

# *Rwanda-Conflict, Violence, and Reconstruction*

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**Abstract:** When it comes to Rwanda, most people first think of the tragic movie — *The Rwanda Hotel*. That film recreates the bloody 1994 massacre in Rwanda, causing irreparable harm to every Rwandan people. Rwanda's history is indeed full of hatred and misery. After the massacre, the Rwandan government led the people to take national reconstruction measures for the country and achieved the desired results. Based on adjusting their own culture, the Rwandans also explored a development path that suits their national conditions and has African characteristics. After the completion of the reconstruction, Rwanda largely resumed its economic development and made all-around progress, even known as the “Singapore of Africa.” Rwanda's reconstruction policy is generally improving, but there are still some shortcomings that need to be adjusted and improved. Driven by those reconstruction measures, Rwanda has achieved remarkable results and is worth learning from other countries.

**Keywords:** Rwanda Genocide, National Reconstruction, Economical Reform

## 1. Introduction

The Rwandan genocide was a racial riot caused by the combination of tribal unrest, economic stagnation, population surge, the artificial division of racial identity by the colonists, and the rise of the democratization movement in the international background.[1]

In the 16th century, Rwanda had its own country. At that time, there were Hutu and Tutsi titles, but no real racial distinction existed between them. The Hutu and Tutsi lived on the same land, used the same language, shared the same beliefs, and often intermarried; their racial division needed to be more straightforward. The most obvious difference is that the Hutu make a living by farming, while the Tutsi make a living by grazing. At that time, the Hutu and Tutsi names were similar to the difference between “peasant” and “herdsman.” If the Hutu farmers turn to grazing, they are called the Tutsi, and vice versa. [2] The two races are well connected, and there is no great hatred.

1890 when Rwanda became a German colony, the Germans differentiated the Rwandans: the Hutu were darker and shorter; the Tutsi were whiter and taller. The north is closer to the Nile, so the Tutsi people are more civilized and of a higher class. In 1935, Belgium entered Rwanda. In order to divide and rule, the Belgian colonists used “phrenology” to formally separate the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups into two different races according to the length of the nose, property status, height, skin color, and pupil color. They also used the ID card system to fix the division forever and extended it to the descendants of Rwandans. The Belgian colonists gave preferential policies to the Tutsi because the

Tutsi were a minority and easy to control. The Tutsi had various privileges, while the Hutu were regarded as poor and reduced to the bottom of society. After the implementation of this system, the class of Rwanda was completely solidified. As the ruling class, the Tutsi added many new legal provisions to help them maintain their dominance. Hence, the contradiction between the two nationalities intensified, and the Hutu and Tutsi developed antagonistic and hateful relationships.

As the Tutsi people had ruled for a long time, the Hutu people are often oppressed and exploited, and racial confrontation and mistrust have become the characteristics of Rwanda. [3] Racial violence has existed for a long time, and the contradiction between the two sides is deepening. Finally, on April 6, 1994, the plane taken by then President Hutu Juvenal Habyarimana was shot down over Kigali, killing all personnel. This led to an outbreak of the genocide in Rwanda. The subjects of the massacre were the Tutsi and Hutu moderates. The massacre resulted in eighty to one million deaths, equivalent to 12.5% of Rwanda's population and 0.0002% of the world's population. Finally, in July 1994, Paul Kagame led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) in control of northern Rwanda, and the RPF announced the ceasefire in October.[2]

The reason for the outbreak of the genocide is apparent. Ethnic conflicts are the root cause of everything, and the refugee problem is a potential hidden danger; the large number of people and less land is an essential factor, and economic stagnation is the crux of the problem. The so-called multi-party democratization of the colonists makes the inherent contradictions in Rwanda more complicated. [4] Under the combined influence of these factors, the genocide erupted.

## **2. Recovery and Reconstruction in Rwanda after the Genocide**

After the 1994 genocide, Rwanda's economy shrank, and its society was disrupted. In order to restore the economy and rebuild the stable country of Rwanda, the government has adopted a series of reconstruction measures. Before formulating the specific policies, the new government of Rwanda, under the leadership of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, mobilized non-governmental organizations and other social forces to organize dialogues across the country, discuss with the public the root cause of the tragedy of 1994, and on this basis, formulated practical policy measures.

### **2.1. Measures and policies adopted by the State**

#### **2.1.1. The Reduction of National Divisions and the Reconstruction of Unity**

Eliminating racial hatred and reconstructing racial unity are the cornerstone of economic recovery and social development. The Government of Rwanda has adopted a series of measures to eliminate racial awareness and racial hatred in the hearts of the Rwandan people and promote racial unity.

