

Country profile

World Vision

Rwanda

GEOGRAPHY

Rwanda is a landlocked country in central Africa less than half the area of Tasmania. It has a predominantly mountainous terrain and is popularly known as “land of a thousand hills”. The landscape includes the volcanic Virunga range on the western edge of the Great Rift Valley. There are small tracts of rainforest on the western and north-eastern borders of the country and tropical savannah in the east. Deforestation is widespread.

PEOPLE

Rwanda is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa. The population is predominantly rural, with a steady increase in urbanisation. There are three groups living in Rwanda – Hutu (84%), Tutsi (15%), and Twa (1%). The Twa pygmies were the original inhabitants of Rwanda. The majority of Rwandans are Christian, but small numbers are also Muslim or have traditional beliefs. Kinyarwanda, English and French are the three official languages

HISTORY

Rwanda has had a turbulent history of tension between the dominant Tutsi minority and the majority Hutus. In 1959, three years before independence from Belgium, the Hutus overthrew the ruling Tutsi king. The ongoing tensions culminated in genocide in 1994. It is estimated that over 800,000 Tutsi and up to 30,000 moderate Hutu were massacred by Hutu armies and civilian militia (commonly known as “Interahamwe”). The killings lasted for 100 days until soldiers from the Rwandan Patriotic Front overran the country in July 1994.



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



Improving educational opportunities for children is an important goal of World Vision's work in Rwanda.

Throughout the crisis, almost three million Rwandans fled to neighbouring countries. Most of the refugees have returned to Rwanda but about 10,000 remain in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This has caused ongoing tension along the border with the DRC. In 2003, Paul Kagame won the first presidential elections since the 1994 genocide. Rwanda has since experienced relative stability and in August 2010, President Kagame was elected to serve a second, seven-year term.

ECONOMY

Rwanda is one of the poorest countries in the world. The economy is predominantly agricultural, with the vast majority of the population engaged in mostly subsistence farming. Coffee and tea are grown for export while cereals, vegetables and rice are grown as food crops. Even before the genocide, Rwanda could not sufficiently feed its population; however after 1994 the country's economic base was severely impoverished, with a limited ability to attract investment.

Rwanda has made substantial progress in stabilising and rehabilitating its economy to pre-1994 levels. However, despite Rwanda's fertile ecosystem, food production often does not keep pace with population growth. Also, inadequate transport links to other countries continue to handicap export growth. Promises of debt relief offer possibilities for progress, but this will depend on the speed and extent of the relief.

The government's high defence expenditure is another issue that causes tension with international donors and lending organisations.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Debt servicing carries a high social cost, with 76 percent of Rwandans living on less than US\$1.25 per day and many households living with inadequate shelter. Since the genocide, approximately half of all households have been headed by women, and approximately 100,000 children live in child-headed households. This puts many families at a social, legal and economic disadvantage.

The Rwandan diet consists mainly of sweet potatoes and beans, with bananas, corn, peas, millet and fruits added in season. Beer and milk are important beverages. Protein deficiency is a serious problem. Cattle are herded as signs of wealth and status rather than for their value as food and most Rwandans consume meat only about once or twice a month. Fish is eaten by those living near lakes. Malaria, HIV and AIDS, and malnutrition are the major health issues in the country. Together with a lack of skilled medical personnel, the people of Rwanda experience a high rate of child mortality and a low life expectancy.

EDUCATION

Over 14 percent of primary school-aged children are not enrolled at school. Of those who do attend, learning is impeded by a lack of basic materials such as books, pencils, school furniture and a scarcity of trained teachers. Approximately four percent of children aged 5 to 14 are working.



Health activities include monitoring and improving the nutritional status of children like Jeannette pictured here with her mother and a World Vision health worker.

Comparatively speaking...		
CATEGORY	RWANDA	AUSTRALIA
Population	10.3 million	21.5 million
Urban population	18.9%	89.1%
GNI per capita (US\$ PPP)	\$1,190	\$38,692
Population with sustainable access to an improved water source	65%	100%
Adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above)	70.3%	99%
Population living on less than US\$1.25 (PPP) a day	76.6%	0%
Under-5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	112	6
Adults living with HIV (% of total age 15-49)	2.8%	0.2%
Life expectancy at birth	51.1 years	81.9 years

Source: United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report 2010

WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN RWANDA

- works primarily in the north of the country;
- promotes sustainable community development with a particular focus on food security and agriculture and addressing the needs of child-headed households;
- ensures education of children is a top priority;
- facilitates a nationwide trauma, healing and reconciliation initiative.