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Rwanda, Conflict

## **Rwanda: a country grappling with the legacy of genocide**

June the 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019, marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the conclusion of the Rwandan Genocide, which saw the death of 800,000 Rwandans, along with 3/4 of Rwanda's Tutsi population (Reid, 2020). The level of violence, topped with the efficiency of the ethnic cleansing process, was unprecedented, and has exposed a vulnerable Rwanda, which had most of its infrastructure decimated by the ensuing violence that engulfed the country and its surroundings for over 3 months. This bloodshed has mainly strained Rwanda's judicial, medical and economic systems, which were not equipped to deal with the outcomes of the genocide or mitigate the great damage that such unrest would cause to the ailing social fabric that Rwanda was left with. The genocide also worsened Rwanda's food insecurity problem. All of this, along with a slow international response, made the Rwandan Genocide one of the deadliest and most consequential acts of genocide to ever be perpetrated by a government in the African Great Lakes region. Despite the destruction that Rwanda incurred in the wake of the genocide, the country has seen tremendous progress over the decades which wouldn't have been possible without the collective effort of the Rwandan people, Kagame's government and the different international organizations that offered to help as soon as the genocide ended.

In this report, we're going to take a look at Rwanda's geographic features and what a typical Rwandan family looks like. We are then going to discuss the origins of Rwanda's troubled history, along with the key events that led to the commencement of the Rwandan Genocide, while emphasizing the role that tribalism and racial chauvinism played in causing the genocide to spiral out of control. After that, I'm going to share some of my suggestions on how to rebuild Rwanda's infrastructure on top of the tattered remnants of pre-genocide Rwanda. My suggestions will mainly revolve around the topic of food insecurity, which continues to be a problem in Rwanda.

## **Rwanda's geography and families:**

Rwanda, a country 5 times smaller than the state of Iowa, is a land-locked country situated in the heart of Africa, that is bordered by 4 other countries: Uganda to the north, Tanzania to the east, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west and Burundi to the south (Sawe, 2019). The country lies 75 miles south of the equator in the Tropic of Capricorn. Rwanda's total land area is 10,169 sq. miles. It has a temperate climate, with temperatures that are unusually low for its equatorial location. This could be explained by the fact that Rwanda has relatively high elevations (Sawe, 2019). Rwanda's population, which is mainly rural, according to the *Trading Economics* (82.79 % of the population, as of 2018), is around 12.95 million. The country is, also, one of the most densely populated countries in Africa. Its population size is the result of decades of steady population growth (ranging from 1.6% to 3.4%), which was only briefly disrupted by the commencement of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994 (NISR, 2014).

The genocide had a long-term impact on Rwanda's government. The overwhelming distrust felt towards Hutus has manifested in the dominance of Tutsis in the Rwandan government—which is a

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presidential and constitutional republic (Chepkemai, 2017). As for the economy, Agriculture plays a very important role in Rwanda. This should come as no surprise, considering that, according to the *Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)*, it accounts for 33% of the national GDP of Rwanda. Some of Rwanda's main crops are tea and coffee, which, according to the *National Encyclopedia*, account for 80% of its export earnings. Other major crops include: plantains, sweet potatoes and dry beans. Rwanda suffers from overcultivation, which is a consequence of the country's relatively high population density and land scarcity. According to the Rwanda Environmental Management Agency (REMA), 3.9 million acres of Rwandan land has been cultivated in recent years. This is out of the 3.4 million acres of land which is considered arable. Another consequence of Rwanda's high population density would be the average size of a typical Rwandan farm, which is around 1.7 acres.

