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Thursday, April 8, 2010

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On the Ground

Nicholas D. Kristof



April 6, 2010, 6:29 pm

16 Years after the Genocide, Rwanda Continues Forward

By [JOSH RUXIN](#)

[Josh Ruxin](#) is the director of [Rwanda Works](#) and a Columbia University expert on public health who has spent the last few years living in Rwanda. Here he reflects on the anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda.

Today is the 16th anniversary of the start of Rwanda's genocide, three months of brutality in which an estimated 1,000,000 people were killed. As I've previously written, Rwanda has rebuilt itself in the aftermath of that tragedy, setting itself apart from other developing nations by intelligently, efficiently, and transparently making the most of other nations' investments and creating the building blocks of success in agriculture, social services, entrepreneurship, and basic infrastructure.



Josh Ruxin Central Kigali

From AIDS to family health, you'd be hard pressed to find a nation that's shown better results for the money spent in improving health care fundamentals. Nevertheless, getting those basics right are only the foundation of the nation's broader plan to become a middle-income country by 2020. That's right: 10 years from now, Rwanda intends to be on par with Brazil, Thailand, and other nations that have pulled themselves out of poverty in recent decades.

Can Rwanda get there? It's possible. This country has certainly come farther in the past 16 years than even the most optimistic observers would have predicted. All of this development is important to recognize because it has been the government's express policy to deliver basic services and economic growth to its people in order to mitigate genocide ideology.

Let me start off with some caveats. Yes, there's been some terrorism here lately: several grenade attacks, just a few weeks ago here in Kigali. And yes, the situation in neighboring Eastern Congo is nowhere near a resolution, though that region is far more stable now than it has been in years. In addition, there are ongoing complaints about democratic principles, this August's election, and freedom of the press. In the months to come, I'll attempt to offer up perspectives on these issues and more, but here, I'd like to take a step back and look at the achievements of the past decade and a half, and in particular, the last five years, during which I've lived here with my family.

Five years ago, traveling anywhere in the country was bound to be a bumpy ride, if the way was even passable. Today, east-to-west and north-to-south, the road infrastructure is impressive and continues to expand. Five years ago, the country struggled to get tourists in for \$375 permits to visit Rwanda's mountain gorillas. Today, during high season, there are not enough \$500 tickets to meet the demand. Five years ago, there were no supermarkets or ATMs, and the cheapest cell phones cost \$50. Today there are multiple supermarkets, over a dozen international ATMs, and cell phones that cost \$14 are plentiful.



Josh Ruxin Centenary House, one of many new office buildings in Kigali.

Access to electricity and running water, both inconsistent five years ago even for those who could pay for it, is being constantly improved. In Lake Kivu, which borders Rwanda to the west, an American Company, ContourGlobal, is building one of the world's largest methane extractors. Hotels are being built everywhere, it seems, and a real service sector is emerging to meet heightened tourism demand. Wireless broadband is being built out across the country with infrastructure from KT (formerly Korea Telecom). More restaurants are opening, as are universities, technical schools, and preschools. The second national language has shifted from French to English, and the country has joined the British Commonwealth.

Against this impressive backdrop, crushing poverty still affects about 40% of the population. Millions live on tiny plots of land scarcely capable of producing adequate food for families in which the average woman gives birth to six children. It's this latter issue –raging population growth – that continues to perplex the policy and development wonks in Rwanda. Perhaps Rwanda can create opportunity for the 11 million who live here today, but can it do so for the estimated 14 million who will live here in 2020? In response, the government has embarked on an ambitious program to promote family planning, but population momentum takes years to slow. At current rates, in 10 years 70% of the population will have been born after the genocide. However, if half of all Rwanda's children continue to be malnourished (as are about half the children alive today), the nation will be unable to realize its highest goals.

While I have yet to meet anyone who fears another genocide in Rwanda, there are many who wonder whether Rwanda will continue to develop in stability or meet some sort of chaos. To meet its destiny, Rwanda will need the grand hotels and the vocational schools, improved farm productivity and light manufacturing jobs, better health care, tens of thousands of new university spots and thousands more primary school classrooms. The challenges are epic, but so is the progress to date. This nation has shown it can rise from the aftermath of unspeakable violence, and is determined to keep that momentum going and take the next critical steps toward real prosperity. If the past 16 years are any indication, Rwanda can do it.

