

A work submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in International Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid.

Final Assignment:

**Exploring returnee reintegration challenges following the 2015 crisis in Burundi**

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### 1.3 Acknowledgements

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## 1.4 Dedication

I dedicate my Final Assignment to my lovely family; A special gratitude goes to my husband whose encouraging words to go back to university to advance my academic level never left my mind and at sometimes made me to be courageous and decided to try it. May he find here my special thanks. My Children Precise, Prevoyant and my dear tweens Kerry and Danny did their best to not frustrate me during my studies and did well in class over my study period I love and bless them so much. Also dedicate this task to my mum and my late dad who always carried me in their hearts to be what I am today helped by the Almighty God.

## 2 About this document

### 2.1 Categories

Countries	Document Type	Subject	Institutions	Language
Burundi	Dissertation	Refugees		English

### 2.2 Author

Christine Ndayhimbaze (5 February 1978) is graduating from an online program from Kalu Institute where she did her program of Master in International Cooperation and Humanitarian Aids. She enrolled in this cursus as she was devoted to alleviated the suffering of children and youth within vulnerable communities through Right To Play an International Non-Governmental organization that she worked for over the 12 past years. During her work in favor of this group that is itself vulnerable, Christine wanted to understand more on those challenges that make repatriated families to always stand on their toes trying to return to refugee camps whatever the motivations for their repatriation. This tendency is not leaving children and youth unaffected, for to not say that they are the most affected by these instabilities of their families.

### 2.3 Executive Summary

A report published by the IRRI (International Refugee Right Initiative and unnamed Burundi Local Partners) explicitly concluded that in Burundi “history has shown that the failures of previous return and reintegration processes have set the stage for the next round of displacement and ignited conflicts, including over land”<sup>1</sup>. A quick review of available literature done before conducting this research has potentially indicated that returnees’ assistance has been taken more as a short-term humanitarian exercise which often ignore the development nexus<sup>2</sup> and thus making return a less durable solution than expected. Following this preliminary conclusion, qualitative research among the returnees following the displacements related to the 2015 political crisis in Burundi, was organised in the province of Rutana, Giharo Commune during August and September 2022. The aim of

<sup>1</sup> International Refugee Right Initiative (IRRI) ‘They Don’t Even Understand Why We Fled’: The Difficult Path to Reintegration in Burundi, Kampala, IRRI 2019, Available at: <http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Burundi-returns-report-IRRI-Feb-2019-1.pdf> (Last Visited 25 March. 2022)

<sup>2</sup> T. Mbazumutima, ‘peace-development nexus, a framework for understanding returnee reintegration in Burundi’, Unpublished Paper, July 2022. Also see Rema Burundi and Building Bridges Burundi, ‘Le lien paix-développement, un cadre pour comprendre la réintégration des rapatriés au Burundi’ (note politique), presented to the different humanitarian and development partners in Burundi, Bujumbura, 30/11/2021

the study was to bring more light into the factors contributing to poor returnee reintegration in Burundi and explore the extent to which comprehensive approach to returnees' reintegration taking into account both humanitarian and development interventions could reverse the trend to the benefit of successful reintegration of returning refugees. The research conclusions showed that while return in Burundi is designed to solve a refugee humanitarian problem by providing durable solution for them, the durability of the solution remains questionable. On one side, returnees reported that, even if the return package has been increased, the quantity remains insufficient while the three months assistance time is short for a population that has been absent from 2015. On the other side, the resilience capacity of the returnees remains weak after the return package. This is partly due to the fact that they return to a context which is largely fragile following the political crisis which lasted for over five years, the economic sanctions imposed on Burundi following the crisis, the impact of Covid-19 pandemic, the environmental hazards, as well as the impact of the Ukrainian war. The fact that return package does not deal with structural issues hurting these refugees accounts for their vulnerability. The research found that, the poor access to means of production, the exclusive practices against returnees by local authorities, and the less varied and limited post return assistance are some of the major issues blocking standing on the way of these returnees. In particular, it was noticed that, even if the Burundian government has shown the willingness to welcome returnees, there is hardly sufficient funding to support them beyond the initial return package generally supplied by UNHCR and its implementing agents. Among the coping mechanisms by returnees which this study finds are internal migration towards areas understood to offer possibility of work, carrying out cross-border informal business, and some reported cases of fresh movements back to former host countries or new destinations. The study recommends that an integrated development program, geared toward improving the return socio-economic context should be associated with the current humanitarian efforts if return is going to be truly a durable solution.

### 3 Introduction and Background of the study

#### 3.1 Introduction

Burundi is one of the least developed countries in the world. In terms of the Human Development Index, Burundi is ranked 185th out of 189 countries (UNDP, 2020). It is landlocked between Tanzania on the East and South, Rwanda on the North, and the Democratic Republic of Congo on the west. with the highest density on the continent, Burundi is inhabited by around 12 million people most of them being young people and children with 90 % of the population living in rural areas<sup>3</sup>.

For most of its post independent history, Burundi has been dominated by a struggle for political power between the Hutu majority (about 85%) and the Tutsi minority (about 14%) while the Twa (1%) played a lesser important role<sup>4</sup>. The Tutsi dominated most of the pre and post independent socio, economic and political management of the country while Hutu struggled to get to power. Most of the attempts by the Hutu to come to power were violently crushed by the exclusively Tutsi army which carried out repression targeted to Hutu population<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> T. Mbazumutima, Building viable community peace alliances for land restitution in Burundi, Durband University of technology (PHD thesis), 2018

<sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>5</sup> ibid

Burundi has had a series of political crisis which had as consequences the killing of hundreds of thousands of its population as well as the displacement of large populations towards the neighbouring countries. Such major conflicts can be dated back to the 1970s civil war-commonly referred to as the selective Genocide against the Hutu<sup>6</sup>- which saw close to 150,000 people from the Hutu community killed and an equal number being displaced throughout the neighbouring countries<sup>7</sup>.

These refugees left behind land and other property which were, in most cases, taken over by the government or government officers who then redistributed them to their close relatives and friends<sup>8</sup>. A considerable amount of that property was also taken away by relatives or neighbours<sup>9</sup>. In both cases, there were effort to formalise the new acquisition of this property by looking for papers with the complicity of the government<sup>10</sup>.

Before these refugees could come back home, another civil war erupted in 1988 in the northern part of the country driving out thousands of more Hutu population who were hosted mostly by Rwanda<sup>11</sup>.

The first attempts for these refugees to come back home was in 1993 after the first Hutu President Ndadaye was democratically elected but this return movement was reversed by the assassination of President three months later-an action which started a civil war which lasted for decades<sup>12</sup>. Close to 500,000 people-especially Hutu including the newly repatriated refugees took off to exile while a close to 1,000,000 people including Tutsi became internally displaced<sup>13</sup>.

It was the 2000 Arusha Peace Agreement and the subsequent peace accords in 2003 and 2006 which put to an end the civil war and opened massive repatriation process which went through to until 2012.

The repatriation was going to put to an end decade of years of refugeeism for many Hutu and this was hoped to open a new era for a reconciled Burundi. The reintegration of these returnees, however, was not going to be easy-it was going to be “the beginning of a long road than its ending”<sup>14</sup>. Among the major problems which were hard to resolve included Land and other property restoration to the 1970s refugees as was the resettlement of

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<sup>6</sup> R. Lemarchand, *In the shadow of genocides past: can Burundi be pulled back from the brink?* 22 January 2016 Available: <http://africanarguments.org> (Accessed 25 January 2016)

<sup>7</sup> T. Mbazumutima, *Building viable community peace alliances for land restitution in Burundi*, Durband University of technology (PHD thesis), 2018

<sup>8</sup> International Refugee Rights Initiative, Rema Ministries and Social Science Research Council, “Two People Can’t Share the Same Pair of Shoes”: Citizenship, Land and the Return of Refugees to Burundi, 2009

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> S. Bambonanire, projet de société basé sur l’élimination ou l’éloignement d’une catégorie de citoyens de leurs terres au profit de certains autres (press release), *Journal Iwacu*, Bujumbura, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> L.H. Malkki, H. L., *Violence, memory, and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania*. Chicago: The university of Chicago Press, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> T. Mbazumutima, “Land Restitution in Post conflict Burundi”, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 15, 2021, 66–85 Available at <https://academic.oup.com/ijtj/article/15/1/66/6272916> (last visited 28 October 2022)

<sup>13</sup> T. Mbazumutima, *The role of the Anglican Church in ministry to Burundian refugees in Tanzania with particular reference to the notions of hope and homeland*, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2009 accessed at <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/2334> (Last visited 28 October 2022)

<sup>14</sup> Fransen, Sonja, and Katie Kuschminder. *Back to the land: the long-term challenges of refugee return and reintegration in Burundi*. Geneva, UNHCR, 2012, Available online under ‘publications’ at [WWW.unhcr.org](http://WWW.unhcr.org)

thousands of landless returnees who has no reference in the country<sup>15</sup>. It is believed that land problem was the major issue in refugees (especially those in Tanzania) deciding to return or to stay behind<sup>16</sup>. As a result, close to 200,000 stayed behind and, in an unprecedented act of generosity, Tanzania gave them citizenship<sup>17</sup>.