The new government stipulated using new ID cards that canceled racial identification. [3] In 1994, Rwanda established a transitional government of National Unity, which abolished the ethnic identification on Rwandan identity cards and strengthened national citizenship. The Rwandan government stressed that all citizens of Rwanda have the same skin color, use the same language, are Rwandans, and should not be divided into different races. Rwanda is a united and harmonious whole. The new constitution adopted by the referendum in 2003 states that "all Rwandan people have free and equal rights and obligations from birth."

The Rwandan government launched the court in June 2002. Rwanda later established more than 12,000 traditional courts, employed more than 160,000 civil judges, and heard nearly 2 million cases in 10 years. In a short time, the Gacaca Court did work that regular justice could not do.[5]

The judiciary is a way of protecting human rights. It is clear that the existing way of trial in Rwanda after the genocide could not meet the requirements of human rights protection. To make up for the traditional judicial process, the most critical step for Rwanda is to launch the special judicial court,

which has been used for centuries—Gacaca.[6]

The court, also known as “justice on the grass,” is a traditional way for Rwandans to resolve disputes over public opinion. When a neighborhood dispute occurs, the elder will gather everyone on the grass, the parties will state the reasons for the conflict, and then the judge will make a judgment. Perhaps today, this way of trial lacks rigor and fairness, but in Rwanda at the time, it played an irreplaceable role in promoting ethnic reconciliation and achieving national stability.

Gacaca has also partly restored the psychological wounds caused by the genocide. At the scene of the trial, when the criminal and the victim's family made statements, most of the neighbors were present, and anyone could express his opinion. In this highly transparent situation, lies are easy to expose, and the truth is hard to hide. The sin and suffering of the dark days were brought before the Rwandans who had just stepped out of the trembling and fear. Whenever they hear the sadness, the judge and the audience cry. In the face of such blood and tears, Rwandans learned how to face the past bravely, how to unload the heavy burden, and how to unite to face the future.[5]

The purpose of the court is truth, justice, and reconciliation, aiming to stop conflict and promote community unity. Adult criminals usually serve their sentences after being prosecuted. For minors under the age of 14, they will first be sent to the “Solidarity Camps” [7] to receive psychological education, make psychological adjustments, and then reintegrate into society [8] to achieve tribal reconciliation and contribute to the unity of the country and tribal unity. The Gacaca court is where Rwandans use the unique combination of religion and tradition to do justice for victims and mend severely traumatized social relations. It is also an innovative social experiment.[7]

### 2.1.2. Economic Reform

After the genocide of 1994, the economy of Rwanda was severely devastated, and to restore and develop the economy, the Rwanda government implemented a series of development policies.

The government encouraged the people to strive for economic diversification and implemented policies to encourage industries. The government encouraged investment in infrastructure. Investment projects in these areas could receive special attention and enjoy preferential policies, such as tax breaks.

The Rwandan government also developed a development plan 2000 for the next two decades, namely Vision 2020. The vision aims to transform itself from an agriculture-based, low-income economy to a knowledge-based, service-guided, middle-income country by 2020. In his vision, President Kagame said, “We hope to build Rwanda into a middle-income country through our vision so that the Rwandan people will be healthier, better educated, and more prosperous.

Vision 2020 adheres to the principle of putting the people first, takes root in the people's livelihood, thoroughly investigates the actual demands of the people, and formulates measures in line with reality and tradition. The most typical example is the “one cow per household” program. In 2006, Rwanda introduced the “one cow per household” policy and distributed 350,000 cattle to poor citizens. Through this policy, the Rwandan people have significantly improved their farming efficiency and obtained large amounts of milk, thus increasing their household income and changing the current situation of poverty and malnutrition. The proportion of the poor population decreased by 12% over six years, and this policy received unanimous support from the Rwandan people.

The new government also improved the business environment, simplified business procedures, and encouraged domestic and foreign investment. The government of Rwanda carried out the privatization reform of the notary industry, allowing individuals to act as notaries and form a private notary office, which is a crucial reform in Rwanda to adapt to the development of the modern economy. This reform makes the notarial legal services more extensive, flexible, and efficient and creates good investment conditions for investors. According to the World Bank's Doing Business 2020 report, Rwanda's business environment ranks 38th out of 190 economies worldwide as the only

low-income country among the top 50.

### **2.1.3. Social-level Protection**

After the genocide, Rwanda suffered huge property damage and psychological trauma, and the Rwandan government adopted a series of safeguards to comfort the victims and improve their living conditions.

Making financial compensation to female citizens and giving them the right to participate in politics. [9] In the 1994 genocide, most of the citizens and those who fled after the Holocaust were men, and after the genocide, 70 percent of the Rwandan population were women. Therefore, the Rwandan government has introduced a series of policies and laws on equality between men and women to strongly support and encourage women's participation in national reconstruction. They are involved in all aspects of the country's reconstruction: picking up trash, helping repair infrastructure, building houses, maintaining public order, and more.

