Conflict Factsheet

Growing Land Scarcity and the Rwandan Genocide of 1994

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<th>Intensity</th>
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<th>Conflict Locality</th>
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<td>Rwanda</td>
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Local resource competition  
Livelihood insecurity and migration

Conflict Summary

The causes of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda are manifold and controversially discussed. While acknowledging the importance of factors, such as colonial legacy, economic decline, structural adjustment policies, internal opposition to the government and the disengagement of the international community, there is a wide body of literature, which highlights the role of growing land scarcity in aggravating inter-ethnic tensions in Rwanda. Since 1994, the Rwandan government has achieved remarkable progress in security and human development. Yet, important social, environmental and economic challenges lie ahead.
Conceptual Model

**Social and Economic Drivers**
- Migration patterns
- Demographic Change
- Economic Development
- Land Use Change
- Pollution / Environmental Degradation
- Increased Land Scarcity

**Environmental Change**
- Land Use Change
- Pollution / Environmental Degradation
- Increased Land Scarcity

**Intermediary Mechanisms**
- Change in Access / Availability of Natural Resources
- Livelihood Insecurity
- Politicisation

**Fragility and Conflict Risks**
- Grievances between Societal Groups

**Context Factors**
- Insecure Land Tenure
- Unequal Land Distribution
- Eroded Social Contract
- Food Insecurity
- Group Focused Enmity
- High Unemployment
- History of Conflict
- Low Level of Economic Development
- Political Marginalization

Agricultural / Pastoral Land
Conflict History

In the late 1990s, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR), a rebel group of predominately Tutsi exiles in Uganda, organized an armed invasion into Rwanda to overthrow the economically and politically weakened regime of President Juvenal Habyarimana. After the attacks, two years of recurring hostilities and negotiations between the government and the FPR eventually led to a ceasefire in July of 1992. The groups also initiated a power-sharing agreement in August of 1993. These accords were vehemently opposed by Hutu extremists in the government, which exploited Rwanda's economic crisis to exacerbate anti-Tutsi resentments among impoverished rural Hutu and derail the peace process. On 6 April 1994, the death of Juvenal Habyarimana when his plane was shot down marked the beginning of the Rwandan genocide. From April to July 1994, until the FPR could defeat the genocidal regime, as many as 1 million people were killed, mostly Rwandan Tutsi, and over 2 million people had to flee to neighbouring countries (UN, 2015; Auswärtiges Amt, 2014; Verpoorten, 2012). The 1994 genocide had also wider regional implications, including the 1996 civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the presently unstable situation in the Great Lakes Region.

The aggravating role of land scarcity and rural inequalities
The causes of the 1994 genocide are manifold and controversially discussed (see Moodley, Gahima, and Munien, 2010). Most accounts emphasise the antagonism between Hutu and Tutsi, inherited from Rwanda's colonial past. Yet, while acknowledging the importance of factors such as economic decline, structural adjustment policies, internal opposition to the government and the disengagement of the international community, there is a wide body of literature, which highlights the aggravating role of growing land scarcity and rural inequalities in Rwanda (Homer-Dixon and Percival, 1996; Gasana, 2002; Bigagaza, Abong and Mukarubuga, 2002).

Historically, Rwanda has experienced a myriad of problems relating to land scarcity. When the genocide began, Rwanda was Africa’s most densely populated non-island country with population densities reaching up to 843 persons per square kilometre in certain rural areas. More than 90% of the population relied on small-scale farming, and population growth rates had exceeded 3%. Land scarcity was further amplified by an unequal distribution of land in favour of political elites and their rural relatives (Verpoorten, 2012; Bigagaza et al., 2002). Gasana (2002) estimates that, prior to the genocide, 43% percent of poorer families owned just 15% of cultivated land, whereas 16% of land rich families owned 43% of cultivated land.

Environmental degradation and economic decline
Population growth and the appropriation of the most productive land by influential men worked in conjunction to push the rural poor onto acidic soils and steep hillsides that were extremely vulnerable to excess rainfall and soil erosion. Furthermore, land already under cultivation became heavily degraded. The continuous expansion of agriculture in Rwanda between the 1960s and the 1980s had been realized at the expense of fallow systems and other soil conservation strategies. Facing increased demand and reduced supply of quality arable land in the 1980s, the previously-flourishing Rwanda was suddenly facing rural poverty and food shortages, which were further exacerbated by the drought of 1988-1989 (Bigagaza et al., 2002; Homer-Dixon and Percival, 1996; Gasana, 2002).
Resentment of the rural poor added to mounting pressures on Habyarimana’s regime, facing internal opposition from southern elites, as well as structural adjustment policies and external pressures to democratise. Matters were further compounded by a sharp decline in world prices for coffee and tea, Rwanda’s main export earners, seriously curtailing the regime’s ability to accommodate its supporters and combat rural poverty. In this context, hardliners within the government exploited anti Tutsi resentment dating back to the colonial period, turning the dissatisfaction of rural Hutu against their Tutsi neighbours. They exacerbated fears related with the imminent reintegration of FPR-forces within the regular army and the return of Tutsi refugees from Uganda and Tanzania, who could claim their land back. Violence against Tutsi was further encouraged by the promise that land from killed Tutsi would be distributed to landless Hutu and organised through the creation of paramilitary Interahamwe militias that would comprise unemployed rural youth (Bigagaza et al., 2002; Moodley et al., 2010).