Apart from Land, returnees in Burundi struggled to reintegrate the Burundians educational system which was very different from the Tanzanian. Research done by Rema Ministries in 2012 revealed that the vast majority of returnees felt disappointed and frustrated and thus some returning to Tanzania on temporary or permanent basis<sup>18</sup>.

Following the decision by President Nkurunziza to vie for a third term which was largely contested by the political opposition and the civil society organisations in 2015<sup>19</sup>, Burundi entered into a news political crisis which negatively affected the democratic and development gains following the Arusha Peace Agreement<sup>20</sup>. The manifestations against the third term by Nkurunziza were organised especially in Bujumbura City and the police was deployed to try and contain the manifestations. With time, what started as peaceful protest against the third term by Nkurunziza degenerated into violence especially after a failed coup by the Army forces<sup>21</sup>. The government came in full force against the opposition which were mostly assimilated to the coup perpetrators while young people from the opposition ranks sustained a violent opposition to Nkurunziza Government<sup>22</sup>.

As a result, over 500 people were reported dead while more than 200,000 refugees were hosted mostly in the neighbouring countries and East Africa especially in Tanzania, Rwanda, DRC, Uganda, and Kenya<sup>23</sup>.

Following a successful general election which brought President Ndayishimiye to power, refugees were encouraged to come back home and the repatriation process that had started in 2017 was accelerated. As of May 2022, UNCHR reported that A total 192,000 refugee were repatriated<sup>24</sup>. Five years after the first refugees arrived back, this people decided to find out about their integration in order to determine the level at which this return and integration are being sustainable.

In the following section, the methodology used in this research is explained while following section will present and interpret the data collected on the field. The last section will

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<sup>15</sup> L. Hovil, "Two People Can't Share the Same Pair of Shoes": Citizenship, Land and the Return of Refugees to Burundi. Citizenship and Forced Migration in the Great Lakes Region Working Paper Series. Rema ministries, *International Refugee Rights Initiative, Social Science Research Council*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> L. Hovil and O. Kweka, Going Home or Staying Home? Ending Displacement for Burundian Refugees in Tanzania. Citizenship and Forced Migration in the Great Lakes Region Working Paper Series. *Center for the Study of Forced Migration, International Refugee Rights Initiative, Social Science Research Council*, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Rema Ministries, "Umenga Nturi abarundi" *Rethinking reintegration in Burundi*, Bujumbura, Burundi, May 2012

<sup>19</sup> Aljazeera. 2015. *Burundi court 'forced' to validate leader's third term*: Aljazeera. Available: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/150508061821607.html>

<sup>20</sup> T. Mbazumutima, Building viable community peace alliances for land restitution in Burundi, Durband University of technology (PHD thesis), 2018

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> S. Vandeginste, Burundi's electoral crisis – back to power-sharing politics as usual? *African Affairs*: 1-13, 2015

<sup>23</sup> T. Mbazumutima, "Land Restitution in Postconflict Burundi", *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 15, 2021, 66–85 Available at <https://academic.oup.com/ijtj/article/15/1/66/6272916> (last visited 28 October 2022)

<sup>24</sup> UNCHR fact sheet, found at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/unhcr-burundi-factsheet-may-2022>

discuss the main conclusion and recommendation of the study. A detailed literature review has been annexed to this study.

### 3.2 Statement of the Problem

Three durable solutions are proposed to end the refugee cycle and these solutions are return, Local Integration, and Resettlement. Over time, either one of these durable solutions has been prioritized often not based on the needs of the displaced people but also and generally based on the needs of the decision makers<sup>25</sup>. Initially the Local Integration was prioritised during the cold war because of ideological and labour needs by the western countries that were hosting refugees from the then communist world<sup>26</sup>. The Post-cold war period was characterised by the feelings of refugees becoming a world phenomenon as seen as a burden to the refugee hosting countries thus prioritising return over the other two solutions<sup>27</sup>. Since then, return has been praised as pragmatic and the most sustainable solution to the refugee problem around the world. Return received a strong impetus in 1992 by the then UNHCR High Commissioner Sadako Ogata, who declared the nineties as the 'decade of voluntary repatriation'<sup>28</sup>.

A year later, the first Burundian refugees returned following President Ndadaye democratic election. A land commission was set up by President Ndadaye in order to deal with property restitution but this commission had hardly started restituting land to returnees when the then President was killed. The newly repatriated refugees took the exile road again leaving behind the newly acquired property. The international Crisis Group believes the 1993 killing of President Ndadaye was, among other major issues, triggered by the land restitution process that was going on<sup>29</sup>.

The second return wave started in 2003 and went on up to around 2012 and a study done by Fransen and Kuschminder in 2012 note that by then most returnees were physically in Burundi but that, once again, issues of land and property remained the major divide between returnee and residents<sup>30</sup>. Later, The IRRI (international refugee Right initiative) concluded that, most of these returnees went to refugee again in 2015 because of poor reintegration among other reasons<sup>31</sup>.

The third return lot is now underway and has been going on for the last five years. The few reports that have been carried out about the lives of these returnees are concurring to the fact that reintegration is not being successful. The IRRI and Rema report that structural issues that led to Burundians having to leave their country are not addressed even now

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<sup>25</sup> R. Black and S. Gent, Sustainable return in post-conflict contexts. *International Migration*, 44(3), 15-38, (2006)

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> J. Tegenbos and K. Vlassenroot, "Going home? A systematic review of the literature on displacement, return and cycles of violence" *politics of return working paper no1*, CRG University of Ghent February 2018

<sup>28</sup> Jolien Tegenbos & Vlassenroot, "Going Home? A systematic review of the Literature on displacement, return and cycles of violence" in [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326392267\\_Going\\_home\\_A\\_systematic\\_review\\_of\\_the\\_literature\\_on\\_displacement\\_return\\_and\\_cycles\\_of\\_violence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326392267_Going_home_A_systematic_review_of_the_literature_on_displacement_return_and_cycles_of_violence) , accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>29</sup> International Crisis Group, Réfugiés et déplacés au Burundi: Désamorcer la bombe foncière. ICG Rapport Afrique, (70): 1-28, 2003

<sup>30</sup> Fransen, Sonja, and Katie Kuschminder. "Back to the land: the long-term challenges of refugee return and reintegration in Burundi.", Geneva, UNHCR, 2012

<sup>31</sup> International Refugee Right Initiative (IRRI) 'They Don't Even Understand Why We Fled': The Difficult Path to Reintegration in Burundi, Kampala, IRRI 2019



and that there is a risk that the situation could escalate<sup>32</sup>. A consortium of NGOs (Rema, Help a Child, American Friends Committee, and CORD, mensen met een missien and others) have concluded that return is being addressed as a from a humanitarian angle rather than addressing it also from a development point of view<sup>33</sup>. A literature review has shown that there is hardly any academic research that has been carried out to find out what is going on with these returnees apart from these very few NGOs' reports. It is therefore for this reason that this study was done in order to Access the level at which the current return is being successful. Particular the research wanted to pin down the factors contributing to poor returnee reintegration and propose ways forward for addressing then and for further study.

