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THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN EDUCATION IN BURUNDI

Abstract: Despite the cultural, territorial and administrative unity of the Burundian people, their recent history has been characterized by tribal wars between communities, the height of which was reached in 1972 and 1993. Since then, some 200,000 Burundians have perished in widespread, often intense ethnic violence between Hutu and Tutsi factions. Hundreds of thousands have been internally displaced or have become refugees in neighboring countries. That period of guerrilla war and civil strife ended by the Arusha peace agreement signed in 2000 by the transitional government and the rebels.

In 2005, Pierre Nkurunziza was elected as President and head of the State. After decades of civil war, Burundi is facing a high level of poverty as a result of dramatic violence. The ambition of the actual government intends to build a new peaceful and developed country. Hence, education is the highest priority of the actual government.

Churches in Burundi are involved in the peace and reconciliation process, teaching people how they can live peacefully with each other, and that conflicts can be solved without fighting. In their framework of interfaith dialogue, they emphasize their engagement to educate for lasting peace and development.

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I. Country Profile

I.1 Geography¹

Burundi is a small landlocked country in east-southern Africa with an area of 27,830 sq. km, of which about 7% consists of lakes. It is bordered by Rwanda to the north, Tanzania to the east and south and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west. Burundi's capital city, Bujumbura, is located in the western part of the country. In general, Burundi has a tropical highland climate with diversity of temperature from one region to another, chiefly as a result of differences in altitude.

I.2 Population

Upon the conclusion of the General Population and Housing Census of 2008 (2008 RGPH), the population totaled 8,053,574 inhabitants, 49.2 percent of them being men and 50.8 percent of them being women. According with CIA – The World Factbook, the estimated number of population in Burundi in July 2014 is 10.395.93.

0-14 years: 45.7% (male 2,385,571/female 2,361,367)

15-24 years: 19.3% (male 1,001,486/female 1,005,617)

25-54 years: 28.6% (male 1,483,936/female 1,491,401)

55-64 years: 3.9% (male 190,707/female 216,983)

65 years and over: 2.5% (male 109,434/female 149,429) (2014 est.)²

I.3 Ethnic groups³

There are 3 social groups improperly called "ethnic groups": Hutu (85%), Tutsi (14%) and Twa (1%).

Unlike real ethnic groups, Burundians have spoken one and the same unique language- Kirundi - for a long time. They share the same values and live in the same villages. They all live on agriculture combined with animal farming. There is no historical or identity reference which distinguishes them. Nevertheless, the Twa are not well integrated into the social order.

Despite the cultural, territorial and administrative unity of the Burundian people, their recent history has been characterized by tribal wars between communities, the height of which was reached in 1972 and 1993. But one should

¹ "Burundi," accessed July 13, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/by.html>.

² Ibid.

³ Nigel Watt, *Burundi: The Biography of a Small African Country* (Hurst Publishers Ltd., 2008), 23-32.

not be mistaken because the great majority of the population (all the communities together) continues to live together as before on the same hills, they go to church, school, markets, and bars and fetch water from the same springs.

I.4 Languages⁴

The main language is Kirundi, a Bantu language. Both Kirundi and French are official languages. Swahili is used as a lingua franca along Lake Tanganyika and in the Bujumbura area. Swahili, a mixture of Arabic and Bantu languages that is the language of trade and business in much of East Africa, also is spoken, mostly in the region of Lake Tanganyika and in the capital city. English is taught in schools from primary.

I.5 Economy⁵

Burundi is the 4th less developed country in the world in terms of social welfare indicators. 68% of Burundians live on less than \$1 a day.

Burundi is a rural country with about 90% of the population engaged in subsistence agriculture. Subsistence means that people have just enough to eat, but do not have spare money for luxury items that are taken for granted in the west.

As Burundi is landlocked, it has few natural resources and negligible industry. Primary exports are coffee and tea. Because of the civil conflict the production of coffee has been reduced by half. This is compounded by the decrease of coffee prices in the world market as well. As a result, people are very poor. Decades of civil unrest and genocide have severely affected Burundi's economy, impoverished the already struggling population and destroyed the country's chances of attracting outside investment.

II. Brief History of Burundi

II. 1 Kingdom and colonization⁶

Even before the fifteenth century, Burundi was an organized nation, a kingdom with sound political structures and a social organization of its own, since then, the country was ruled by a line of seventeen Kings of four dynasties of Ntare, Mwezi, Mutaga and Mwambutsa.

