

Country profile

Burundi

World Vision

GEOGRAPHY

Burundi is located in East Africa and occupies an area half the size of Tasmania. Only 38 percent of the land is arable. The country shares borders with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania. The terrain of Burundi is hilly and mountainous, dropping to a plateau in the east. The lowest point is at Lake Tanganyika, at 772 metres, with the highest point being on Mount Heha, at 2,684 metres.

PEOPLE

Burundi is one of the smallest and most densely populated countries in Africa. The population is estimated at 7.2 million people. The dominant ethnic groups are Hutu (85%), Tutsi (14%), and Batwa (1%).

The main languages are Kirundi and French. Swahili, a mixture of Arabic and Bantu languages that is the language of trade and business in much of East Africa, is also spoken, mostly in the region of Lake Tanganyika and in the capital city. English is taught in some schools.

The main religious groups in the population are Catholic (65%), Protestant (27%), Muslim (6%) and traditional religions (2%).



Map courtesy of The General Libraries, University of Texas at Austin.

HISTORY

The first evidence of the Burundian state is from the 16th century. From 1796 to 1850 the kingdom doubled in size. In 1899 Burundi became part of German East Africa and in 1916, Belgian troops conquered the area during the First World War. Full independence was achieved on 1 July, 1962.

During 1988, increasing tensions between the ruling Tutsis and the majority Hutus resulted in violent conflict between the army, the Hutu opposition, and Tutsi hardliners. During this period, an estimated 150,000 people were killed, with tens of thousands of refugees flowing to neighboring countries.

In 1993, Burundi's first democratically elected Hutu president was assassinated. As a result of the murder, violence again broke out between the two groups, and an estimated 100,000 people died within a year.

Despite the efforts of the international community to create a peace process, the civil war continued until 2005. In February 2007, the United Nations (UN) officially shut down its peacekeeping operations in Burundi and turned its attention to rebuilding the economy. The UN had deployed 5,600 peacekeepers since 2004, and several hundred troops remained to work with the African Union to monitor the ceasefire. The UN donated \$35 million to Burundi to work on infrastructure, promote democratic practices, rebuild the military, and defend human rights.



World Vision's vocational training is providing valuable income opportunities.

ECONOMY

Burundi is a resource-poor country with an underdeveloped manufacturing sector. More than three-fifths of the country's population live in poverty.

The economy is mainly centered on agriculture and pastoral activities. Agriculture supports more than 90 percent of the labour force and accounts for 38 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The principal subsistence crops are cassava, bananas, maize, sweet potatoes, beans and sorghum. The leading cash crop is coffee, which accounts for over 80 percent of all export earnings.

Burundi is a herding society, and the cow holds great symbolic power in the national culture. This is reflected in the language: a typical Kirundi greeting, Amashyo, translates as "May you have herds of cattle."

Although Burundi is potentially self-sufficient in food production, the decade long civil war, overpopulation, and soil erosion have contributed to the contraction of the subsistence economy. Large numbers of internally displaced persons have been unable to produce their own food and are largely dependent on international humanitarian assistance. Burundi is a net food importer.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Acutely unreliable food sources and supplies, and the lack of basic services affect a large portion of the population. The situation has worsened with serious drought periods over the last four years. Land is extremely scarce - 0.5 hectares per household on average.

Burundians traditionally built their houses of grass and mud in a shape reminiscent of a beehive, and wove leaves together for the roof. The traditional hut, called a rugo, was surrounded by cattle corrals. Today the most common materials are mud and sticks, although wood and cement blocks are also used in cities by the privileged class. Each



These goats are providing important nutrition and income support for this child-headed household.

Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	BURUNDI	AUSTRALIA
Population in millions	7.2	20.9
GDP per capita	\$333	\$36,032
% of births attended by professional health staff	25	100
% of population living on <\$2 a day	87.6	0
% of under 5 mortality rate	181	6
Life expectancy at birth (years)	48.5	80.9
Urban population (% of population)	10	88.2
Internet users (per 1,000 people)	5	698

Source: UNDP World Development Report 2008

house is surrounded by a courtyard, and several houses are grouped together in compounds that include the homes of extended family members.

The most common foods are beans, maize, peas, millet, sorghum, cassava, sweet potatoes, and bananas. Fish is consumed in the areas around Lake Tanganyika. Meal production is labour-intensive. The cassava root is washed, pounded, and strained, and sorghum is ground into flour for bread or porridge. The bread is rolled into a ball with one hand and dipped in gravy or sauce.

The diet consists mainly of carbohydrates. Vitamins and minerals are provided by fruits, but little fat and protein is available. Meat accounts for two percent or less of the average food intake. As a result, kwashiorkor, a disease caused by protein deficiency, is common.

EDUCATION

The main focus of Burundi's education system is on primary education. The Burundian government has tried to deliver universal primary education, but struggles with limited resources. Around half of all eligible primary school age children receive no primary education and remain outside the school system. Traditionally, male children are given extensive training in public speaking, storytelling, traditional dances and agriculture.

The overall adult literacy rate is 59 percent. Only 8 percent of the children attend secondary school. The functioning of the schools has been hindered by political instability, a severe shortage of teachers, and a lack of supplies.

WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN BURUNDI

- assists children, their families and communities to meet basic needs in education, health and clean water
- helps farmers with improved knowledge and techniques of food production and soil conservation.
- supports internally displaced people to re-integrate in their communities and live in harmony.