**Burundi**

**Location**

The Republic of Burundi is located in Central Africa and covers 10,740 square miles which is slightly smaller than Maryland. It is commonly known as “The Heart of Africa”. The capital is Bujumbura located on the western border. Burundi is bordered to the west by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to the north by Rwanda, and the east and south by Tanzania.

**Geography**

This small country is landlocked with only 7% consisting of lakes. Located along the western border of Burundi is Lake Tanganyika, the second deepest lake in the world. The average elevation in Burundi is 5,600 feet; however, the highest peak is 9,055 feet at Mount Karonje. The terrain is hilly and mountainous with flooding, landslides, and drought being common natural hazards. The country suffers from soil erosion, deforestation, and decreasing wildlife populations.

**Climate**

In general, the climate is tropical with a daily temperature range of 68°F to 73°F. Rain is irregular but can occur during September to November and February to May. The dry seasons fall between June to August and December to January. Longer periods of drought are more typical for Burundi and vary in length.

**History**

Burundi’s population has consisted mainly of two tribes that have never seen eye to eye, the Hutu and Tutsi tribes. From 1962 until 1993, Burundi was controlled by military dictators. These years involved a lot of ethnic violence. In 1972, 1988, and 1993 Hutu extremists attempted to wipe out the existence of the Tutsi tribe. In 1993, the first democratically elected president, a Hutu, was put into office. A few months later he was assassinated by the Tutsi...
which triggered widespread ethnic violence between the tribes. More than 300,000 people were killed during the conflict in a span of several years. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced or became refugees in neighboring countries. The genocide continued even after most of Burundi’s political groups agreed to a peace deal in 2003. Unfortunately, civil unrest has continued along with continued negotiations. Burundi still faces many challenges today.

Important Dates

Important dates on Burundi’s calendar are January 1—New Year’s Day; May 1—Labor Day; July 1—Independence Day; August 15—Assumption Day; September 18—Victory of UPRONA; November 1—All Saint’s Day; December 25—Christmas. There are several days of celebration that do not always fall on the same day each year: Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost.

Population

The population of Burundi in 2007 was estimated to be 8,390,505 people, approximately half of whom are age 14 or less. The median age for a Burundian is approximately 16 years old. The age distribution is as follows: 46% of the population is 0-14 years of age, 51% is between the ages of 15-64 years of age, and only 3% is over the age of 65. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS has a significant impact on the population. This epidemic causes higher death and infant mortality rates, and lowers life expectancy. Approximately 85% of the population is of Hutu ethnicity with the majority of the remaining population being Tutsi. The population density is 753 people per square mile, which is second to Rwanda.

Currency

The official currency of Burundi is the franc. In January 2008, the franc was valued at 1,129.40 per U.S. dollar. Coins come in 1, 5, and 10 francs. Banknotes are in denominations of 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, 1000, 2000, 5000, 10000.

Education
As of 2005, Burundi has a new democratic government and President Nkurunziza pledged to provide free primary education for all children, effective immediately. That announcement nearly doubled first grade enrollment to 500,000 children. Approximately 50% of school aged children aged 7 through 12 attend. The enrollment ratio appears to be estimated at 59% boys and 48% girls. The languages of instruction are Kisundi and French. Secondary school lasts for seven years and enrollment is much lower with approximately 8.5% attending. In 1995, approximately 48,000 students were enrolled. The country has only one institution of higher learning, The University of Burundi, in Bujumbura. In 1993, approximately 4,200 students were enrolled. The adult literacy rate is 65% of the population. Attendance and literacy rates are low, partially due in part to the shortage of teachers and supplies.

Language

The official languages are French and Kirundi, primarily. Swahili is spoken in some parts of Burundi.

Religion

The most heavily practiced religion in Burundi is Christianity. Approximately 60% of the population is Roman Catholic and approximately 5% are Protestant. There are approximately 20% of people with indigenous beliefs and 10% of the population are Muslim. The remaining 5% either have no religious affiliation or it is unknown.

Agriculture

It is estimated that 43%, or 2,718,000 acres, of Burundi’s land area is arable or used for crops. Most of the agriculture consists of subsistence farming which supports approximately 90% of the population. The primary crops for consumption are manioc, beans, bananas, sweet potatoes, corn, and sorghum. The land continually suffers a loss of fertility because of soil
erosion. Contributing factors are poor agricultural practices, irregular rainfall, and a lack of fertilizer.

The majority of livestock herds are of poor quality and live in unsanitary conditions. In 1999, Burundi was estimated to have 329,000 cattle, 594,000 goats, 165,000 sheep, 61,000 pigs, and four million chickens. Milk production was estimated at 23,000 tons and meat consumption was estimated at 24,000 tons. The average person was consuming only 48 calories per day which is only one-tenth of the world's average. The number of livestock they have far exceeds their needs and usage. These herds are occupying land that could be used for crops and simply destroying it by overgrazing.

Trade

Nationwide commerce involving daily necessities and food is practically nonexistent. Domestic trade is severely limited to subsistence farming. A small manufacturing sector exists in Bujumbura, primarily for local distribution. It produces basic necessities such as beverages, soap, textiles, and cigarettes.

Burundi exports coffee, tea, sugar, cotton, tobacco, wheat, fabrics, and hides. Coffee accounted for 50% of their exports in 2006. Imported goods such as food, petroleum, chemicals, and vehicles accounted for 13% of their imports in 2003. Burundi’s major trading partners are Switzerland, Belgium, United Kingdom, Netherlands, France, and Tanzania.

Food

In Burundi, red kidney beans and rice are staple items commonly consumed on a daily basis. Other common foods are plantains, sweet potatoes, cassava, peas, and maize. Fish is more common than meat which may be eaten only a few times a month. In some cases this is due to lack of affordability but some families who own cattle view them as a status symbol.
Snack foods are items such as ground nuts, sugar cane, and fruit. Sweet desserts are not commonly served with meals. Most food is boiled, stewed, or roasted over wood fire.

Urwarwa, a homemade banana wine, is a fairly common beverage during celebrations. Primus is a popular beer that is produced in Burundi. Impeke is a home-brewed beer made from sorghum. When close friends or family get together they often drink Impeke through straws from a single, large container. This tradition is a symbol of unity.

**Landmarks**

There are numerous sites to see in Burundi. First and foremost is the capital, Bujumbura, and the famous Lake Tanganyika. Gitega, the former capital, has a national museum and large market center. Situated throughout Burundi are must sees such as Kibira National Park, Ruvubu National Park, Rusizi Natural Reserve, Bururi Natural Reserve, and Rwihinda Lake Natural Reserve. The National Office of Tourism also offers many tours to Nyakazu Break, Karera Falls, Vyanda, Kabonambo, and the tea plantations of Teza or Rwegura. It would be nearly impossible to see all of these places in one visit; Burundi welcomes many return tourists.

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