From 1898 to 1916, Rwanda Urundi was a German Colony. The German authorities made no changes in the indigenous organization; they administered the territory through the traditional authorities in accordance with the laws and

⁴ Ibid., 11-22.

⁵ "Burundi," accessed July 14, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/by.html>.

⁶ Watt, *Burundi*, 22-32.

customs of the region. After its defeat in World War I, Germany handed control of a section of the former German East Africa to Belgium. So they adopted the same policy of indirect administration employed by the Germans.

II.2 Independence and end of royalty of Burundi⁷

On 1 July 1962, Burundi became an independent, constitutional monarchy headed by the Mwami (King) Mwambutsa IV. Mwambutsa was deposed in July 1966, and was succeeded in September by his son, Charles, who then became known as Ntare V. On 29 November 1966, Ntare V was in turn overthrown by a military coup headed by the Prime Minister, Col. Michel Micombero, who abolished the monarchy and declared Burundi a republic with himself as president.

On 1 November 1976, President Micombero was stripped of all powers in a bloodless military coup led by Lt. Col. Jean-Baptiste Bagaza who became the second president of Burundi.

Bagaza encouraged land reform, electoral reform and reconciliation. However, after 1984 Bagaza's human rights record worsened due to his suppression of religious freedom and political opposition. In September 1987, he was overthrown in a bloodless military coup while he attended a conference in Canada. Major Pierre Buyoya became president. In 1988 Ethnic violence erupted in the north and killed many Tutsi and Hutu.

II.3 The civil war⁸

Major Buyoya agreed to the restoration of multiparty politics in 1991, and a new constitution was approved in March 1992. The elections of June 1993 brought to office Burundi's first elected president, Melchior Ndadaye. Unhappily, on 21 October 1993 (3 months later), Ndadaye and several cabinet members were assassinated by a faction of soldiers. Ethnic violence continued, launching the country into civil war, with around 100,000 Burundians (all ethnics) killed in this violence. In January, 1994, Cyprian Ntaryamira, another member of FRODEBU (Democratic Front founded by President Ndadaye) was appointed President of Burundi.

On April 6, 1994, he died with Rwanda's President Habyarimana in a plane shot down by Rwandan rebels. The crash marked the beginning of the Rwandan genocide.

⁷ Jamie Stokes, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Peoples of Africa and the Middle East* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009), 130; René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide* (New York – Melbourne: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press and the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1994), 58-130.

⁸ Lemarchand, *Burundi*, 131-87; Stuart Notholt, *Fields of Fire: An Atlas of Ethnic Conflict* (Leicester: Matador, 2008), 2.26.

According to the Burundian constitution, Sylvester Ntibantunganya, who was the president of the general Assembly, became the next president of Burundi. Meanwhile, the civil war spread in the whole country.

On 25 July 1996, Major Pierre Buyoya, backed by the Burundi military, overthrew Ntibantunganya and promised to organize a "transition Period". The National Assembly continued to function. East African nations cut trade ties to the country and imposed an economic embargo after demanding Major Buyoya to restore the parliament. The African leaders also demanded that Major Buyoya, president of Burundi from 1987 to 1993, begin peace talks with rebels. Yet ethnic violence escalated in the months following Major Buyoya's takeover and CNDD (party for the democracy defense), who claimed officially to be fighting against the political leaders, resorted to killing many civilian innocents.

II.4 Burundi towards a transitional government⁹

In 1999, in his new role as facilitator of the Arusha Peace Process, Nelson Mandela asked all parties—the government, rebel forces, and international organizations—to sit down and discuss the issues. In the early months of 2000, several such meetings were held in Tanzania, leading up to the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi on 28 August 2000.

From 2001, CNDD-FDD of Pierre Nkurunziza, the main rebel group and the transitional government of Burundi signed a cease-fire, followed by a similar agreement by other rebel parties. Only the Palipehutu-FNL of Agathon Rwasa had not signed a cease-fire with the transitional government by mid-June 2003.

Under the Arusha Agreements, a three-year transitional government was inaugurated on November 1st 2001, under the leadership of Pierre Buyoya. On April 30th 2003, Buyoya stepped down under the terms of the agreement, making way for a Hutu vice president, Domitien Ndayizeye, to assume the presidency for the remaining 18 months.