According to a 2017 report by the United Nations, an average household in Rwanda consists of around 4 people. This report also highlights the shrinking size of Rwandan households, which is the result of the government's strong emphasis on family planning and the use of birth control (Family Planning, 2020). According to *EveryCulture*, Rwandan families typically live in single-family compounds which consist of several building that are surrounded by a fence. Rwandans use locally- grown ingredients to prepare their meals. Their diet usually consists of sweet potatoes, beans, corn, peas and other locally-grown plants. As for the main source of employment, most Rwandans work for the agricultural sector, which employs 72% of the population (FAO in Rwanda: Rwanda at a glance). Even though Rwanda has made great

economic progress since the end of the genocide, at least 40%\* of the population still lives under extreme poverty (at or under \$2 per day) according to an estimate by the *Voice Of America*. Rwanda's impoverished state could be seen quite clearly when looking at its average annual household income, which is around only \$400 (Gaspard, 2017). Even though the genocide left most of Rwanda's educational and medical services in a bad shape, 98% of Rwandan children are enrolled in primary schools (according to an article by UNICEF). As for healthcare, Rwanda operates a universal healthcare program alongside a *zipline* system (that began its operations in 2016), which relies on drones to transport blood to the country's hospitals and healthcare centers. This vastly improved the blood transportation system of Rwanda.

Some of the major challenges that Rwandans still face include: a lack of job opportunities and affordable housing (in Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda), small farm sizes (for a country that relies on agriculture), corruption, and the country's failed commitment to preserve the rule of law.

### **The impact of the genocide on food security:**

Food insecurity has been a pressing problem in Rwanda ever since the country gained its independence in the 1960s. The main contributors to this stifling problem are extreme poverty, land scarcity, small farm sizes, natural disasters and, yes, the country's dark history of ethnic conflict, that culminated with the Rwandan Genocide. The resentment felt by both major ethnic group (the Hutus and Tutsis) towards one another has resulted from the country's colonial past and the constant and abrupt regime changes that took place in Rwanda over the decades. The tensions brought by this increasing ethnic strife would finally explode into a bloody genocide with the assassination of Rwanda's former Hutu president, Juvénal Habyarimana, in 1994 (Clay, D., & Lemarchand, 2020). To understand the severity of food insecurity in Rwanda, along with the long-term impact of the genocide, one has to look at the number of Rwandan households that are food insecure, which, according to an article by the *Borgen Magazine* (2019), is about 18.7% of Rwandan households. Another thing to look at would be the prevalence of stunting in Rwanda, which is mainly caused by early childhood malnourishment. The number of children, under the age of 5, that were subjected to stunting has fallen a considerable amount, from 44.3% in 2010 and 2011, to a still high 37.4% in 2014 and 2015 (Adair et al., 1970), which shows a general improvement in the state of food availability in Rwanda. The government has also been somewhat successful at fighting poverty. According to the

World Bank, the poverty rate fell from 59% in 2001, to 39% in 2014. Though impressive, these accomplishments are not satisfactory enough for a person that seeks to uplift Rwanda to a better state. This conclusion that I've reached has motivated me to pour my energy and time into the three- pronged solution that I'm going to discuss in following segment of this report.

### **Rwanda's path to sustainable food security:**

Even though Rwanda has made great progress in the decades following the genocide, there is still a lot to be done. From Rwanda's debilitating land scarcity problem to the prevalence of growth stunting and malnourishment in Rwanda's rural communities, there is no denying that years of unjust land expropriation and redistribution (that was conducted by the Hutu elite), along with the incendiary and divisive government propaganda (that the government sponsored), took their toll on Rwanda's ailing social fabric. Then came the genocide, which delivered the final blow to Rwanda's tumbling economy and, ultimately, the country's agricultural sector.

26 years have passed since the genocide, and the problem of food insecurity remains unresolved. It saddens me to acknowledge that the Rwandan government has enacted many policies that failed to live up to Rwanda's commitment to the *Millennial Development Goals*, which include fighting poverty, malnourishment and food insecurity. So, in this report, I'm going to share a plan that I've devised after weeks of research, that I believe would help Rwanda achieve general welfare and reach a state of relative prosperity. Before sharing my plan, however, I'd like to start by mentioning that all Rwandans, even those displaced by the genocide, will be covered under my plan, irrespective of their race, tribal affiliation, religion or sex. There are three main components that are imperative to the success of my plan, and they are the following: 1. The replacement of Rwanda's current welfare system with a *National Basic Income (NBI)* program, 2. the widescale adoption of *GMO* technology, and 3. the mechanization and modernization of Rwanda's farms.