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1.

Sara

Los Angeles

April 7th, 2010

5:39 pm

Dr. Ruxin, thank you for this post. While I generally share your view that Rwanda has made tremendous progress in recent years, I have met many Rwandans who do indeed both fear and believe that another genocide could take place. I found there to be a tremendous amount of festering anger, particularly in the northwest, over unpunished--and largely unpublicized--human rights abuses that took place in the late 90s and early 2000s. Could you comment on this?

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2.

z

arlington, va

April 7th, 2010

5:40 pm

i wonder if any of this progress can be attributed to the high percentage of female legislators in Rwanda.

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3.

Raymond

New Zealand

April 7th, 2010

5:40 pm

I was truly amazed by this article. It is hard not to simply shake one's head in despair when thinking about Africa, so to hear of a ray of hope in a country that was so devastated is very heartening. Rwanda joining the Commonwealth and changing its official language to English are significant acts in this context. I believe there has to be a time limit on post-colonial guilt, but for some reason France's involvement in 20th century geopolitical disasters seem often to be ignored. To take other examples, the Viet Nam war is always associated with US militarism, never with the way the French withdrew from South East Asia. And when the initial deal-making was going on to create a compact state of Israel back in 1937, it was France's insistence on "keeping" Syria that finally derailed it. I am not a Francophobe, but some recognition that the US and UK are not responsible for every bad thing that ever happened is overdue.

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4.

David Russell

London

April 7th, 2010

5:40 pm

Dr Ruxin writes that "I have yet to meet anyone who fears another genocide in Rwanda". Though working with survivors of the genocide, sadly we do often hear that view expressed. We only wish it were different.

In an insightful article to mark the 15th Anniversary of the genocide Phillip Gourevitch in The New Yorker presents a comprehensive overview of the situation in Rwanda. He stresses the point that so much of Rwanda's

peace, as well as remarkable economic rebuilding, is dependent on President Kagame. Without his leadership, the situation though may be very different. As he quotes from a number of interviews with Rwandans:

- "The Rwandans are still the same-and without Kagame the genocide could come back."

- "If he were not there, we would all be killed."

<http://www.scribd.com...>

Though Dr Ruxin may have not met anyone with that view, it does exist, and sadly more widely than I believe Dr Ruxin may realise.

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[5.](#)

Robert Levine

Malvern, PA

April 7th, 2010

5:40 pm

Why all over sub-Saharan Africa are there extremely high birthrates among people who are frequently destitute, with little viable employment, often unable to feed themselves or their children, and living in substandard housing? What cultural factors explain this unsustainable population growth? You would think that people with little resources would husband them and try not to have children they can't provide for. I noted awhile ago that one of the container vessels high jacked off the Somali coast was carrying food aid to Kenya, a country that historically had been rich in agricultural resources, but is unable to feed itself now. Nor does it have the economic wherewithal to provide for an exploding population with very large unemployed populations migrating to cities with over strained and failing infrastructure. This bespeaks growing social anarchy in failing societies beset by crime, illegitimacy, and widespread poverty.

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[6.](#)

Rachel Boehm

NYC

April 7th, 2010

5:40 pm

Male Entrepreneur Spurs Gender Equality in Rwanda through His New Fresh Food Home Delivery Idea

\$15 Is a Vote for Hope for Rwanda Women and His Business

www.bpeace.org/vote

April 7, 2010, New York— Rwanda is a nation led by women. Women comprise 55% of the country's workforce, own roughly 40% of businesses and head 1/3 of all households . This gender gap is one effect of the Rwandan Genocide, which began 16 years ago today.

Throughout Rwanda's rebuilding process, it is the women who have taken the charge. "Rwanda's economy has risen up from the genocide and prospered greatly on the backs of our women...Bringing women out of the home and fields has been essential to our rebuilding. In that process, Rwanda has changed forever... We are becoming a nation that understands that there are huge financial benefits to equality." --Agnes Matilda Kalibata, Rwanda Minister Agriculture.