On September 17th 2004, the National Assembly adopted a post-transition constitution with a new electoral agenda for the summer of 2005. Then, Pierre Nkurunziza was elected president on August 19th 2005. He was reelected in 2010 for a second mandate which is to last until 2015.

⁹ *International Council on Human Rights Policy, Negotiating Justice? Human Rights and Peace Agreements* (Versoix: International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2006), 34-6.

III. Reconstruction and Reconciliation as Huge Challenges of Burundi

III.1 The Consequences of Civil War¹⁰

Burundi's history of ethnic tension and violent conflict has crippled its economy and infrastructure. Mortality rates in the small Eastern African nation are alarming - well above what's associated with an emergency situation. Thousands of Burundians died in mass slaughters in 1972 and 1993, thousands more die each year from infectious disease, and hundreds of thousands of Burundians live in a chronic state of instability without access to basic health care.

The insecurity is the greatest obstacle to development. In the aftermath of a decade-long war, rural and urban residents are confronted with high levels of insecurity and violence. The proliferation of small arms is now the greatest threat to civilian security in Burundi; a civilian disarmament program is under way, but has had little impact. An estimated 80% of households in the capital, Bujumbura, and in the larger provinces possess small arms. For the female population, the consequences are particularly dire.

For women, there is a particular consequence: armed robbery was often accompanied by sexual assault. If women or girls are found when farms and homes are attacked and robbed, they are raped.

Another devastating consequence of armed violence is the high number of orphans and widowed mothers in Burundi. Widows suffer particular discrimination under Burundian law, as they cannot inherit the property of their dead husbands. With no inheritance rights, widows lose all belongings and property to their late husband's family. Poverty and desperation are the direct result of widowhood. Fortunately, on the matter of land inheritance and women, the Burundian government has put in place a law to allow them to inherit land - a huge opportunity for the country to change its mentality on women's rights.

Moreover, Burundi is also facing difficult land issues for Burundians who were born in refugee camps after 1972, for orphans, and for those whose land was sold because they belonged to rebel groups.

Almost every Burundian is suffering from the consequences of divisions and violence and they have to learn how to be peaceful in diversity. Hence, they need reconciliation and trust in themselves and in their neighbors.

According to some witnesses¹¹, everyone needs to be considered with dignity and justice. She is a Tutsi and is going to marry a Hutu. She also said

¹⁰ Tom Bundervoet, Philip Verwimp, Richard Akresh, *Health and Civil War in Rural Burundi*, Policy Research Working Paper 4500, Post-Conflict Transitions Working no. 18 (The World Bank Development Research Group, Macroeconomics and Growth Team, January 2008).

¹¹ Kaneza Gloria, Burundian, 22 years old, shares her experience: "So me, I cannot judge someone because they are Tutsi or Hutu because there are Tutsi who are not so good. There are Hutu who are not so good. You can judge someone by their actions, their heart,

discrimination between the two ethnic groups still exists, but with the current peace, she said her country will be “very beautiful” in the future.

III. 2 Education, a Priority of Nkurunziza's Government

People are very excited about the future and tired of the war. The huge challenge that Burundi is facing is to manage a good transition from a post-conflictual to a democratic governance characterized by human rights and a lasting development.

The ambition of the "Burundi Vision 2025" plan is to build a competitive and diversified economy. Notably, the vision intends to build a new country by modernizing agricultural production in rural areas, developing the services industry and promoting urbanization. Burundi has adhered to the East African Community (composed by Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Burundi)

All these objectives cannot be achieved without well-trained, competent people who are also competitive in the wider world. Since 2005, the government has been supporting Burundians to construct new primary and secondary schools, along with universities on a community development basis.

According to the Head of the state, Peter Nkurunziza, education is a priority of the actual government. “Indeed, we made education our highest priority. This is reflected in the Burundi's Second Growth and Poverty Reduction Paper (CSLP 2), which highlights the needs for funding in priority areas such as Education”¹². But what do we mean by education? According to experts, we intend to mention “a permanent process of control and development of the human being in all the aspects of life: physical, biological, sociological, spiritual and moral”¹³.