### 3.3 Research goal & Research questions

The goal of the study is to investigate the level at which reintegration of returnees in Burundi is being successful. In doing so, the study is going to answer the following three questions:

1. What is the voluntariness nature of return and how does this affect the reintegration process in Burundi?
2. What are the issues affecting the current returnees' reintegration in Burundi how do they affect the resilience capacities of returnees and host community?
3. What could be done to improve the lives of the returnees and their host communities?

### 3.4 Significance of the Study

First, the significance of the study is that it interrogates the narrative that return is the best durable solution to end the cycle of refugees by bringing up to date fresh and contextualised information proving that return is a very complex endeavour that needs combined efforts if it is going to be sustainable. The information shared in this study comes from returnees themselves and since this groups' voices are often not capture and known, this study given a space to the returnees to speak about their first-hand experience. This enhances democracy in research and argues that knowledge is with the people themselves. Further the study brings light to the negative impact of a badly handled repatriation in increasing the vulnerability of the Burundian returning refugees.

Second, the timing of the study is of paramount importance because the return process in Burundi is only half way and the recommendations from the study could be helpful in informing return policy and thus making return more successful to the benefit of returnees themselves.

### 3.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study was conducted in Rutana province, Giharo commune, located in the South Eastern part of Burundi. Due to the qualitative nature of the research, which involved using great detail of life stories from individuals, the data was collected from 30 returnees and 15 members of the host community, both men and women, with different age and from different tribes and political inclination. Therefore, while every care was taken to ensure

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<sup>32</sup> <sup>32</sup> International Refugee Right Initiative (IRRI) *'They Don't Even Understand Why We Fled': The Difficult Path to Reintegration in Burundi*, Kampala, IRRI 2019, Available at: <http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Burundi-returns-report-IRRI-Feb-2019-1.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Rema Burundi and BBB(Building Bridges Burundi), *Le lien paix-développement, un cadre pour comprendre la réintégration des rapatriés au Burundi*, une Note Politique, Bujumbura

that the findings of this study are relevant to other contexts, proper precautions are taken while generalising the findings beyond the geographic and social context of the current research.

## 4 Research design and methodology

### 4.1. Introduction

This section is going to explain the way data was collected, analysed and represented. Basically, this study was concerned by collecting and analysing people's stories as told by them<sup>34</sup>. This section discusses how narrative was used in qualitative research especially in collection, analysing and representing people's stories.

### 4.2. Data collection: Gathering people's life stories

One of the narrative research roles is about gathering other people's life stories. The assumption here is that of postmodern view of truth –that there is no such a thing as absolute truth which is supra-historical and supra-cultural and that, consequently an individual life stories (even those from marginalised individual groups like refugees) can be a source of knowledge<sup>35</sup>. Individual life stories are influenced by and told from socio-political and economic context<sup>36</sup> of the area where the storyteller is; reason for which the knowledge that is gained through these narratives cannot be generalised. Therefore, stories are the perspectives and point of view of life as lived by the storyteller<sup>37</sup>.

The way stories were collected was through guided interviews whereby the interviewer and his/her respondent embarked on a journey of guided conversation leading to common purpose between the two<sup>38</sup>. Progressively these two entered a relationship of mutual trust. Care was taken so as to manage this relationship in a way that does not affect negatively the outcome of the conversation. For example, I constantly kept on check how much of personal information I could share with the respondent<sup>39</sup>.

Whereas, it is clear that the degree at which the respondent knows the research can positively influence the quality of the conversation, it is also possible that the respondent may share the information which she/he thinks the research wants to hear<sup>40</sup>. This is obviously a very difficult dilemma to resolve and the way the research thought around this was to come back to the principle that narrative research is not so much advocating for truth as lying more in the objectivity of the story but so much emphasis was put on the capacity of the researcher to reflect on the story having in mind that it is creating certain degree of contextualised knowledge as revealed in somebody's life experience.

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<sup>34</sup> K. Etherington, Narrative approaches to case studies. (Presentation), 30, 2013. Available: <https://www.keele.ac.uk/media/keeleuniversity/facnatsci/schpsych/documents/counselling/conference/5thannual/NarrativeApproachestoCaseStudies.pdf> (Accessed 23 February 2016)

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*

<sup>36</sup> S. Germeten, Personal narratives in life history research. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* Vol. 57 ( 6): 612-624, 2013 Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2013.838998>

<sup>37</sup> Etherington, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> K. Hampshire, N. Iqbal, M. Blella, and B. Simpson, The interview as narrative ethnography: seeking and shaping connections in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 17 (3): 215–231, 2014

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>40</sup> T. Mbazumutima, Building viable community peace alliances for land restitution in Burundi, Durband University of technology (PHD thesis), 2018

The issue of disclosing the researcher's identity becomes more complicated when dealing with sensitive issues that can easily impinge on the security and safety of the researcher –especially that, whereas the identity of the respondents is protected, it is not so with the researcher who must do everything to manage the socio-political space and minimise risks<sup>41</sup>. As in every project, risk management and other ethical issues in research especially when involving difficult and sensitive issues is something which this researcher thought through carefully and I had to look for the approval by the relevant local authorities so as to minimise such risks.

#### 4.3. Data analysis: Analysing life stories

The qualitative data as analysed using a thematic content approach which consisted of identifying patterns and themes in the data collected<sup>42</sup>. This implies that the collected data was transcribed and the main coded ideas developed into trends out of which themes emerged. The last stage was to reflect and interpret these themes in the light of the available knowledge. This reflection leads naturally to the conclusions and the recommendations<sup>43</sup>.

In life story research, the interpretation does not start with the analysing of stories recorded by the researcher. Both the researcher and the respondent build a meaning to the story right from the interviewing stage and the reflection is an ongoing process<sup>44</sup>. The interpretation goes beyond words and encompasses other forms of nonverbal communication.

Therefore, the analysis of the story is about looking for meaning embedded by the story not as if the story was the data to be analysed by the researcher but as a stock of knowledge created over time through the life experience of the story teller<sup>45</sup>.

The life story of people is always guided by what their culture, beliefs, values, and future hopes and intensions –so that, therefore, storytelling becomes a hermeneutical exercise giving meaning to complex human life experience<sup>46</sup>. The story, becomes “a window onto a knowable reality” analysable using different qualitative analysis techniques<sup>47</sup>. It should be noted that Researcher ended up, sometimes, making an interpretation of the story which cannot be distinguished from the story itself<sup>48</sup>.

During the study, the challenge in analysing life stories had mostly to do with the capacity to be faithful to the story not as the researcher wants it but as the respondent experienced it. After all, it is the perspective of the respondent in a specific context (which the researcher tries to explore).

#### 4.4. Study design

By study design it is meant a set of guidelines to be followed in responding to research objectives or questions<sup>49</sup>. This study used qualitative method as its design because,

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<sup>41</sup> K. Hampshire, N. Iqbal, M. Blella, and B. Simpson op cit.

<sup>42</sup> J. Mouton. op. cit

<sup>43</sup> T. Mbazumutima. op cit.

<sup>44</sup> ibid

<sup>45</sup> M. Sandelowski, Telling Stories: Narrative approached in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 23(3): 161-166, 1991

<sup>46</sup> Etherington, Op. cit

<sup>47</sup> ibid

<sup>48</sup> S. Germeten, Personal narratives in life history research. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* Vol. 57 (6): 612-624, 2013

<sup>49</sup>J. Mouton, *Understanding social research*. Van Schaik Publishers, 1996.

unlike the quantitative research which assumes that there is a single reality, qualitative research assumes that there are multiple contextual realities<sup>50</sup>. Specifically, this study is qualitative with a transformative worldview-that is the goals in this research is aimed to contribute to social Justice by addressing the issue of human suffering the refugee-returnee context. It has explored the returnees' views on their reintegration process in Giharo Commune as well as suggesting ways of improving the lives of the returnees and their host communities?

#### 4.5. Study sites

This study took place in Giharo Commune, Rutana Province in the south-East part of Burundi. Interviews with returnees and their host community members took place in their homes in the zones of Muzye, and Butezi. Rutana Province has six communes namely: Giharo, Mpinga-Kayove, Rutana, Musongati, Gitanga and Bukemba.