The Rwandan government also implemented educational reforms. Following the genocide, the new government improved the education system, introduced a non-discriminatory education for all in Rwanda, and implemented a twelve-year compulsory education system for children. It is worth mentioning that Rwanda has suspended the school's history curriculum and recompiled its history. [10] In 1994, the new government decided to suspend history teaching, and in 2011 published the first history book written by Rwandans, "Rwanda History: From its Origins to the End of the 20th Century". The president of the National University of Rwanda wrote in his book: "Today's Rwandan society urgently needs to properly understand the past in order better to face the challenges of the present and the future. The history of Rwanda, written by Rwandans and read by Rwandans, is an important step in the process of the national identity reconstruction."

The new government also conducted health care reform and improved medical conditions. After the 1994 genocide, Rwanda's national health system collapsed, with the world's highest child mortality rate and the shortest life expectancy. Rwanda has rebuilt the health system and trained community health workers. In 2008, the Rwandan government launched the health insurance scheme, which implementation reduced the average annual out-of-pocket cost by more than half. Now, the NHI program covers over 85%. At the same time, Rwanda built a high-quality medical system. The country has vigorously trained medical staff. Currently, two universities offer general medicine and surgery courses. An international school called Global Health Equality is also in the process of construction, which will offer internationally recognized undergraduate and postgraduate medical courses.

## **2.2. Challenges and obstacles faced in the process of national reconstruction**

The first obstacle in the reconstruction process was the large size of the genocide, the escape of Rwandan citizens, the displacement of almost all citizens, the destruction of infrastructure, and the people's deep psychological trauma, making the implementation of the policies difficult.

Crucially, policy inequalities lead to a lack of popular support. National reconstruction policies and social welfare security are still biased toward the Tutsi "survivors," and funds and economic income have not been distributed equally. Poverty is still an important issue. In Rwanda, 90% of its citizens are still engaged in agriculture, and only a few people can escape their farmer status and do business.

## **3. Problems with the Reconstruction Measures**

In the post-genocide reconstruction process, the problem was "exchanging fairness for economic growth." Policies and social welfare are partial. While there is no racial identity, there is a new

classification of political identity: survivors, expected to settle returnees, newly settled returnees, and Holocaust suspects. Later, it fell into two main categories: victims and perpetrators. [11] This division affected the share of resources allocated, and the Tutsi enjoyed special preferential treatment as victims. In 1998, Rwanda established Survivor Assistance Funds. The Tutsi had the right to funding, and they had more likely to get college scholarships, easier access to psychological counseling and medication, and so on. At the same time, the Tutsi people have apparent advantages in administration, education, military, and other aspects. They can hold important positions in the government and the private sector, while the Hutu people are still mainly farming, challenging to get involved in the business layer, and still discriminated against; some scholars call this phenomenon “the Tutsi bias of power.”

From the post-genocide reconstruction situation, there is a situation that the investment in social welfare security share is inconsistent with the actual needs of different places. In the genocide, it is difficult to count the number of victims. The number of Tutsi before the genocide was unknown. The killing was not recorded during the genocide. And the number of post-Tutsi people in the genocide was strange because the new government removed ethnic symbols, and many Tutsi refugees escaped Rwanda, making it challenging to assess casualties precisely. As a result, the Rwandan government cannot invest a share of benefits that will match the actual situation, which means that many refugees do not receive the social benefits they deserve.

#### 4. Conclusion

After the massacre, Rwanda actively adopted reconstruction measures for national conditions and achieved results that could not be ignored. Rwanda’s reconstruction policy is generally improving, but some shortcomings still need to be adjusted and improved.

One crucial part is that President Kagame’s lengthy re-election is a problem for the country. President Kagame led the Rwanda Patriotic Front to power in 1994, ending the brutal massacre and leading Rwanda to political stability and economic development. He became President of the Transitional Government in 2000 and won a landslide re-election in 2003 and 2010, still holding the presidency today. As the president of Rwanda, Kagame has also been the de facto master of Rwanda. Historical evidence shows that the extended presidential term often forms a fixed development model, which is challenging to improve and innovate, leading to the stagnation of national development and hindering the dynamic progress of the country. Thus, the extended tenure raises concerns about the potential strangling of domestic innovation and renewal in the country, creating a potential obstacle to the future development of Rwanda and creating a disaster for its development.

From what has been mentioned above, although there are some problems and irrationality in the reconstruction measures in Rwanda, they have achieved remarkable results. They are still worth learning from other countries.

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