III.3 The Context of Education in Burundi

The civil war has been very disruptive to education. Few students were attending school in the later part of the 1990's. In the fall of 2005, the government of Burundi introduced free and basic education for all primary education students. This program of free education gave 300,000 Burundian children the opportunity to go to school. This places an overwhelming demand on the country's educational infrastructure. The government has put together an emergency plan to add 5,000 teachers and to increase the education budget by more than \$1.5 million. They are relying on other countries and relief organizations for donations.

what they are doing. Me, I do not like the expression that I am Tutsi or I am Hutu because it makes barriers.” (“Stories of Lament and Hope: Burundi gathering by Stephanie Wheatley and Jen Stallings, August 2009,” accessed July 13, 2013, <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles.php/1185?pg=all>.)

¹² Pierre Nkurunziza in a speech given at Dubai on March 16, 2013.

¹³ “Survey of ICT and education in Africa: Burundi Country report,” accessed July 15, 2013, www.infodev.org.

Despite the problems, free primary education represents a turning point for the country. Previous Burundi's Education Minister, Saidi Kibeya, says this decision to abolish primary school fees is vital to the success of Burundi's post-war reconstruction and development.¹⁴

The lack of resources is not the only thing hurting Burundi's schools. Twelve years of civil war that killed hundreds of thousands of people has scarred the country's children. Many children did not attend school during this time. The Burundian education system has the extra burden of needing to help the children recover from the trauma of war. These children were born during war times and have witnessed war all their life.

In 2009, the adult literacy rate in Burundi was estimated to be 67% (73% male and 61% female), with a literacy rate of 77% and 76%, respectively, for men and women between the ages of 15 to 24. Literacy among adult women in Burundi has increased by 17% since 2002. Burundi's literacy rate is low due to low school attendance and because literacy in Kirundi only provides access to materials printed in that language. Ten percent of Burundian boys are allowed a secondary education.¹⁵

Burundi has one Public University with two campuses; the main is at Bujumbura and the other at Gitega.

III.4 The Contribution of Churches to Burundi's Education

III.4.1 Religion in Burundi

It is important to notice the lack of objective information about religious statistics. Three versions give different data. Central Intelligence Agency gives the following statistic: Catholic 62.1%, Protestant 23.9% (includes Adventist 2.3% and other Protestant 21.6%), Muslim 2.5%, other 3.6%, unspecified 7.9% (2008 est.).¹⁶ The statistics from the International Religious Freedom Report give different data: approximately 60 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 20 percent belongs to indigenous religious groups, and 15 percent to Protestant groups. Muslims constitute 2 to 5 percent of the population, and live mainly in urban areas.¹⁷

On Wikipedia we find the following information: Christian 75% (Roman Catholic 60%, Protestant 15%), indigenous beliefs 20%, Muslim 5%.¹⁸ Most

¹⁴ "Burundi Struggles to Implement Free Primary Education," accessed July 13, 2014, <http://www.voanews.com/content/a-13-2006-05-16-voa52/327420.html>.

¹⁵ "Burundi," accessed July 13, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burundi#cite_note-79.

¹⁶ "Burundi," accessed July 13, 2013, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/by.html>.

¹⁷ "Burundi 2013 International Religious Freedom Report," accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/222237.pdf>.

¹⁸ "Burundi," accessed July 13, 2013, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burundi>.

Muslims are Sunni, although some belong to Shia groups. The remaining population practices other Christian faiths, indigenous religions, or has no religious affiliation.

The Transitional Constitutional Act of 2001 provided religious freedom this right is generally respected in practice.¹⁹ Actually, many new religious movements are registered in Burundi and the Burundians are easily changing their affiliation. The President of the Republic, Pierre Nkurunziza, is organizing two weeks of prayer every year and the staff of the government is involved in these gatherings, at which many people participate.²⁰ The First Lady is Pastor of the Stone Church (a Christian church) and she was recently awarded a prize for her leadership by the US. There is no state religion.



Pierre Nkurunziza

III.4.2 Achievements of the churches in peace building in Burundi

Since the 1960s, The Roman Catholic Church and mainstream Protestant churches have adopted a more respectful position towards other religions and have supported democratic institutions. The main religious churches in Burundi, like Islam and Christianity, also contain principles that affirm the innate equality and dignity of all human beings, social justice, and some form of the Golden Rule.

¹⁹ "Constitution of Burundi," accessed July 13, 2013, <http://kituochakatiba.org/sites/default/files/legal-resources/Constitution%20of%20Burundi%20in%20English.pdf>.