Giharo commune is among the largest communes in the countries and is located alongside Tanzania borders and this has made the commune a highway of Burundians fleeing from the war from other provinces to Tanzania. It has also been a preferred returning zones by many returnees originally not from these communes. Giharo itself is among the most refugee producing communes. Consequence, this commune which used to among the least populated commune is now the most populated commune in Rutana province. The UNHCR Protection Monitoring of Returnees Report mentions Rutana province-and for that matter Giharo commune-as an area with difficult access to health care and with food stress<sup>51</sup>.

Even though, Giharo offers a number of economic activities opportunities because of its Geographic position offering economic exchange with Tanzania and its vast land in comparison with other communes making it possible for migrants to farm or get employed in farming. Many of the migrants to this commune are former refugees to Tanzania with who master Swahili and understand the geography of their former country. They therefore have a comparative advantage to the rest of the population enabling them to carry out informal cross boarder businesses as well as renting vast agricultural land from their Tanzanian neighbours. It is for all these reasons above that this study was located to this commune because the researcher believed this location had different return dynamics. Further, for logistic reason, the researcher decided to concentrate on this one commune.

#### 4.6. Study target population and respondent selection

Choosing a study sample is an important step in any research project since it is hardly practical, efficient or ethical to study whole populations<sup>52</sup> The sampling of the population in this research was guided by the desire to collect relevant data to the research objective. The research took place in The South Eastern province of Rutana in Giharo commune considered to be one of the communes currently receiving many returnees with numerous reintegration problems. The total population in Giharo is projected at 148,828 in 202 with 10, 804 returnees and 30 returnees and 15 members of returnee host communities were interviewed. The 45 respondents included both men and women, young people under 30 years old as well as being collected from both the political opposition and the government party. The study also conducted two focus Group discussions one with 10 returnees and

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<sup>50</sup> A.K. Davis, Validity and reliability in qualitative research on second language acquisition and teaching: Another researcher comments.... *TESOL Quarterly* 26(3): 605-608, 1992

<sup>51</sup> UNHCR, Burundi-Protection Monitoring of returnees-July 2022, <https://data.unhcr.org>

<sup>52</sup> N. M. Marshall, Sampling for qualitative research. *Family practice*, 1996, vol. 13, no 6, p. 522-526.

another with 10 host community members. Both these returnees had come back following the 2015 political crisis and 22 of the 30 interviewed had been refugees at least more than once.

#### 4.6. Sampling method

Non-probability purposive sampling will be used for the selection of information rich cases in order to reach my objectives (Palinkas et al. 2015: 533). As such, there is no requirement for a set number of informants as I will decide on the number and quality of informants able to give needed information (Adebayo 2015: 128-129). The study is about real life experience and it makes sense that the research team members are those involved directly with the problem. Therefore, the 10 action team members are all having land conflicts while those involved in focus groups and in the in-depth interview are directly or indirectly involved with the problem. In order to identify the participants, I will work with a peacebuilding NGO –Rema Ministries (Appendix 4 for the letter requesting for that assistance) that has been working in Makamba province on land restitution conflicts.

#### 4.7. Research instruments

I developed an interview guide for both Key Informants interviews as well as Focus groups in order to get deeper understanding not covered by the literature review in responding the set objectives for this study. The research assistants took the notes for me as it was obvious that the respondents did not want me to use an audio recorder for reasons of research context which was sensitive. I also used the observation and the journal in order to capture nonverbal data.

##### 4.7.1. Semi structured interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 45 purposely-selected returnees and members of host community in order to get detailed analysis on return dynamics:

The 30 returnees were selected in order to provide information needed for the research questions which wanted to explore the perspectives of returnees on the nature of voluntariness of return and how this affects their reintegration, the other issues affecting their reintegration process as well as their views on what is needed for their lives to get improved. Further 15 people from the returnee host community were also interviewed in order to understand the impact which return is having on the livelihoods of the host communities as well as understand what they think should be done in order to reduce the vulnerability in the community. Therefore, the interview with the individuals above was articulated on the questions bellow. The first group of questions were asked to the returnees:

1. What led you to leave Burundi and become a refugee? Which country did you go to and why?
2. What was life like in the refugee camps?
3. Why did you decide to come back?
4. How was the return organised? What did you like most? What did you like less? Who were the actors?
5. How were you received in the community? What assistance did you get and by whom?
6. Were your expectations met? If no, why?
7. What are the issues which you want to see addressed and how?
8. In your opinion what evaluation do you give to the current return process?
9. How could it be organised better?

#### 10. Do you have any other thing to add?

The following questions were as to the members of the host communities:

1. What was your feeling when you saw your neighbours leaving Burundi? Why did you not leave yourself?
2. How did you receive back the returnees? Who does what? How were you prepared to do this?
3. What are the challenges related to return in this community? What is being done well?
4. What could be done to improve life in your community?

#### 4.7.2. Focus group discussions (FGDS)

This study had two focus groups namely one focus group with 10 returnees as well as one focus group with host community. The data collected through the focus groups complemented the gaps left unanswered by the literature review. The research started with Focus Group in order to get the general views on the research questions. It was an opportunity to understand the points of agreement and well as the points of disagreement. Finally, the researcher used the focus groups to make observation for probable selections of individuals who were interviewed in the key informant's interviews. These first informants led us to identify other people to be interviewed. The similar set of questions used in the Key informants' interviews were also used to guide the focus groups discussions as follows:

Returnee focus group discussion:

1. What led you to leave Burundi and become a refugee? Which country did you go to and why?
2. What was life like in the refugee camps?
3. Why did you decide to come back?
4. How was the return organised? What did you like most? What did you like less? Who were the actors?
5. How were you received in the community? What assistance did you get and by whom?
6. Were your expectations met? If no, why?
7. What are the issues which you want to see addressed and how?
8. In your opinion what evaluation do you give to the current return process?
9. How could it be organised better?
10. Do you have any other thing to add?

The following questions were used during the host community focus group:

1. What was your feeling when you saw your neighbours leaving Burundi? Why did you not leave yourself?
2. How did you receive back the returnees? Who does what? How were you prepared to do this?
3. What are the challenges related to return in this community? What is being done well?

#### 4. What could be done to improve life in your community?

##### 4.8. Description of the Study Area

This study is first and foremost interdisciplinary. It brings together history, refugee studies and how humanitarian and development approaches interact and complement each other in assisting refugees. The researcher did not go to the field with a set of assumptions or a hypothesis to prove or disprove. Instead, the primary objective was to hear the context and to understand how people perceive and make meaning of their situation. Rooting the research within its historical context is intended to ensure an understanding of how identities have become defined over time, not least through the specific dynamics created by the 2015 political crisis and economic hardships in context of sanctions and the covid 19. An anthropological approach will form the basis for exploring the specific cultural Dynamics- especially exploring the multiple identities which refugees acquire during their trajectories. Here the narrative of refugees being in a protracted situation is interrogated and a positive view on the ability and contribution of refugees and returnees is proposed. Methodologically, the main orientation of the research component to this project is qualitative, which reflects the epistemological and ontological position: emphasising a qualitative approach reflects the Project's concern with listening to the whole context and with taking a more interpretative approach. Finally, the study has an action component to it as and intended to propose some leads to refugee governance policy reform.

##### 4.9. Ethical consideration

The researcher treated data with confidentiality and for academic purpose only. The researcher had permission from the local administration. Consent was given by all participants in order to adhere to the principle of voluntary participation in the research.

#### 5. Research results

The following section is going to present the data collected as well as interpreting them in the light of the available knowledge. The discussion starts from the voluntary nature of repatriation as returnees themselves see it and proceed to discuss how the logistics to bring them home are organised as well as how they get on with the assistance which they receive. The section ends with a discussion on the durability of return as a solution to the refugee situation of Burundians.

##### 5.1. A return hard to determine its voluntary nature

One of the UNHCR's mandate is to "promote enabling conditions for voluntary repatriation" and "to ensure the exercise of a free and informed choice," by refugees<sup>53</sup>. The researcher wanted to understand what returnees had to say about this voluntary repatriation and how UNHCR facilitated this exercise. Returnees were therefore asked why they decided to come back to Burundi. A woman found at Nyembuye village:

We did not have any other option. Just imagine that the refugee camp management in Nduta where I was with my family decided to stop all the small activities which we had been doing to supplement the little food which we were being given by UNHCR. We were not allowed to go out and cultivate, we were refused even to collect firewood and we were truly prisoners in that camp. It reminded me what we went through in Mtabila when this refugee camp was closed down by force. I was a refugee there and they started stopping every activity in order to force us to go back home. We tried to resist but the Tanzanian Army came and forced us to go back to

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<sup>53</sup> UNHCR, "Voluntary Repatriation", Available at, <https://www.unhcr.org/voluntary-repatriation-49c3646cfe.html>, Accessed on 12 December 2022

Burundi leaving behind all our belongings. We did not want to go through the same thing again. We decided to come back, Tanzania does not want us, they are tired<sup>54</sup>.

