




**SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH ON THE DYNAMICS
OF REFUGEE AND IDP RETURNS AND
REINTEGRATION IN BURUNDI**



The research took place in the provinces of Bujumbura, Cibitoke and Muyinga between 14 January and 20 April 2020, the start date of campaigns for presidential, legislative and municipal elections in **Burundi**.



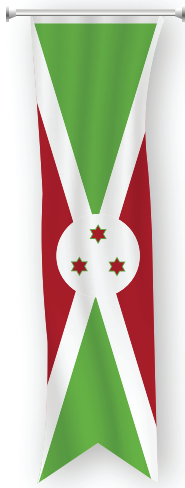
RESEARCH TOPIC

The Return Dynamics of Refugees and IDPs in the Provinces of Bujumbura, Cibitoke and Muyinga.

The research focused on IDP and returnees following the 2015 crisis in Burundi, not those who were there before.

METHODOLOGY

A predominantly qualitative research methodology based on interviews with 97 respondents, 56% men and 44% women.



CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Between September 2017 and March 2020 more than 80,000 Burundian refugees were repatriated by UNHCR from Tanzania to Burundi on the basis of an earlier Tripartite Agreement. Insecurity and pressure in Tanzanian camps had forced many of them to choose to return home. Other countries hosting Burundi refugees in the region did not sign any Tripartite Agreement. However, in addition to the influx of Burundian repatriates, and the existence of thousands of IDPs from earlier political crises, the country was hit by new IDPs from successive waves of natural calamities (landslides, floods, drought, etc..) at the same time, in addition to the presence of spontaneous returnees.

Assistance by UNHCR, the local administrative authorities and other stakeholders focused on the distribution of food and household items, as well as local resettlement and house reconstruction. Although this assistance was insufficient, it did generate jealousy and a sense of injustice among vulnerable groups in the community such as spontaneous returnees, host families and IDPs. There was widespread perception among the population that a link existed between humanitarian assistance and affiliation and loyalty to the ruling CNDD-FDD party but authorities at the grassroots level have firmly refuted this criticism.

Furthermore, in many cases, returnees were perceived by the authorities as being linked to the main opposition party, CNL, and were intimidated and harassed by the «Imbonerakure», youth wing of the ruling CNDD-FDD, often with the complicity of the local authorities. This constituted the major source of human rights violations at the local level, reflected by torture, arbitrary arrests, denial of the freedom of expression and association, long term detention and/or imprisonment on framed charges, among others. To make it worse, there were allegations of disappearances and summary executions. In that kind of situation, new departures into exile were not uncommon. Nevertheless, the research revealed that in some places, thanks mainly to the firmness of senior administrative officials, there was cohabitation, collaboration and joint working between the two main rival political parties in community activities, thus contributing to sustainable peace and security in those areas. Peace and security were some of the major determinants influencing refugees' decision to return home.

Land was another important issue for all returning refugees. Despite government intervention in recent years, there are still land tensions and conflicts, making life difficult for returnees, particularly women who suffer gender discrimination and have been the main victims of domestic conflicts over land.

Summary of Recommendations from the research:

- Step up messages of pacification and reconciliation, as well as hold relevant individuals accountable for their crimes.
- Ensure good relations between returnees, IDPs and the local authorities particularly by including them in critical decision-making organs and processes to enhance their participation and agency.
- Combat unequal and exclusionary gender relations by educating the communities on appropriate, gender-sensitive and anti-sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) laws and processes for prevention and redress.
- Undertake activities to prevent land conflicts and promote peaceful social relations by encouraging the population to register their land at the Land Registry, among others.
- Increase the size of UNHCR return packages and expand the coverage of humanitarian assistance to vulnerable members of the host community, disaster-stricken IDPs and spontaneous returnees.
- The UNHCR, the international community and the countries hosting Burundian refugees should ensure that repatriation is strictly voluntary and devoid of any undue pressure, coercion or duress. A mechanism for refugees to make fact-finding assessment visits to Burundi and independently report back to their fellow refugees to help them in decision making is encouraged.
- The Burundian Government, with the support of the international community, should strengthen a truly democratic culture, within a human rights respecting environment, and stimulate development, with a specific emphasis on the return of Burundian refugees.
- Elaborate and integrated planning in preparation for the return of refugees under the new political dispensation.

In general, in a country with high demographic pressure, ever rising levels of unemployment and poverty, security challenges, and a low rate of development, returnees experience big challenges as they try to compete for scarce resources and opportunities. For emphasis, prior multi-sectoral planning for the absorption of returnees should engender better outcomes for their reintegration.