Starting with the *National Basic Income (NBI)*, this newly-developed concept would act as a perfect alternative to Rwanda's current welfare system, as it allows individuals to adequately cover the price of basic goods and services— like food and rent cost —while being able to earn additional income through work. This means that low-income earning individuals wouldn't be disincentivized by the income thresholds imposed by welfare programs on additional sources of income. An *NBI* would also diminish the need for an overreaching and restrictive bureaucracy— that is often expensive and ineffective —as it provides every citizen with a set amount of money, regardless of their financial or employment status. Due to the fact that an *NBI* depends on the cost of living in a specific country, my plan doesn't specify the amount of money that would be given to each individual on a monthly basis. This is in hopes of allowing

the Rwandan government to come up with an *NBI* that is best suited to accommodate the rapidly changing cost of living in Rwanda.

As for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> components, which include the widescale adoption of *GMO* technology and the mechanization and modernization of Rwanda's farms, I believe that a free market strategy, that reduces barriers and excessive regulations, is the best and most suitable approach for a country like Rwanda. Before studying how these components should be implemented, however, I'd like to start by laying out some of the benefits that would come with adopting the aforementioned components.

Starting with the 2<sup>nd</sup> component, *the widescale adoption of GMO technology* would increase food production and robustness, which would, in turn, increase food availability and make Rwanda's smaller farms a lot more productive and profitable for (Rwandan) farmers (Qaim & Kouser, 2013). Notwithstanding *GMO*'s scientifically-proven potential, efforts to normalize its use have been met

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with massive resistance around the world due to the emergence of a growing campaign of disinformation that has long sought to erode our trust in this technology by using pseudoscientific fallacies as grounds for supporting anti-*GMO* legislation. Anecdotal claims about the dangers associated with the use of *GMO technology* have been viciously refuted by 2000+ studies commissioned by various scientific groups and organizations (Wendel & Entine, 2019). This further proves how baseless the anti-*GMO* movement really is.

As for the 3<sup>rd</sup> and last component of my proposal, it has been proven that *mechanizing and modernizing farms* would help increase land productivity, improve farmers' lifestyles and diminish the need for labor-intensive and traditional means of farming (Times Reporter, 2017). According to *The New Times*, agricultural mechanization in Rwanda would consist of introducing and using farm machinery and implements that perform various farm operations from land preparation to planting and harvesting. Such machinery includes tractors, farm vehicles and important implements like plows, seed drills and cultivators. Rwanda should also encourage the adoption of more efficient and modern means of farming. This includes encouraging farmers to replace their traditional flood and sprinkler irrigation systems with a water-friendly drip irrigation system. A drip irrigation system is a system of crop irrigation that uses a network of pipes to irrigate individual crops. This system has been proven to minimize water usage and wastage, and maximize crop yield (Kumar, 2017). Another potential solution to the increasing land scarcity in Rwanda is vertical farming, which uses either a hydroponic, aquaponic or aeroponic method of farming in a controlled environment. This optimizes plant growth, uses significantly lesser water than normal cultivation (70-95% less) and uses lesser

space than conventional farms (LeBlanc, 2019). With its shrinking farm sizes, and having already 79,074 acres of its arable land mechanized (Times Reporter, 2017), Rwanda has a solid foundation and— most importantly —a good reason to mechanize and modernize its farms even more. Continuing on this path would ensure a bright and promising future for food availability in Rwanda and Africa.

Both, the *adoption of GMO technology* and the *mechanization of Rwanda's farms*, could be made mainstream by adopting, as I've mentioned earlier, a free market strategy. The success of this strategy depends strongly on minimal government intervention and the enactment of pro-market legislation. This would mainly consist of lowering the central bank's high interest rate (that, according to *Trading Economics*, averaged around 7% between 2005 and 2020) and imposing an interest rate ceiling, that would be aimed at preventing commercial banks and other financial institutions from lending money at unreasonably high rates of interest. Being able to borrow at a lower rate of interest means that an average Rwandan could invest more of their borrowed money on agricultural machineries and GMO seeds to improve crop quality and increase crop yield. This commitment— on the government's part — to create a free market economy doesn't stop with monetary policy. Another factor that plays an important role in the success of such a strategy is the country's willingness to embrace free international trade and distance itself from protectionist and anti-globalist sentiments and laws that seek to reduce foreign competition (in certain industries). Such laws are dismissive of the fact that a lack of competition deprives local industries of an incentive to lower prices and improve the quality of their products and services, which would do the hard-working farmers of Rwanda a great disservice in the process.