This story was not unique, most returnees said they would not have come back if the situation in the refugee camp was good:

I left Burundi first in 1972 and decided to come back in 1993 during Ndadaye time. However, when Ndadaye was killed, I decided to go back to Tanzania and we were in Mtabila refugee camp. In 2006, we were encouraged to come back because President Nkurunziza had been elected and we were told there was peace. But in 2015 things went bad again and we had to flee. This time around I was taken to Mtenderi refugee camp. I thought to myself that I was not going to come back to Burundi because I was tired. However, the government of Tanzania started to give us deadlines for us to go back home, I realised that we had no place in Tanzania and I decided to come back<sup>55</sup>.

Others evoked little food in the camp and the capacity to get some incentives if they accepted to come back to Burundi: "You see my friend the choice was simple for us: Stay in the camp and risk being brought by force, or coming back home voluntarily and be given some money. 150\$ per adult and 75\$ per child is what we were given. At the same we were receiving very little food.<sup>56</sup>".

During the focus group discussion with the returnees, the participants were all unanimous on the fact that even UNHCR was being pressurised by the Tanzanian government to support repatriation:

In the meeting, UNHCR had said that it was not safe for us to come back. This angered the Tanzanian government to such a point that they said they were going to use the government means to take Burundian refugees home. And they even told UNHCR that they would close down their offices if they did not cooperate. When we realised that UNHCR could not challenge the Tanzanian Government, some of us decided to come because, at the same time, the Burundian Government was saying it is safe<sup>57</sup>.

People in the group discussion mentioned that some refugees decided to come back by themselves for fear of being brought back home by force: "we know people who had a bad experience with Mtabila and when they heard that the Tanzanian government was threatening to send refugees back home, they could not even wait for UNHCR to bring them. They went by themselves<sup>58</sup>".

One man interviewed at Nkanka even regretted he come back:

I was not sure how things were going to turn around with the government of Tanzania stated giving deadlines, limiting our movement, and reducing food. I decided to come back because I had been brought back by force when they closed Mtabila and I thought things were going to be the same. Many people decided to come but others stayed, now that there is no much pressure for them to come back, they are not coming back in big numbers. Even UNHCR brought some to see in the hope that they will all come back

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with a returnee woman, Giharo, 12 August 2022

<sup>55</sup> An interview with an Old returnee man at Muhafu village, 17 August 2022

<sup>56</sup> A young man during returnee focus group held at Muzye village, 5 August 2022

<sup>57</sup> A man during the returnees focus group discussion held at Muzye village, 5 August 2022.

<sup>58</sup> Returnee focus Group Discussion at Muzye village, 5 August 2022



but they are still there. I wish I did not come back because, without a land, life is very uncertain<sup>59</sup>”.

Some refugees decided to come back to Burundi because the humanitarian situation had improved: “when I left Burundi in 2016, we had famine but when I realised that there is no more famine in 2019, I decided to come back<sup>60</sup>”. Another man believed that things had changed and that he could safely come back: “I am not a politician and I had not been involved in politics against the third term of President Nkurunziza. So, I came back as soon as 2018 because I had left Burundi in 2016 because of fear. Those that were in demonstration against the third term had to think twice”<sup>61</sup>.

## 5.2. Return trajectories less prepared at home

The researcher wanted to understand how their journey back home was organised. Most returnees were happy how the logistics were organised «they brought us in buses and our belongings were brought in lorries. When we arrived at the border, we were registered and given food at the transit centres. After one or two days, we were taken to our communes of origin and left there in the hands of the communal authorities. We had been told that part of the money given was to help us go at home. We then went at our home village and the authorities there had been told that they must receive us well<sup>62</sup>”.

They spoke of some incidences where their belongings were lost but the authorities made sure they corrected mistakes with time: “We arrived late at Rubaho and we spend the night there. At night some young people come and store our good, I lost a whole bag of maize. Ever since they brought the police to make sure goods of returnees are taken care of <sup>63</sup>”.

Even though, many returnees did not have shelter as their houses left behind had been destroyed because they were left unattended and therefore not cared for:

My biggest problem was how I was going to get a shelter with my five children especially that I am a widow. We all went to stay with my brother-in-law. They received us well with love but the house was too small for all of us. It was also during rainy season and it was not easy to get building materials for us to try and get our own shelter. As days went by, we became a real burden to our host and I felt so bad about it. We stayed there for 6 months before we could move to our own shelter. I used the money given to pay people who build for us but, even now, we do not have iron sheet<sup>64</sup>.

Members of the host community argued that the government left them with a big burden to receive returnees:

“We were also poor like them and we were expected to share the house and food with them. They also shared what they had been given but it did not last for all the days they stayed with us. Some of the children got sick and it was hard to take them to hospital. They were told to buy a health insurance card but the government hospital had no medicines. We really carried the burden but what else could we have done?<sup>65</sup>”

<sup>59</sup> A returnee man interviewed at Nyembuye, 17 September 2022

<sup>60</sup> An interview with a returnee man at Nkanka, 18 September 2022

<sup>61</sup> An Interview with a returnee man at Muhafu Village, 18 September 2022

<sup>62</sup> Focus Group Discussion with returnees, Muzye, 5 August 2022

<sup>63</sup> A returnee man interviewed at Kabingo, 18 September 2022

<sup>64</sup> Interview with a returnee woman, Nyembuye village, 17 August 2022

<sup>65</sup> Members of host communities focus group discussion, Muzye, 6 August 2022

A member of the host community felt that they were not given enough notice to get prepared to welcome their neighbours: "Imagine we were not informed about the arrival of our relatives or neighbours until the same day they arrive. Surely what did UNHCR expect from us<sup>66</sup>?"

Others felt that they should have been assisted too: "they are assisting only returnees and we are equally poor and they expect us to welcome them and share the little we have. In our culture you have to share but share what? We did not have enough to ourselves. I think they should assist us all. Most of the returnees shared too but not the money... hahaaa.... Money is hard to share"<sup>67</sup>.

What was even harder for the returnees was the fact that they did not know what to expect:

when you are housed by somebody, you also have to share what you have. However, we were not sure whether we were going to be given more food or not. Some of us rented houses in the hope that we were going to be given iron sheet and other building materials to build our shelter. Before we realised, we were not going to be given any other help, our money had all be spent on rent<sup>68</sup>.

### 5.3. Assistance which is not enough and which is the source of tension in the community

UNHCR assists returnees like by providing transportation to their home township, three months' worth of food rations - provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) - household items, including buckets, soap, mattresses, blankets, mosquito nets, plastic sheeting and cooking utensils, and a cash allowance of US\$150 per adult and US\$75 per child<sup>69</sup>. This cash allowance was significantly increased in comparison to what returnees were getting in the early years of return. Adults were getting 70,000 Burundian francs [approximately 40 USD] while every child was given 35,000 Burundian francs [approximately 20 USD]<sup>70</sup>.

The returnees who were interviewed in this study confirmed the assistance known as packet retour: "we are given food and non-food items as well as money which they loaded to our phones<sup>71</sup>". During the focus group discussion, returnees were all unanimous that what they get is not enough:

they give us food which is supposed to take us through three months but to be honest this food is finished on one month. And we use the money not for food but to try to get shelter and for transport from the commune where UNHCR leaves us to our villages. Even if this food was to last for three months, three months would not be long enough for us to restart life here in Burundi after years of absence<sup>72</sup>.