²⁰ Charles Bigirimana, "Burundi's born-again ex-rebel leader," accessed July 13, 2013, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4162504.stm>.

These principles can provide the foundation for democratic cultures.²¹ In order to promote human and citizen values, the leaders of the Christian church and the Islamic community have founded a framework of dialogue and common actions. The framework is called the Interreligious Council. A lot of workshops have already been organized on peace building topics. Almost all recommendations emphasize the importance of values of education because Burundi needs a new generation who can accept diversity and work for a lasting development.

III.4.3 The partnership of churches in development of education in Burundi

Bernard Ntahoturi, the Archbishop of the Matana Anglican diocese said: “The churches of Burundi are involved in the peace and reconciliation process, telling people they can live peacefully with their neighbors and that conflicts can be solved without fighting.” He acknowledged that the wounds will take a long time to heal.



Archbishop Bernard Ntahoturi

Until 1954, all education was provided by religious missions (mainly Catholics); it was almost entirely limited to the primary grades. The government of the Second Republic, under Bagaza's presidency (1976-87), attempted to curtail the social and educational activities of the Roman Catholic Church. After a military coup in 1987, the issue was temporarily defused, yet the church continues to manage schools and education.

Actually, many religious communities like the Catholic, Adventist, Pentecost, evangelical church of friends and Muslims are involved in education.

²¹ Sheldon Gellar, “Varieties of Religious Doctrines and Institutions in Africa and Their Impact on Democratization Processes,” accessed July 13, 2013, http://www.indiana.edu/~workshop/publications/materials/conference_papers/W07-9_Gellar_DLC.pdf.

They organize their own schools according to a convention signed with the state which recognizes such involvement. The convention defines the role of the ministry and the church regarding the management of education. Every church owning a school is allowed to organize activities to improve the human and moral values of the students in collaboration with the staff and the parents.

III.4.4 Education of values as priority in the church's activities



Bishop Gervais Banshimiyubusa

“Our contribution as a Church shall consist, first of all, in educating consciences for responsible actions in the cause of peace.”²² In fact, if we do not exercise capable influence on today’s citizen, we face a great risk of seeing whatever we build collapsing like a house built on sand. The reconstruction of Burundi can become a reality through new approaches and proper action, aimed at instilling a Christian and faithful mentality in our surroundings. We are called upon to uproot from the minds of our young (and not so young) brethren the feelings of hatred and exclusion, thus leading to real love. Such is the education we indispensably need for a new society. In fact, as the Bishop Gervais Banshimiyubusa said, if the society wants peace, it has to educate on it: “To have peace, it is necessary to educate with peace. Our catechism precisely says that to prevent the conflicts and violence, it is absolutely necessary that peace starts to

²² „Message de la VI ème Assemblée Plénière de l’ACEAC aux fidèles catholiques de la sous-région des Grands Lacs et aux hommes de bonne volonté. Fait à Kigali, le 17 mai 2002,” accessed July 13, 2013, <http://peres-blancs.cef.fr/aceac.htm>.

become a major value in the intimacy of each person; in this manner it can extend in the families and the various forms from communities to all the levels.”²³

Conclusion

The crisis of Burundi is not an accident. It is rather the result of an ever growing decay in moral norms and the obscuring of the moral conscience. The schedule for education in values (human, citizen and spiritual) should reach all categories of people. To work efficiently towards the renewal of society we have to start by redeeming our citizens.

The complete education goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge: it influences behavior and attitude, the skill of being and knowing. The Church, as the first institution entrusted with the education of peoples, should keep its eyes open on the moral state of its members and act, in their respective surroundings, as "the salt of the earth" whenever needed.

In conclusion, a generation conscious of its human dignity who does not exclude one another, but enrich one another's qualities. In this way it will be able to bring back to Burundi the joy of living in a universal brotherhood, and being capable of hastening the arrival of a climate of justice and peace. Where religion and spirituality are rooted in the everyday life of people and society, they can make an important contribution to sustainable development. They can also strengthen the culture of dialogue. That is what Burundians are expecting from the churches.

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²³ Gervais Banshimiyubusa for the Conference „Peace from the Ground Up: Post-conflict Socialization, Religion and Reconciliation in Africa,” Cape Town, South Africa, June 5-7, 2013.

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