I believe that the party responsible for the execution of this plan is the Rwandan government, which has proved itself capable of leading such an enterprise after years of modernizing the country and solving some of its most pressing problems. The people, too, have to play a very important role in making sure that this plan is well-funded and that it is being executed ethically and in accordance with the will of the people. With that being said, I'm still of the opinion that international oversight is necessary to make sure that a project of this importance doesn't fall victim to government mismanagement.

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Looking for a solid source of funding proved to be quite a challenge. Even though Rwanda was ranked as one of the least corrupt countries in Africa in 2018 (48<sup>th</sup> globally), it still remains well below other African countries like Seychelles and Botswana, that were placed as the 28<sup>th</sup> and 34<sup>th</sup> least corrupt countries around the world by the *Transparency International* in their *Corruption Perception Index of 2018* (Ebatamehi, 2019). In spite of

Rwanda's improving record on corruption, such a ranking by an accredited organization, like *Transparency International*, raises concerns over the government's ability to effectively raise taxes and fund the various programs that it might implement (including ones from my proposal). A great example of how corruption and government negligence could impact the national revenue is best seen in the case of tax evasions, which costed Rwanda Rwf 6.8 billion (\$7.1 million) in 2016, when 25 companies issued forged invoices from electronic billing machines to evade taxes (Nyesiga, 2018).

To address some of these concerns, the Rwandan government has to enact comprehensive anti- corruption legislation, that would be aimed at cracking down on corrupt elements within the government and parts of the Rwandan economy. Strictly enforcing Rwanda's tax code on both corporations and individuals should be the government's top priority as well. Though initially skeptical, I now believe that simplifying Rwanda's tax code to a single-rate, flat tax on income is an important step for the government to take in the long process of reforming the tax system of Rwanda. Such reform would eliminate almost all compliance costs associated with the system of progressive taxation and would motivate individuals to pursue pay raises and job promotions, which would, in turn, create more wealth (Erb, 2016). A flat income tax would also exempt individuals below a set income threshold from paying taxes. The aforementioned proposal should be enough to fund a long- standing *NBI* program. As for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> components of my plan, limited funds would be required to implement them, since I chose a free market strategy that mixes between reducing the countries high interest rates and introducing legislation that would allow market forces to cheapen the price of agricultural machineries and GMO technology without the need for government intervention.

To address food insecurity and the practice of stunting directly, It is important that the government enacts strong anti-stunting legislation, that would prosecute parents for malnourishing their children (assuming they had the financial means to properly feed them) and set up stations and units that would provide essential care for stunted children and food insecure families. It is important to mention that my plan would not require or accept foreign aid. This is because I believe that foreign aid would do Rwanda more harm than good. Foreign aid could make the recipient country partially or fully dependent on other countries to survive. It is also possible that, due to the presence of corruption in Rwanda, this money might be mishandled or misused by corrupt politicians. A great example of this would be the \$12 million of aid that Zimbabwe received from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, that was misused, according to the inspector general of the organization, with \$7.3 million used to cover expenses other than what they were intended for, which was fighting killer diseases (Dugger, 2008). Refusing to accept foreign aid would make Rwanda independent, self- reliant and unaffected by the changing political landscapes of its donor countries (like the USA).

**Conclusion:**

Rwanda deserves to be praised and supported by the international community for its achievements. The progress that it has seen over the decades is a testimony to the driving force of determination that has turned Rwanda into a beacon of hope in a continent that struggles with on-going conflicts, corruption, and government ineptness. To keep this train of progress going, the people of Rwanda have to actively engage in the political process and see it that their demands and grievances are addressed. My plan (as outlined in this report) is essentially worthless without the support of the Rwandan people and their government. Soliciting such support would be my top priority as a hunger fighter that seeks to push food insecurity out of Rwanda once and for all.

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**\*Poverty in Rwanda:** Due to a lack of consistency in the documentation of poverty statistics and concerns about the authenticity of Rwandan government and news sources, I relied on multiple sources to get my poverty statistics.