A returnee meets in Murehe had the same view:

<sup>66</sup> Interview with a woman member of the host community at Murehe village, 15 September 2022

<sup>67</sup> Interview with a man member of the host community at Nyembuye village, 17 August 2022

<sup>68</sup> Returnee focus group discussion, Muzye 5 August 2022

<sup>69</sup> Nations Unis, *Aider les rapatriés Burundais à se construire un avenir plus prospère et stable*, Available at <https://burundi.un.org>, Accessed 12 December 2022

<sup>70</sup> International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), "They Don't Even Understand Why We Fled - The Difficult Path to Reintegration in Burundi". February 2019 (<http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Burundi-returns-report-IRRI-Feb-2019-1.pdf> accessed on November 22, 2022).

<sup>71</sup> Interview with a woman returnee, Nyembuye village, 17th August 2022

<sup>72</sup> Returnees Focus Group Discussion, Muze village, 5th August 2022

“UNHCR tells us that we are given enough food for three months because they say that our own crops will be ready after three months. However, I had two problems with this: one I do not have land, where will I cultivate my own food. Second, I arrived here in June and this was not an agricultural season. Even those who had land had to wait until October for the rains to come and start harvesting in January of the following year. How can they survive for six months?<sup>73</sup>

Food was not the only complain which returnees had, they also complained about shelter:

I came back in 2019 and it was so hard at that time because my house had been demolished. You see these houses of ours are not strong and with four years of absence, the house had completely fallen apart. All I had in my hand was a plastic sheeting and nothing else. It was rainy season and impossible for me to make bricks. This was my biggest pain ever: to stay with my neighbour for four months in a very small house with 4 children. I am so sorry to say but there is no dignity without shelter<sup>74</sup>.

Aside food and shelter, healthcare was among the top list issues which returnees struggle with.

“Yes, we all bought CAM-Carte assurance maladies” (medical insurance card) but this is not very useful for us. When we go to the government clinics, they do not have medicines and they send us to go to buy medicine to the pharmacies. Everybody here and especially our children are struggling with all kinds of diseases because of poor living conditions. How can we get money to buy medicines always<sup>75</sup>?

When asked the question as to whether or not they received any other help after the initial return packet, they had this to answer:

Some returnees have received iron sheet and some help to start income generation activities. However, very few people are selected and we still do not know the selection criteria. We are all returnees but NGOs manage to select those that they give assistance. It is irritating. What we all get is the seeds and the farming tools. That’s all we get<sup>76</sup>.

Even though returnees complained about insufficient assistance, members of the host communities were very unhappy with the fact that they were not also assisted:

They (returnees) come with a lot of money from UN and they spend their time enjoying beer and brochettes while we are not able to buy even a bottle of beer for ourselves. You would think they are being complemented for having left the country. We were here looking after the country and we are equally poor. Our houses are also falling apart and we cannot get iron sheet like the returnees do. Actually, even those returnees who came by themselves, they are not assisted and yet we are the ones who helped them<sup>77</sup>.

This member of the host community found in Murehe argued on the same direction as above:

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with a returnee woman in Muzye 8th August 2022

<sup>74</sup> Interview with a returnee man, Rubaho village, 22 September 2022

<sup>75</sup> Returnee Focus Group Discussion, Muzye, 5 August 2022

<sup>76</sup> *ibid*

<sup>77</sup> Focus group discussion with members of host communities, Muzye 5th August 2022

I received returnees who came back from Nyarugusu and who did not come by UNHCR, they stayed with me for two months without any assistance and after they left, another family also came being brought by UNHCR and they stayed with me for another two months. Now what I do not understand is that every project that come in this commune supports the only returnees and a small percentage of members of the host communities. I have never been assisted and I wonder what they look for to support people<sup>78</sup>!

Some of the members of host communities are actually angry and they were hoping they were refugees themselves: "Next time, I will also go to the refugee camp so that I may be assisted. We are equally poor and this government is selective and we are not happy about this."<sup>79</sup>

#### 5.4. Building resilience in a difficult environment

The researcher wanted to know what these returnees do for a living especially after the initial return package is finished. Answers are full of a lot of innovation strategy but with a lot of risks which these returnees have to endure on a daily basis.

Some of the returnees who had land or who had means to rent farming land from other people did cultivate to make their living. These ones are able to integrate quickly. It was for the landless or those with very small portions of land who have to try alternative sources of livelihood. A man meet at Muhafu village had migrated from Musongati (another commune away from Giharo) and he shared the following story:

when we came back from Tanzania, we were taken back to my home village in Musongati but we did not have enough land there and life was going to be hard for us. I decided to come here with my family and I started doing some cross border business in order to feed my family. I used the money UNHCR have us and went to Tanzania where I bought rice and maize and sold it here in Burundi. I also rented land there and my wife and I would go and cultivate in Tanzania and get food back here. Crossing the border was never easy because we had to bribe both the local authorities in Burundi and Tanzania who would otherwise stop us from going to Tanzania or coming back. However, with Corona Virus, the boarders were closed down, I lost all my crops in the farms in Tanzania and my business stopped. When they reopened the border, I had no more money to rent land or start my business again. Now I do not know what to do<sup>80</sup>.

Acquiring land in Tanzania is a common practice for people living in communes bordering Tanzania. During the focus group discussion, the research realised that a good number of the returnees (4 out of 10) had relocated to Giharo from other area. They shared with the researcher the following reasons made them to relocate to Giharo:

We have lived in Tanzania for many years, first as refugees in the 1970s in Katumba and 1990s in Mtabila, then as refugees in Nduta after the 2015 events. We know Swahili very well and know how to function in Tanzania. During that time, we acquired land in Tanzania from the local authorities in exchange with some money but we were aware this transaction was not legal since land in Tanzania belongs to the government. However, we were happy because we could use land and get food for our families. But since we are not allowed to stay in Tanzania, the best option was to relocate to Giharo which borders Tanzania, live in Giharo and cultivate in Tanzania. The boarders

<sup>78</sup> Interview with a man member of the host community, Murehe village, 15 September 2022

<sup>79</sup> Interview with a man member of the host community, Murehe village 15 September 2022

<sup>80</sup> Interview with a returnee man at Muhafu village, 17 August 2022

were closed because of Corona virus when we were in Tanzania but we managed to continue to move in between the borders after paying a lot of money to the authorities in Burundi. Today, we continue to cultivate in Tanzania but we have to keep paying money to the local authorities there in order to allow us to enter without passport and cultivate their land<sup>81</sup>.

One young man met at Rubaho went to another level: "I had to marry a Tanzanian woman in order to live in peace. Now I am here to sell my small land so that I may permanently relocate to Gitanga (a village in Tanzania). Now that I am married to a Tanzanian woman, I will be safe<sup>82</sup>".

Access to Tanzania was not the only thing available to do for the returnees. Some brought with them business skills acquired from Tanzania and they practiced it in Burundi:

In Tanzania we used to sell things from every point in front of our house or on the street. When I arrived here, I had some money from UNHCR and I wanted to do the same business. Locals went to the market but the market was open only twice a week. I decided to come to this road point here at Muhafu and started selling whatever I could get from fish, to fruits, vegetables, or grains of all kinds. Other people started doing the same and today we are more than ten women selling every evening from 4 to 8 pm. This is how we earn our living and even those who are not returnees have joined us<sup>83</sup>.

Business in Burundi, however, is not that easy. This woman shared some of the challenges which they go through:

The biggest problem for us is that people here are poor and they really cannot buy many things so as to allow us to make enough profit. Also, because people do not have many alternatives, they all want to sell the same things which we are selling and the competition becomes fierce. However, the biggest headache is the inability to have access to financial institutions that can give us enough money to extend our business. I understand there is a bank for women based in Gitega, it is impossible for us to go to Gitega from here. Also, we do not even know how we can get to that funding. Finally, we always have challenges when children get sick. We use the little money we have to buy medicine because there is not medicine in the government clinics. We are ever starting all over again and it is hard to move forward<sup>84</sup>.

These challenges are not unique to returnees. Members of the host community are struggling too: Even me who has land, I am struggling like those without land. You see my friend we are now towards the end of October and rains have failed to come. We were expecting them late September but there is not sign of rain up until this time. I wish the government helped us to practice irrigation. We have been sharing what we have with the returnees and now it is going to be hard to all us<sup>85</sup>.

##### 5.5. A Return process which is not meeting the returnees and host community expectation

The researcher finally wanted to understand what returnees thought of the current return process.