The 1994 genocide took place in a unique context, shaped by economic hardship, political divisions and societal cleavages dating back to the colonial period. These had a multitude of causes other than land scarcity. However, loss of livelihoods and rural poverty exacerbated existing tensions and could be exploited by the government to stir anti Tutsi violence. The present government acknowledges the importance of these issues and combines justice and reconciliation programs with ambitious agricultural reforms.

Resolution Efforts

Since 1994, Rwanda has undertaken efforts to improve their justice systems and foster reconciliation. In November of 1994, the United Nations Security Council established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in order to prosecute those that contributed to the planning of the genocide or committed the atrocities. In 2001, the government began implementing Gacaca courts, a participatory justice system loosely based on customary legal institutions, to deal with the over 120,000 cases in a timely fashion. The community-elected judges in Gacaca courts handle all crimes besides those that involve planning genocide. Sentences are decreased for people who seek reconciliation with the community (UN, 2015).

National programmes and grassroots initiatives

Rwanda has also passed laws against discrimination and divisive genocidal ideology. Established in 1999, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission has promoted programmes of peace education that teach the population the history and origins of division in Rwanda. The commission also engages in training for political and grassroots leaders, youth and women in trauma counselling and promotes research to foster national unity (UN, 2015).

Many local organisations and faith-led initiatives address issues related to social justice, human rights and the trauma caused by the conflict (See Peacemakers Trust, 2015 and Peace Direct, 2015 for a list).
Economic development and agricultural reform
Recognizing that economic growth is paramount to ensuring peace and stability in Rwanda and the Great Lakes region, the IMF and the World Bank have supported numerous macroeconomic reforms, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) established a trust fund for capacity building in Rwanda.

More specifically, the Rwandan government has launched a series of large scale reforms centering on land registration and consolidation of agricultural production to improve tenure security, agricultural productivity and food security (Pritchard, 2013).

ICTR and citizen-based justice: A mixed record of successes
Despite remarkable achievement in the domains of security and human development, some challenges still lie ahead. The ICTR and the Rwandan national courts have convicted most of the persons indicted with genocide, yet several accused are still at large (UN, 2015). Officially closed in May 2014, the Gacaca courts have left behind a mixed legacy. Many Rwandans agree that the courts have shed light on what happened in their community during the genocide, even if not all the truth was revealed. They also helped some families finding the bodies of their murdered relatives. The system has also ensued that tens of thousands of perpetrators were brought to justice, and, in some cases, has helped in motion reconciliation within communities. Yet, the courts have been criticised for their leniency towards suspects and flawed decision-making (often caused by judges’ ties to the parties), as well as for the re-traumatisation of victims and limited chances to get reparations (HRW, 2011; Seay, 2014). Allegations of manipulation by government authorities, false accusations and intimidation of witnesses stain the image of the courts (Vasagar, 2005). It has been denounced that many of the appointed judges were not trained well enough and were vulnerable to corruption, as they do not receive a remuneration (HRW, 2011).

The limits of agricultural reform
Most farmers in Rwanda are in favour of a stronger involvement of the state in the agricultural sector, yet reforms enacted by the government have had a mixed record of success. On one side, the government has increased tenure security by making land registration mandatory, and has spent considerable resources to allow the poorest farmers to afford registration fees. But these successes have often been offset by aggressively enforced consolidation policies, which impose crop specialisation on subsistence farmers. In many cases these have not only made small holders more vulnerable to weather extremes, but also fomented fears of confiscation, thus reducing land tenure and food security (see Pritchard, 2013).

Further challenges
Although less pronounced today, rural poverty and land scarcity are still an important problem in Rwanda. In this context the accommodation of returning refugees represents a major challenge. Some argue that this might be a source of grievances and inter-ethnic tensions (Musahara and Huggins, 2005; Takeuchi and Marara, 2011). The threat of renewed violence is further aggravated by the presence of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) - a rebel army composed of génocidaires - in the neighbouring DRC, which the Congolese army and other international forces have been reluctant to engage (Wolters, 2015).
## Intensities & Influences

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### Violent Conflict
- Yes

### Salience with nation
- National

### Mass displacement
- More than 100,000 or more than 10% of the country’s population are displaced within the country.

### Cross Border Mass Displacement
- Best estimate that more than 100,000 or more than 10% of country population are displaced across borders.

## Resolution Success

### Reduction in Violence
- Violence has ceded completely.

### Resolve of displacement problems
- Displacement continues to cause discontent and/or other problems.

### Increased capacity to address grievance in the future
- The capacity to address grievances in the future has increased.

### Grievance Resolution
- Grievances have been partially addressed.

### Causal Attribution of Decrease in Conflict Intensity
- Conflict resolution strategies have been clearly responsible for the decrease in conflict intensity.
Entry Points for Resilience and Peace Building

Transitional justice
The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was established in order to prosecute those that contributed to the planning of the genocide or committed the atrocities. In 2001, local Gacaca courts were also implemented to handle all crimes besides those that involve planning genocide.

Promoting peaceful relations
The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, as well as several local organisations and faith-led initiatives address issues related to social justice, human rights, the trauma caused by the conflict, and promote peace education programmes.

Improving state capacity & legitimacy
The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have supported numerous macroeconomic reforms, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) established a trust fund for capacity building in Rwanda.

Strengthening legislation and law enforcement
The Rwandan government launched a series of large scale reforms centring on land registration and consolidation of agricultural production to improve tenure security, agricultural productivity and food security.

Resources and Materials

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Further information