

These fact sheets have been developed by the AMEP Research Centre to provide AMEP teachers with information on areas of professional concern. They provide a summary as well as identifying some annotated references that can be used to broaden knowledge and extend understanding. These references can be obtained through the AMEP Resource Centre at rescentr@nceltr.mq.edu.au

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Context

Refugees from Rwanda have recently been accepted for resettlement in Australia and are emerging as a new client group for the AMEP. Rwanda is a small country in central Africa, surrounded by the Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) to the west, Uganda to the north, Tanzania to the east and Burundi to the south. It has an area about one-third the size of Tasmania. This part of the world is relatively unfamiliar for most Australians, including AMEP provider staff. Some may know about Rwanda's *Parc Nacional des Volcans*, the habitat of highland gorillas, and most will have heard of the horrors of the communal violence and massacres of 1994. This fact sheet aims to provide some background about Rwanda for AMEP staff who are working with clients from this complex region.

Historical background

The population of Rwanda is estimated to be about 7.5 million, making it one of the most densely populated countries of Africa. Until about 1000 AD, the territory of present-day Rwanda was inhabited by the indigenous Twa people, a pygmy people who make up about 1% of the population of Rwanda today. Around 1000 AD, Hutu people, who were Bantu farmers from southern Africa, moved into the area and became the dominant people and culture. In the 15th and 16th centuries there was a further influx of Tutsi people, who were warrior pastoralists originating from southern Ethiopia and Uganda. Their superior military skills enabled them to gain control of the country. This resulted in the development of a highly ordered feudal system in which the minority Tutsis held political control and exploited the forced labour of the Hutu majority.

Germany was the first European colonial power to take control of Rwanda in the 1890s. After the defeat of Germany in World War II, Belgium took control of Rwanda as a protectorate under the authority of the League of Nations. The Belgians preferred to rule indirectly through the strongly centralised Tutsi

monarch, the Mwami or king. This led to an increase in the wealth and privileges of the Tutsi minority, while the conditions for the majority Hutus deteriorated.

When the Mwami died in 1959, an extremist Tutsi nationalist clan seized power. But this led to a large-scale Hutu uprising in which 100 000 Tutsis were killed and thousands fled to neighbouring countries. As a result the Belgian administration introduced reforms, and when independence was granted in 1963, power was handed to the Hutu majority.

After independence, rebel Tutsi groups conducted a guerilla war and raids on Hutu communities, and there was brutal retaliation. By 1990 the Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda from neighbouring countries in which they had been in exile since the late 1950s. Many of the rebels were the children of Tutsis who had fled Rwanda just before independence from Belgium. This attack by the RPF was repelled with military aid from Belgium but there were bloody reprisals. In 1991 a second attempt at invasion by the RPF was more successful, and a cease-fire was called when the RPF was only 25 kilometres from the capital, Kigali.

In 1994 communal trouble erupted on an enormous scale after the presidents of Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi were killed in a plane crash in Kigali when they were returning from peace talks in Tanzania. It is suspected that they were killed by Hutu extremists who felt that the Rwandan president was too tolerant of Tutsis. Hutu attacks on Tutsis followed, but the RPF was eventually able to gain control and seize power in July 1994. In the turmoil about 800 000 Rwandans were massacred within three months and three million people fled the country, as well as millions being displaced within the country. Those killed were largely Tutsis and 'moderate' Hutus who were more tolerant of Tutsis. The RPF remains in government today. International tribunals are pursuing those responsible for the excesses of 1994, and the Rwandan Government has at times taken the side of the rebels in the civil war in neighbouring Congo (Zaire). Most of those who fled the country in the mid-1990s are now returning to Rwanda.

There has been relative stability in Rwanda in recent years. The government is seeking to repatriate those who had sought refuge in neighbouring countries, with the support of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). The Rwandan Government appears to be seeking to establish a more stable situation, and has generally supported international measures to hold to account those responsible for the brutality of the early 1990s. However, it has been difficult to repatriate some people and to resettle those who were displaced within the country and who have been living for some time in urban areas.

The ongoing tensions are a result of both the long-term and recent history of Rwanda. The CIA World Factbook website (see Annotated bibliography) describes the current situation in the following terms: 'Tutsi, Hutu and other ethnic groups, political rebels, and various government forces continue fighting in the Great Lakes region, transcending the boundaries of Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda' (Section on Transnational Issues). In contrast, according to the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office website (see Annotated bibliography), the present government of Rwanda sees the source of recent divisions and tensions in Rwandan society not as based on ethnicity, but on the divide-and-rule policies of the colonial regime, which created extremes of inequality.