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<sup>81</sup> Focus group discussion with returnees, Muzye 5th August 2022

<sup>82</sup> Interview with a young returnee man, Ruhabo village, 19 September 2022

<sup>83</sup> Interview with a woman returnee, Muhafu Village, 17 August 2022

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with a member of the host community, Nyembuye village, 16 August 2022

On a positive note, refugees were happy with the way the logistics were organised: “This was my second time to come back home from Tanzania. The first return was in 2007 and I can tell the difference. This time around, we came in comfortable buses and the process to take us home and give us documentations was very fast and well organised<sup>86</sup>”. They were also happy that they could move around the country freely and that they were not confined to one place like it was the case in Tanzanian camps. They positively appraise the security situation in Burundi and the way they were received; “One thing I like here is that we need no permit to move around and we have security unlike in 2015. The local authorities also do assist us. Of all the people I praise members of the host community who really received us and helped us”<sup>87</sup>.

However, most returnees were anonymous that they were not satisfied by the process. This one met in Muzye said he did not have a choice to stay in Tanzania: “I had no choice and I did not expect anything better than what I have now. Basically, I liked the way transport was organised but I am disappointed that apart from the return package, no other assistance has been given”<sup>88</sup>.

Returnees in the focus discussion group were disappointed that they could not freely cross over to Tanzania and do their business:

“We hear on the radio that we are all citizens of the East African Community but we are always harassed whenever we go to Tanzania. We want to work with our own hands and we believe we can also contribute to the economy of Tanzania. We have always asked our leaders in Burundi to help us to carry out our business freely but they do not want to do this”<sup>89</sup>.

Returnees reported that some of their counterparts who did not manage to get alternative sources of livelihood decided to go to other countries:

Our friends who could get money for transport went to Zambia, Mozambique, and Kenya to see whether they can have better life. Upon arriving in those countries, they seek for refugee status so that they may be able to live in those countries and they start doing some business. We hear reports that some of them are doing well while others are struggling like all of us here<sup>90</sup>.

Another man regretted to have ever returned home:

I did not have to come back because I knew I had no land and I knew I would not get my land. CNTB-Commission Nationale Des Terres et Autres Biens (Land Commission)- has taken a very long time to decide whether or not I can get back my family land which has been taken away in 1972 when we first left Burundi as refugees. Now that the CNTB has been phased away I have lost hope to get back this land. It hurts<sup>91</sup>.

Those returnees who decided to migrate to other communes in search of livelihood were also not comfortable: “some time we are we are being accused by local authorities that we are behind theft in the farms simply because we came from another province”<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with a returnee woman Kabingo village, 18 September 2022

<sup>87</sup> A woman in returnee focal group discussion, Muzye 5 August 2022

<sup>88</sup> Interview with a returnee Young person, Muzye village 6 August 2022

<sup>89</sup> Focus group discussion with Returnees, Muzye village, 5 August 2022

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with a returnee man, Nkanka village, 18 September 2022

<sup>92</sup> Interview with a returnee man in Nyembuye village, 16 September, 2022

Locals were happy that the returnees came back but were unhappy that the assistance was selective: “There are our brothers and sisters, and we are all in great need of assistance. We are happy that they are here with us and we received them with an open heart but we are sad that we are not being assisted”<sup>93</sup>

The researcher wanted to know what could be done to redress the situation and the returnees gave a list of things they would like to see done:

For the refugees who have come back home more than once and then become refugees again, they should be allowed to stay in Tanzania. For example, Tanzania can give them a permanent visa and Burundi can give them a passport. We do not need to become Tanzanians but we can live in Tanzania legally and do our work because it is clear that life in Burundi is not possible for them<sup>94</sup>.

They also spoke about the impact of Covid-19 on their business: “Further, Covid-19 has destroyed our business, we would like to be given more capital so that we may restart business again. However, we would request that the Tanzania and Burundian authorities at the boarder stop harassing us”.

The government of Burundi and UNHCR was request to extend the assistance period and help refugee without arable land to start other income project: “The assistance they give is too little and is for a short time. They need to give is varied assistant and especially help those without land to start income generation projects”<sup>95</sup>

Returnees came back to the structural issues that are hunting them and which the government is struggling to meet:

Our land was taken away by our neighbour in 1972 and when we came back in 2006, we took the matter to the CNTB and until we run again in 2015 the land commission had not yet decided on this matter. Now I am back again only to find that the CNTB have been terminated by the government without telling us which government institution is going to deal with our land cases. This is like torture to us<sup>96</sup>.

Members of the host communities spoke of inclusive assistance program which take care of the need of the whole community but also which can improve the infrastructure which have been destroyed following the years of conflict: “All we need is a good road so that we may be able to sell our produces. This is very important to us. Also, if there is assistance brought to returnees let us also be considered<sup>97</sup>”.

## 6. Analysis on the data collected

The data collected during this study show that there are themes and narratives that need to be readdress in the whole refugee return process if this process is going to be sustainable.

First, it is clear that there is a clear connection between a successful return and the fact as to whether it was voluntary or not. The interviews with the returnees proved that they are coming back to Burundi more because of push factors in the refugee camps than pull factors in Burundi. Under such circumstances like restricting refugees from carrying out small income activities in and around the camps, restricting their movements to only inside

<sup>93</sup> Members of the host community group discussion, Muzye village, 5 August 2022

<sup>94</sup> Returnee focuss group discussion, Muzye village, 5 August 2022

<sup>95</sup> Interview with a returnee woman, Ruhabo village, 19 September 2022

<sup>96</sup> Interview with a returnee woman at Nyembuye village, 16 August 2022

<sup>97</sup> Members of Host Community focus group discussion, Muzye 5 August 2022

the camp and giving them intimidating messages including threats to repatriates them by force, cannot insure a successful reintegration back to their home. The major reason behind this failure is that, in cases as forced repatriation, refugees are not free to choose a durable solution that work for them. And in many cases return is chosen because it is the only one which is open to them. IRRI (International Refugee Rights Initiative) have documented incidences of forced return in the case of Burundian refugees in Tanzania<sup>98</sup>.

Second, the humanitarian approach attached to return is not making it durable as a solution. Even if it is of paramount importance to support returnees with immediate need like food and shelter, it is important to see the other side of integration which calls for a more longer developmental approach. Although the Burundian experience has proved that ignoring structural questions had tremendous consequences on the wellbeing of returnees, growing voices are supporting the idea that peace and development are two entangled states of dynamic equilibrium<sup>99</sup>. It is therefore hard to envisage return as a peacebuilding mechanism and durable solution to refugee cycle if development efforts have not accompanied the humanitarian endeavours.

Third, it is therefore logical to conclude that, envisaging return in Burundi as a short-term program is not in the interest of the durability of the solution. Issues like property restitution and socio-cultural integration take a very long time and many and varied investment<sup>100</sup>. Consequently, as question as to when one ceases to be a returnee becomes very important. It is clear that some actors see return as an event rather than a process.

Fourth, it was clear that past experience has an influence on the decision of refugee vis-à-vis their future perspectives. In this case of Burundi, past experience in Mtabila camp where there was an invocation of the cessation clause against Mtabila refugees and therefore a forced repatriation applied on an unwilling refugee<sup>101</sup>, current refugees-most of them victims of this secession close- will take decision with Mtabila experience at the back of their mind. Therefore, some decided to come back to Burundi and used Burundi as a transit area to other countries like Mozambique and Zambia where some are now living as refugees. Return therefore reinforces the protractedness nature of these refugees' experience.

