loss of key nutrients in the soil. This has deeply affected Rwanda’s maize crop, a vital one for Rwanda’s food supply. The main nutrient, phosphorous, has been dangerously low, especially in the past ten years (Mukularinda 2010). This not only affects crops grown in Rwanda, but it also is a sign of soil erosion. Not only are people’s lives in danger due to a low food supply, but those who grow maize must also fear that their houses will be taken by a landslide. Because it takes much less time to extract nutrients from the soil than for nutrients to replenish themselves, the problem has compounded greatly in the past decade or so. This has raised concerns among agriculturalists, because if Rwanda cannot grow its own food supply, it must import food from abroad, putting Rwanda in a debt cycle.

To combat the dangerously low phosphorous levels, scientists have done studies to determine if there is a fertilizer that is effective and inexpensive. It was resulted that an organic green fertilizer, T. Diversifolia, gave the best results for replacing phosphorus into the soil (Mukularinda 2010). T. Diversifolia is made from agroforestry materials, which is good, because this means that the materials needed to make T. Diversifolia are fairly easy to obtain. On the other hand though, if Rwandans become too dependent on the green organic fertilizer, the exploitation of resources to make the fertilizer could become an even worse problem in the future.

**Solutions and Prospects to Reduce Hunger in Rwanda:**
As of 2005 the Rwandan government prioritized the struggle to end poverty and hunger as the top national issue. Linking hunger and poverty reduction to agricultural growth, the government has since implemented a variety of national policies in their attempt to revolutionize rural life. Increasing government centralization, developmental strategies such as regional specialization, land registration, swampland development, and livestock programs are currently being attempted to combat this issue (Ansoms 2010:106). Furthermore additional propositions are being made to limit brewing banana production in which solutions include a state imposed monocropping system mandating that each region specialize in the production of a different crop based on individual climatic conditions (Ansoms 2010:109). In addressing land scarcity two policies, including the registration of all landholdings and state funded farming of swamplands, intend to tackle land fragmentation (Ansoms 2010:111). And finally, a “one household, one cow” program has been suggested to lessen wealth inequality providing each peasant family with at least one cow. In accompaniment, a “zero grazing” policy also plans to be put into effect which mandates that farmers provide the feed for their cattle in order to prevent the grazing of already depleting land (Ansoms 2010:115). Still objectives exist outside of this four pronged program and include a second Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy, the 2005 Organic Land Law, the destruction of banana plantations, and Vision 2020 a program to foster the commercialization of agriculture with the aims of decreasing the percentage of agricultural dependent people from eight-five to fifty percent by the year 2020 (Huggins 2008:297).

In most cases, aid from other big countries doesn’t appear until something catastrophic happens. For Rwanda, it took a massive civil war for people to notice and help the people. Even then, most thought the only issue was ethnic differences between the people; when in fact, the majority of the conflict was brought about because of “rapid population growth, land degradation, inequitable access to resources, political power struggles, famine, and betrayal” (Gasana 2002:24). While Elite Hutu farmers were sitting on large plots of land, peasant farmers were struggling to find available farmland, which forced them to use acidic soil and steep slopes for farming. Farming on the slopes caused the land to erode by 8,000 hectares of soil per year, which is enough to feed approximately 40,000 people for one year (Gusana 2002). The increase in population has also put a strain on energy supplies in Rwanda. Most of Rwanda’s energy comes from biomass energy through the burning of wood and other crops. Deforestation has become an increasing problem in the country, causing people to turn more towards burning crops for their fuel. The burning of crops limits the amount of organic matter that is able to sink back into the earth and replenish the soil causing the fertility of the soil to lessen. These issues are a big factor in the conflicts in Rwanda (Gusana 2002).

With the increased need for energy, the production of food has fallen to the wayside. In Rwanda, the average person only consumes 1,900 calories compared to the minimum food energy requirement of 2,100 calories (Gusana 2002). Hunger has also become a factor in the violence, but emergency food supplies going to areas of conflict, often become a challenge for those delivering the supplies, because they want to relieve food shortages without aiding the fighters (Cohen and Pinstrup-Anderson 1999). Representatives from the peasant association Twibumbe Bahinzi stated, “There is a generalized famine in the country, that is difficult to eradicate because it is only the cultivators-pastoralists [peasants] who are bearing its impacts while the ‘educated’ [the elite] are enjoying its side effects. Those who should assist us in combating that famine are of no use to us… it will require no less than a revolution similar to that of 1959… On top of this there is war. Even if the cultivators-pastoralists can still till the land, it is very difficult for them to work in good conditions when they have spent the night guarding the roadblocks, and are not sure that they are going to harvest…” (Gasana 2002:24).

