

Heroes of Our Time: Rwandan Courage & Survival



SURF's Exhibition is entitled *Heroes of Our Time: Rwandan Courage & Survival*. It presents a history of the genocide and focuses on the plight of survivors today through the stories of four heroic survivors – Siméon Karamaga, Daphrose Mukangarambe, Cassien Mbanda and Ange Cendrine Mukayitesi.

Geography



Rwanda is located near the centre of Africa, a few degrees south of the Equator, with Kigali as its capital.

It is separated from the Democratic Republic of Congo by Lake Kivu and the Ruzizi River valley to the west; it is bound on the north by Uganda, to the east by Tanzania, and to the south by Burundi.



Rwanda's countryside is covered by grasslands and small farms extending over rolling hills, with areas of rugged mountains that extend southeast from a chain of volcanoes in the northwest. The divide between the Congo and the Nile drainage systems extends from north to south through western Rwanda at an average elevation of almost 9,000 feet. On the western slopes of this ridgeline, the land slopes abruptly toward Lake Kivu and the Ruzizi River valley, and constitutes part of the Great Rift Valley. The eastern slopes are more moderate, with rolling hills extending across central uplands at gradually reducing altitudes, to the plains, swamps, and lakes of the eastern border region. Therefore the country is also fondly known as "Land of a Thousand Hills" (*Pays des milles collines*).

Rwanda is a tropical country; its high elevation makes the climate temperate. In the mountains, frost and snow are possible. The average daily temperature near Lake Kivu, at an altitude of 1,463 metres (4,800 feet) is 23°C (73°F). Rwanda is considered the lightning capital of the world, due to intense daily thunderstorms during the two rainy seasons (February-May and September-December). Annual rainfall averages 83 centimetres (31 inches) but is generally heavier in the western and northwestern mountains than in the eastern savannas.

People

Rwanda's population today comprises three main social



Kigali, the capital city, is nestled in a series of hills and is home to 300,000 people.

groupings: the Hutus, the Tutsis and the small minority Twa.



The first inhabitants of Rwanda were the Twa, who were mainly hunters. Later, Hutu cultivators and Tutsi cattle-keepers arrived. Rwanda consisted of small chiefdoms with groups living side by side. Twenty generations later one of the Tutsi clans, the Nyiginya, achieved political dominance in central Rwanda. Over several centuries, the Nyiginya formed the core of a state that expanded to cover most of the area occupied by modern-day Rwanda.

As the dominance of this Nyiginya

Before the arrival of the European colonialists in the 19th century, however, Rwanda's inhabitants lived under

Tutsi lineage expanded, the terms 'Tutsi' and 'Hutu' began to acquire a political significance. Those who achieved ruling class status became identified as Tutsi, while those who did not were assigned to the ranks of the Hutu. Tutsis as well as Hutus had their classification changed as their fortunes rose or fell. Hutus and Tutsis belonged to all nineteen of the main clans in Rwanda. At the same time, there was much intermarriage between members of the newly forming 'classes'. Thus the distinction between Hutu and Tutsi was not so much ethnic as political and class-based. The population shared the same Kinyarwanda (Rwandan) language, culture and traditions.

Typically, it was the Tutsis, traditionally cattle-keepers by

a feudal system and identified themselves according to social class rather than ethnic affiliation.

trade, who found themselves among the wealthy, while most Hutus, who were farmers, lacked the wealth associated with owning cows. In the 19th century King Rwabuguri established a unified state. His preference for the Tutsi in positions of power helped to cement their dominance.

By the time the first Europeans arrived in Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi identities were defined partly by politics (i.e., being born in the Nyiginya clan or moving ranks), partly by occupational status (being traditional cattle-keepers, or acquiring cattle), and partly by ancestry (being born into a cattle-keeping family or by intermarriage). The distinctions between Hutu and Tutsi were thus not purely 'ethnic', let alone racial in nature.

Economy

Rwanda is a rural country with about 90% of the population engaged in agriculture. It is the most densely populated country in Africa; is landlocked; and has little natural resources or industry.



The 1994 genocide destroyed Rwanda's fragile economic base, severely impoverished the population, particularly women,

and eroded the country's ability to attract private and external investment. However, Rwanda has made significant

progress in stabilising and rehabilitating its economy and is still a strong exporter of coffee and tea.



Rwanda's economy is based on the rain-fed agricultural production of small, semi-subsistent, and increasingly fragmented farms. It has few natural resources to exploit and a small, uncompetitive industrial sector. The production of coffee and tea is well-suited to the small farms, steep slopes, and cool climates of Rwanda and has ensured access to foreign exchange over the years.

After the genocide, the Government began a major programme to improve the country's economy and reduce its dependence on subsistence farming. The government has focused primarily on building its manufacturing and service industries and eliminating barriers to trade and development.

Beginning in 1996-97, the government became increasingly active in helping the industrial sector to restore production through technical and financial assistance, including loan guarantees, economic liberalization, and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises. In early 1998, the government set up a one-stop investment promotion centre and implemented a new investment code that created an enabling environment for foreign and local investors. An autonomous

revenue authority was established, improving collections and accountability.

As security in Rwanda improves, the country's nascent tourism sector is beginning to grow. Centred around the attractions of mountain gorillas in the north of the country (where Diane Fossey was once based), more tourists are putting Rwanda on their travel map.

In June 1998, the Government signed an Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility with the International Monetary Fund and has embarked upon an ambitious privatisation programme with the World Bank. As the country begins to improve its telecommunications and transport infrastructure, the future of the economy in Rwanda looks ever brighter.