As Rwandan women advance in the workforce, their time is increasingly divided between traditional homemaking duties and their new business obligations. One young Rwandan male entrepreneur recognizes both the vital role these women play and the challenges they face in balancing these responsibilities. Hervé Debarego's dream is to support these women with his own new business and a U.S. non-profit organization is helping him raise the seed capital he needs.

Hervé is one of six finalists in the Bpeace (Business Council for Peace) Race to Innovation, where Rwanda and Afghan entrepreneurs are vying for seed capital. His business idea is a fresh produce delivery service. Beyond the obvious convenience, Hervé's delivery service will create a significant change in Kigali (Rwanda's capital city), providing stable paying jobs to women who currently sell fruit in the streets. In addition, women utilizing his services will no longer spend hours in the markets shopping for the freshest and least expensive foods; allowing

them more time after work to be at home with their families.

Every urban American can relate to the timesaving benefits of fresh food delivered right to their doorstep. In a country like Rwanda where 22% of households are food insecure and over 50% of children are chronically malnourished, increasing access to inexpensive, fresh nutrition is more than a luxury--it is a life-saving initiative. And providing sustainable employment to Rwanda female street vendors is doubly so.

By providing sustainable employment to women, Hervé will be empowering the gender proven to most likely reinvest their earnings in family, community and business development. By empowering Hervé's business through the Race to Innovation, online voters will be empowering Rwanda's women.

Online voting is the final chapter in Bpeace's Race to Innovation. Through their "\$15 is a Vote for Hope" campaign, Bpeace hopes to raise \$10,000 in seed or expansion capital for each of the six finalists. The winner will additionally receive a trip to the U.S. to meet with experts in their industry.

To vote for Hervé visit bpeace.org/vote where you can also watch his pitch video and read a brief commentary by his Bpeace pro-bono business adviser, Teri Leavens, business development associate, Weber Shandwick.

About Bpeace

Bpeace has been assisting Rwandan entrepreneurs since 2003.

Bpeace believes the path to peace is lined with jobs. We work with entrepreneurs in conflict-affected countries to scale their businesses, create significant employment for all, and expand the economic power of women. More jobs mean less violence.®

Bpeace is a non-profit coalition of business professionals. Bpeace members offer access to expertise, technical assistance, networks and proven methodologies to help Fast Runners expand their businesses, increase profitability, create new employment, retain and attract customers, and access markets and capital.

Bpeace tailors a one to three year investment in each entrepreneur—a mix of consulting, training, mentoring, out-of-country apprenticeships and business site visits, employee technical training, equipment, technology, branding and marketing, and networking opportunities.

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For More Information:

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www.bpeace.org

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7.

Rob Morris

New Haven

April 7th, 2010

5:40 pm

Excellent post! Realistic and hopeful. On this 16th anniversary of Rwanda's genocide, I'm reminded of something that famed "Hotel Rwanda" manager and human rights hero, Paul Rusesabagina said; "Kindness is not an illusion and violence is not a rule."

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8.

Luke Parrott

Durango, CO

April 8th, 2010

12:31 am

Hope and Progress has been the theme of this nation in the past 16 years. I would hope it to be the same in the next 16 years as well!

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[9.](#)

John

USA

April 8th, 2010

2:45 am

You need to remember that under Habyalimana, Rwanda was one of the most prosperous countries in Africa. No one denies economic achievements under Kagame. But Kagame is repeating the same mistakes Habyalimana did. Kagame is actually worse. In today Rwanda, all wealth is in the hands of a few Tutsis from Uganda. Human rights are non existant, people go jail or are killed for no reason. Today Rwanda has more refugees than any other time. Look at the way Kagame is treating the oposition. It is unacceptable. Look at the case of Deo Mushayidi. The bible say that it is better to live a modest life or be poor but have peace. Today, many Rwandans are not sure if they are going to see tomorrow. They are terrorized by the government that is supposed to protect them. Kagame is nick named the hitler of Africa, he comment on that himself during his speech remembering the genocide. When will you hardliner will accept that Kagame is a dictator, when will the New York Times, the Washington Post, CNN and all quit telling lies to the american people? You are not helping rwandans by telling polished stories. Having reaches with no peace is meaningless. All Rwandans want is democracy and peace. Majority of Rwandas want Ingabire yet she can't even register her party. We also want justice for all. Kagame and his soldiers killed millions of Rwandans, and millions of Congolese yet they roam Kigali freely. Where is justice? Kagame is been in power for 16 years. We are sick and tired of him. He needs to go.