The US, the UN, and other major countries have sent aid to Rwanda during their civil wars. In 1994, some US troops were sent to assist the UN’s operation in Rwanda to stop the war (New York Times 1994). Washington also sent $270 million in aid to Rwanda (New York Times 1994). After the conflict, relief organizations work with the countries to conquer food insecurities and “break cycles of conflict” (Cohen and Pinstrup-Anderson 1999). These agencies, such as CARE, attempt to develop programs that aim at bringing food relief and long-term development to the country (Cohen and Pinstrup-Anderson 1999). Unfortunately, most aid to countries gradually stops after the country is no longer in the news. To help Rwanda’s recovery and growth, interest needs to be brought back up in people that are willing to make donations. The conflicts aren’t going to stop just because the war has technically ended, and the hunger doesn’t end when a couple countries send food to them.

**Scholarly and Peer-Reviewed Sources:**

**Ansoms, An**

2010 Views from Below on the Pro-poor Growth Challenge: The Case of Rural Rwanda *African Review Studies* No. 53: 97 - 123

2010 Green Pepper to the Rescue of African Bananas *Appropriate Technology*: 68

**Cohen, Marc J. and Pinstrup-Andersen, Per**


**Ford, Robert E.**


**Gasana, James**


**Huggins, Chris**


This article explains the rapid population growth, problem of land distribution, and a lack of cooperation between the government and farmers as a pretext for a rise in poverty amongst Rwanda’s rural sectors. As these problems continue to remain unresolved there has been a steady rise in food insecurity in many areas.

**Ingelaere, Bert**


**International Crisis Group**

2002 Rwanda at the End of Transition: A Necessary Political Liberalisation *Africa Report* No.231 - 54
Gives an in-depth analysis of Rwanda's political environment from the 1994 genocide and civil war to the constitutional reform process of 2002-2003. Highlights problems of political inclusion and democratic governance in a post-conflict society which has never before known true democracy.

Kamola, Isaac A.
2007 The global coffee economy and the production of genocide in Rwanda Third World Quarterly 28: 571-592
Analyzes the Rwandan Genocide from the lens of economic inequality, both within Rwandan society and between Rwanda and its partners in the global economy.

2010 Phosphorus uptake and maize response to organic and inorganic fertilizer inputs in Rubona, Southern Province of Rwanda. Agroforest Systems 80: 211 - 221
Gives a scientific reasons on why agriculture in Rwanda has been steadily declining. Also, the article gives a specific example of a crop that has been declining, maize, and also gives examples of the chemical imbalances in much of Rwanda's agricultural soil.

Okech, Suleman H.
This article addresses the predominance of the subsistence farming of brewing banana's in almost all agricultural sectors. Though the staple crop, brewing banana's contribute to hunger as they have no nutritional value, do not bring in enough income for families, and provide little revenue from trade on the world market.

Pottier, Johan
1996 Why aid agencies need better understanding of the communities they assist; the existence of food aid in Rwandan refugee camps. Disasters 20:4 324-337
This article gives a good historical insight on food production during the Rwandan Civil War. Much of the problems in food production that occur today have ties to the days before and during the civil war and gives good examples on how unequal food production brought unspoken ground for the civil war too.

Rutagarama, Eugene and Martin, Adrian

The African Capacity Building Foundation
Gives an analysis of Rwanda's political system and quality of life changes from the genocide to the constitution reform process. Focuses on how the Rwandan government was able to stabilize the country and put it on a path towards stable reconstruction and economic growth.

Verpoorten, Marijke
The article outlines several contributing factors to poor farming in 1990s. It compares the economic output of food and cattle ownership of rural Rwandan farmers during the civil war and after. The article also explains some underlining cultural implications of cattle ownership, as well as the cattle's benefits to the farmer.

Other Sources:

Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook
2011 Rwanda CIA World Factbook
Provided maps and general background for researchers to use as "spring-board" of sorts


United Human Rights Council
2011 Genocide in Rwanda United Human Rights Council
Provided an in-depth descriptions of the causes of the Rwandan Genocide.