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## **Sustaining Research in Rwanda**

*by Andre Lachance*

A strange silence has reigned over the Rwandan countryside for the last few months. From the ricefields of the Kabuye Valley to the sugar cane fields of Nyabarongo, in Bugesera, the country seems to have been abandoned. Few farmers can be seen on the roads. In some regions, there is not a sign of life to be seen in the thousands of rugos, those traditional family compounds of the Rwandan landscape.

The unusual calm pervading the country of the thousand hills is not a comfortable one, however, for this is a misleading peace. It is the peace of the graveyard, the peace left in the wake of massacres and land abandoned during the exodus. Rwanda has been ravaged in more ways than one. It is true the infrastructures are relatively intact, but in the countryside many houses were damaged or destroyed. The country then lost a significant share of its population in the genocide, which may not be over, in view of the recent events in Kibeho. Finally, we must not forget the refugees, both within the country and outside, who are not about to resume normal lives, even though they represent an economic and intellectual potential the country definitely cannot do without.

While young soldiers, with their transistor radios in one hand and assault rifles in the other, stand on guard on the outskirts of the towns and on the hills, the government has countless obstacles to overcome before it can reorganize. The majority of public servants have fled, government offices are empty, the doors and windows have been wrenched off and equipment was looted during the war. In most of the public service, until quite recently, there were not enough paper and pencils for the few remaining employees to work properly.

Human rights violations are still commonplace. The judicial system hardly exists at all any more, and only 40 out of the 750 magistrates from before the events of April 1994, have remained in their positions. Thousands of men, women and even children suspected of having taken part in the massacres huddle in over-populated, sometimes even clandestine, prisons.

The insecurity caused by the roundups and arbitrary arrests does little to foster reconciliation. More than one-quarter of the population took refuge in bordering countries and hesitate to come back to the country today. These refugees watch helplessly while new arrivals, former refugees or nationals from other countries, move into Rwanda. So a majority of the properties in Kigali and some of the large towns have new occupants as in the countryside, where the best properties have changed hands, from those of their exiled owners to those of the new arrivals, without any compensation.

### **A Project to bring hope**

This is the difficult background to the Rwanda National Reconstruction Project developed by IDRC. This initiative, which is banking on the goodwill of all Rwandan researchers and intellectuals, within the country and outside, may play a major role in seeking a lasting solution to the present problems. The

purpose of the project is first of all to help the largest possible number of Rwandan researchers and intellectuals inside and outside the country to survive during the current transition period, explains Serge Dub, of the Regional IDRC Office in Nairobi, Kenya. We also wish to enable them to pursue research activities compatible with their training so that, when the time comes, they can take part in the process of national reconciliation and reconstruction of the country.

A large number of researchers and intellectuals essential elements for getting the country back on its feet have left Rwanda since April 1994, and taken refuge in Belgium, France, Kenya, Malawi, Niger, South Africa, Togo and Zambia, as well as in camps in Zaire and Tanzania. Serge Dub, recently saw for himself the vacuum left by the disappearance of the country's intellectual and scientific elite: The research stations belonging to the Rwandan Institute of Agricultural Sciences have been abandoned and the National University was not able to open some of its doors again until April, for lack of teachers and students. Obviously, Rwanda will not recover from the current crisis, if its researchers and intellectuals, at home and abroad, do not get back to work quickly and undertake the national reconciliation process.

This is exactly what IDRC hopes for. In addition to helping Rwandan scientists to maintain their skills during the current transition period, the National Reconstruction Project, to which IDRC has allocated \$496,500, is meant to foster a dialogue between the protagonists. To do so, the plan is to carry out research projects, write a work about the current crisis and hold workshops and conferences that should provide a clearer picture of Rwandan problems. If everyone does their share, it should be possible to define some firm foundations for a genuine national reconciliation.

Jean-Baptiste Katarwa, the former Dean of the Faculty of Applied Sciences at the National University of Rwanda, is working temporarily, thanks to the IDRC, in the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of Sherbrooke, in Quebec. According to this scientist, who lost his father, his brother, his sister and some twenty family members to the infernal killing machine, the pluralistic democratization process must at all costs be revived in Rwanda. An independent judicial system must be set up, says Katarwa. All those responsible for the crimes committed against the Rwandan people since 1990 must be tried before the courts; property must be returned to the exiles; any detainees who have not been charged must be released immediately; and, finally, the summary executions must end. These are the conditions essential to a lasting peace and thus to the reconstruction of the country.

## **Forum on Rwanda**

These concerns were to be read between the lines at a forum on Rwanda organized by IDRC in March 1995, in Montreal. Of course, there were congratulations for the IDRC on its initiatives, notably its participation in the Seeds of Hope project, designed to protect and even increase the stocks of seed specific to each farming area of Rwanda. People also asked what should be done to finally get the country on the road to stability. There was talk of values, such as democracy, freedom of the press and respect for human rights values apparently not endorsed by some of the participants of Rwandan origin, who were among those in attendance at the forum, obviously unable to surmount ethnic differences in discussions of the scope of the tragedy. Monique Mujawamariya, a human rights militant who took refuge in Quebec after narrowly escaping death, made an impassioned plea against such inflexibility: We must get beyond the notion of Hutu and Tutsi. Above all, we are Rwandans and we must learn to live together, to respect one another, to be fair with one another. We must be reconciled! These are words of faith, which hopefully will be heard by the majority of Rwandans.

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