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[10.](#)

Aimable Mugara

Toronto, Canada

April 8th, 2010

2:46 am

April 05, 2010 – A Citizen’s Weekly Open Letter to General Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda

Originally posted at www.rwandahumanrights.org

April 05, 2010

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A Citizen's Weekly Open Letter to General Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda

Dear General,

There are 19 weeks left before the elections. This is my fourth letter and there are 19 letters left. This week, we remember with great sadness the horrible tragedy of genocide that befell our nation in 1994. A tragedy that began on April 6th, 1994 which was sparked by the simultaneous assassinations of Mr. Habyarimana the President of Rwanda, Mr Ntaryamira the President of Burundi, General Nsabimana the Chief of Army of Rwanda, all of them assassinated at once by the shooting down of the Falcon 50, the Rwandan presidential plane that was carrying them along with their top cabinet members who also got killed. This shooting down happened during a war that had spanned 4 years and caused the deaths of thousands of civilians and the internal displacement of over a million people. It is simply undeniable that this terrorist act is what started the genocide and without it there would never have been any genocide in Rwanda.

As we remember the innocent lives that were lost during the genocide, it is very important for us to look for answers to a very important question that remains unanswered today, 16 years after the fact. The question is: Who ordered or authorized this terrorist act? Whoever authorized this terrorist act, how many casualties were they expecting as a result of the cycle of violence that would surely take place in the aftermath of these assassinations? Was the resulting "collateral damage" considered reasonable for the sake of whatever goal that terrorist mastermind was trying to achieve? What goal did that terrorist have that could justify starting a genocide?

Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Yet, a certain terrorist took that right from the passengers of the Falcon 50 plane, but more importantly this same terrorist is responsible for all the bloodshed that followed. So, Mr President I ask you today, why is it that your government has not asked the United Nations for an investigation into that terrorist act? This is in stark comparison with Lebanon where their Prime Minister Mr. Hariri was assassinated in February 2005 and within a few weeks their leader was at the United Nations Security Council urging them to open an investigation. Less than 2 months later, a United Nations investigation into Hariri's assassination started. Why is it that your government has gone out of its way to block any investigation by the United Nations into the shooting down of the presidential plane, the event that surely sparked the genocide?

As long as the terrorist who killed President Habyarimana and President Ntaryamira has not been convicted in an international court of law, there is a danger that the cycle of violence will continue in our country. For the sake of the 800,000 to 1 million innocent civilians who were butchered in Rwanda during the genocide, the truth needs to come out. Who made that decision to shoot down the Falcon 50 plane and did this person know at the time that they were risking the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians? Your government talks so much about honoring the victims of the genocide. Yet, your government continues to block any attempts for the United Nations to find out who the culprit was. It is time for your government to do more than talking. It is time for your government to ask for a United Nations investigation into this terrorist act. The truth about who actually ordered the shooting down of that presidential plane is a better way to honor the genocide victims, better than all the talk.

Thank you!

Aimable Mugara
Toronto, Ontario Canada
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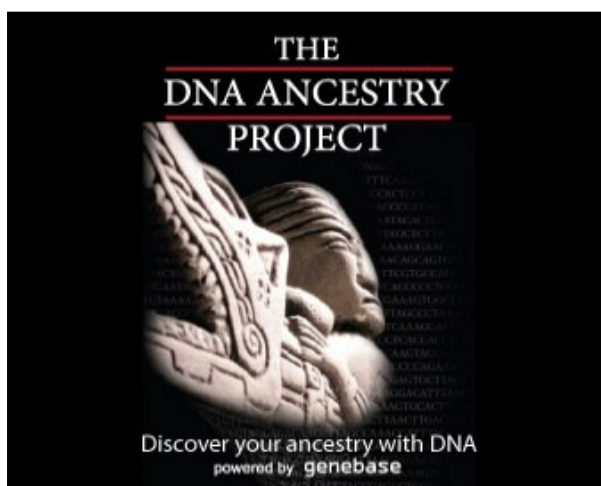
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