People and culture

Of the total population of 7.5 million, 84% are Hutu, while Tutsis make up 15%. The Twa make up about 1%, and it is estimated that perhaps 75% of the Twa were killed in the massacres in 1994. Life expectancy is short at 38.66 years overall (38.14 years for males, 39.2 for females), and the HIV infection rate is 11.2%.

Christianity is the major religion in Rwanda, with most Christians being Roman Catholics, and a smaller number being Protestant. A small proportion of the overall population are Muslims, and a number also practise traditional tribal (animist) religions – though the proportion of Rwandans who practise tribal religions varies from 25% to less than 1% depending on the source of the information.

Rwanda is a Bantu language spoken by all groups in the population. The language is also known as Ruanda, Kinyarwanda, Ikinyarwanda, Orunyarwanda, and Urunyaruanda. There are a number of different dialects spoken. English and French are also spoken, and Swahili is also used in commercial centres. Rwanda, French and English are the official languages.

Economy and education

Rwanda is mountainous, with almost all of the country rising up to 1000 metres above sea level. It is higher

in the west than in the east. Rwanda's economy is based largely on subsistence agriculture, with what industry and international trade there is being based on agricultural products. Coffee is a major export, but decreasing coffee prices have limited the foreign earnings of the country in recent years. Rwanda is one of the poorest countries in Africa, with 90% of the population being involved in subsistence agriculture.

Schooling is largely provided by the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. While schooling is compulsory between the ages of 7 and 15, a shortage of classrooms and resources means that many are not able to participate in education. There is one university in the country.

Literacy rates in Rwanda are moderate, with estimates ranging from 48% to 60%, with men having slightly higher rates of literacy than women.

Classroom issues

AMEP students from Rwanda are likely to have experienced extreme hardship, deprivation, trauma and distress. Rwandans who have been accepted for settlement in Australia are likely to have been displaced from their homes for some time, and lived in countries bordering on Rwanda or were resettled in urban areas, and for political reasons have been unable to return to their original homes. A shortage of land also means that they have not been able to resettle in other parts of the country.

Refugees from persecution in Rwanda include Hutus who are deemed to be 'moderate' in that they have tolerated, mixed with or intermarried with Tutsis. Children and people of mixed marriages may also have been persecuted in intergroup conflicts.

As literacy rates are low among Rwandans, some students may have limited prior literacy. Students may have some familiarity with French and English, which are used throughout the country – especially in the capital. French is more widely used than English.

Education and legal systems in Rwanda are based on western European models, a legacy of Belgian colonialism, so learners from Rwanda may have experience of education that has been influenced to some extent by western approaches to education.

Annotated bibliography

British Foreign and Commonwealth Office website
www.fco.gov.uk

This site contains country profiles under the 'Countries and Regions' heading. By selecting Africa, and then Rwanda on the linked pages, the profile of Rwanda is reached. This profile contains a lengthy description of the recent history of Rwanda and the current situation there.

CIA World Factbook 2003 website
<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/rw.html>

This site contains a 'World Factbook' that provides a basic overview of many of the main features of Rwanda, including estimates of significant statistics and a map. Follow the links from the home page to the World Factbook, and type 'Rwanda' into the search box.

Ethnologue website
http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=Rwanda

This link provides information on the languages of Rwanda, and a map of language distribution in the country.

Lonely Planet. (2001). *Africa on a shoestring*. Melbourne: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd.

The Lonely Planet budget travel guide to Africa contains a brief section on Rwanda, with background information on the country – especially its recent history. It has a brief description of the capital, Kigali. Most of the information in the book can be accessed at Lonely Planet's website on Rwanda:

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/africa/rwanda/

United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) website
<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

This site contains the annual reports for UNHCR activities in countries in which it is operating. By going to the 'Global Report' link, you can find links to the countries of the African Great Lakes region, including Rwanda. Clicking the link to a country downloads the UNHCR report for that country. (Reports for previous years are also available by using the search function on the UNHCR site.) The report for Rwanda for 2002 mentions resettlement of some Rwandan refugees in Australia and other western countries.

World Book Encyclopaedia (CD-ROM version, 2001).

This reference contains a useful entry on Rwanda, with background information on the country and a reasonable map.

Other Internet resources

A search for 'Rwanda' using the Google search engine provides about 2.75 million links. These include sites of the Rwandan government, international aid agencies and media

organisations. The links to African studies sites at the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University can be interesting to follow up, as they provide further links to information on a wide variety of topics on the country.

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