Five, it was clear that refugee experience is not all bad. Refugees learn a great deal including host country cultural practices as well as economic culture. Return, as framed today, is confined to a designated geographic area as of the returnee loses contact with the former host country. This study shown that, in practice, returnees continue to also visit their former host countries where they do various activities. What is apparent is that these returnees are not encouraged to do this by creating for them safe and conducive environment to so do. In most cases, returnees do so at their own risk and have to suffer a lot of human right abuses by local authorities in both countries. Maybe this is an area that should be explored closely-so that return may mean also a possibility to use the acquired knowhow in order to make return successful. In cases where we even have the economic

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<sup>98</sup> International Refugee Rights Initiative, "Returning to Stability? Refugee returns in the Great Lakes region", Kampala, IRRI, 2019

<sup>99</sup> Rema Burundi and Building Bridges Burundi, 'Le lien paix-développement, un cadre pour comprendre la réintégration des rapatriés au Burundi' (note politique), presented to the different humanitarian and development partners in Burundi, Bujumbura, 30/11/2021 see also Amadei, B. Systemic Modeling of the Peace-Development Nexus. *Sustainability* **2021**, 13, 2522. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13052522>

<sup>100</sup> Rema Burundi and Building Bridges Burundi, 'Le lien paix-développement, un cadre pour comprendre la réintégration des rapatriés au Burundi' (note politique), presented to the different humanitarian and development partners in Burundi, Bujumbura, 30/11/2021

<sup>101</sup> L. Hovil and T. Mbazumutima, "Tanzania's Mtabila Camp finally closed", *Pambazuka News*, 2012, Available at <https://www.pambazuka.org/governance/tanzania%E2%80%99s-mtabila-camp-finally-closed> (Accessed on 28<sup>th</sup> March 20202)



block integration like East African Community, it only makes sense that human capital should be allowed to circulate freely.

Six, the host community in Burundi have stood in solidarity with the returning refugees. They share shelter and other resources with returnees to such an extent that one would be tempted to say that the success of refugee return hinges on the solidarity of the local community. This goes with a cost since the available resources are quickly used up and this community needs to be assisted too. Such programs like integrated development programs need to be rolled up to the benefit of the whole community in order to reduce the communities' vulnerability caused by return but also to avert conflicts that could arise from assisting one group.

Finally, for return to be sustainable in Burundi, there is need for dialogue between the returnees and the other return partners. From the returnees' conversations, it is clear that decision is top-down and refugees have little contribution to the decisions taken. Further, refugees are not informed about what to expect beyond the return package period. Monitoring on what is going on after the initial return could improve the actors' response and make return truly successful. For example, monitoring and dialogue activities would lead the actors to realise the damage which covid-19 made to the livelihoods of the returnees and help them accordingly.

## 7. Conclusion and recommendations

The aim of this research was to explore the returnee reintegration challenges following the 2015 crisis in Burundi. The study a qualitative approach in order to give a voice to returnees and members of their host communities so that they may share their perspectives on the durability of the current return process. The study major finding was that returnees do not have an independent and fully informed choice to come back to Burundi. Further, the assistance which the government and UNHCR give them does not guarantee the minimum socio-economic re-integration and that, consequently they try alternative ways to improve their livelihoods. The study showed that the efforts by the returnees to be resilience are faced by abuse by local authorities in both countries or negative effects of Corona virus. The study has noticed also that returnees have decided to go to other more receptive countries with all the consequences which this has on their trajectories and lives. The study major conclusion is that, in Burundi, the current return is not fulfilling its purpose of being a durable solution.

Therefore, the study proposed that return be voluntary and be accompanied by a diversified assistance including holistic development effort in addition to the humanitarian assistance given to the returnees. The study further advocates for an inclusive assistance program that takes in consideration the needs of both the returnees and host community. A permanent conversation between the communities in refugee and returning zones would also help to address emerging challenges timely and efficiently.

Finally, the study recommends that further study be done in order to understand the crossborder dynamics by displaced people and the extend to which they cause and advantage or a danger to displaced people involved in order to recommend appropriate measures. This study was done only in Burundi and in one commune, it would be interesting to see whether there are similar crossborder socio-economic dynamics in other areas and their consequences.

## 8. Annexes

### 8.8. List of Acronyms

CAM : Carte d'Assurance Maladie (Insurance card)

CNTB : Commission National Terres et autres Biens (National land commission)

IOM: International Organization for Migration

NGO: Non-Governmental organization.

UN: United Nations

UNHRC: United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

## 8.9. Research Instruments

### ❖ Interview Guide for Returnees

#### 0. Before the interview say the following:

Thank you for taking an interest in my research. My name is ..... I am currently a registered Masters student in..... at..... I would like to briefly share about the research which I am going to carry, and which I hope you will get involved in, so that you may have a clear idea on what I will be doing.

The title of my study is "Exploring returnee reintegration challenges following the 2015 crisis in Burundi". The goal of the study is to investigate the level at which reintegration of returnees in Burundi is being successful as a durable solution so that the different actors may learn from the conclusions of the study and hopefully improve on their services given to make return more successful.

If you choose to be part of this study you may be required to answer questions in an interview which I will have with you and in some cases more than once either on your own or as part of a focus group discussion.

All the participants do this on voluntary basis and can withdraw from the study at any time. All the information given will remain confidential and be used only for academic purpose and the participants will have access on the conclusions of the study if they so wish. Therefore, the names of all the participants will not appear in the report. There is no payment given to participants and these ones will not be requested to pay any study participation fee.

In case you have any question then please contact me on +257 79472216.

#### I. General Information

1. Name + Surname of the investigator.
2. Day and time of the interview.
3. Location of the interview?
4. Name + Surname of the assistant.

#### II. Identification

1. Sex:                      Male:                      Female:
2. Age estimation
3. When did you run away?
2. In which camp/settlement did you live before returning?
5. Social status of the returnee (widow, young orphan, married, unaccompanied minors)
6. Repatriated spontaneous or supported by UNHCR
7. Date of return

8. Point of entry to Burundi

9. Place of resettlement (hill / village /town) upon return.

10. Did you migrate from one place to another within the country? If yes from where to where?

### III. Main questions

11. What led you to leave Burundi and become a refugee? Which country did you go to and why?

12. What was life like in the refugee camps?

13. Why did you decide to come back?

14. How was the return organised? What did you like most? What did you like less? Who were the actors?

15. How were you received in the community? What assistance did you get and by whom?

16. Were your expectations met? If no, why?

17. What are the issues which you want to see addressed and how?

18. In your opinion what evaluation do you give to the current return process?

19. How could it be organised better?

20. Do you have any other thing to add?

### ❖ Interview Guide for host/ resident communities

0. Before the interview say the following:

Thank you for taking an interest in my research. My name ..... I am currently a registered Masters student in..... at..... I would like to briefly share about the research which I am going to carry, and which I hope you will get involved in, so that you may have a clear idea on what I will be doing.

The title of my study is Exploring returnee reintegration challenges following the 2015 crisis in Burundi. The goal of the study is to investigate the level at which reintegration of returnees in Burundi is being successful as a durable solution so that the different actors may learn from the conclusions of the study and hopefully improve on their services given to make return more successful.

If you choose to be part of this study you may be required to answer questions in an interview which I will have with you and in some cases more than once either on your own or as part of a focus group discussion.

All the participants do this on voluntary basis and can withdraw from the study at any time. All the information given will remain confidential and be used only for academic purpose and the participants will have access on the conclusions of the study if they so wish. Therefore, the names of all the participants will not appear in the report. There is no payment given to participants and these ones will not be requested to pay any study participation fee.

In case you have any question then please contact me on +257 79472216.

#### I. General information

1. Name and surname of the interviewer

2. Date and time of the interview
3. Commune visited
4. Location of the interview
5. Name and surname of the research assistant

II. Identification of the interviewee

1. Sex:                      Age:                      Social status:
2. Residence area:

III. Main questions:

The following questions were as to the members of the host communities:

5. What was your feeling when you saw your neighbours leaving Burundi? Why did you not leave yourself?
6. How did you receive back the returnees? Who does what? How were you prepared to do this?
7. What are the challenges related to return in this community? What is being done well?
8. What could be done to improve life in your community?

❖ Interview Guide Focus group for returnees

0. Before the interview say the following:

Thank you for taking an interest in my research. My name is Christine Ndayihimbaze. I am currently a registered Masters student in.....at..... I would like to briefly share about the research which I am going to carry, and which I hope you will get involved in, so that you may have a clear idea on what I will be doing.

The title of my study is "Exploring returnee reintegration challenges following the 2015 crisis in Burundi" The goal of the study is to investigate the level at which reintegration of returnees in Burundi is being successful as a durable solution so that the different actors may learn from the conclusions of the study and hopefully improve on their services given to make return more successful.

If you choose to be part of this study you may be required to answer questions in an interview which I will have with you and in some cases more than once either on your own or as part of a focus group discussion.

All the participants do this on voluntary basis and can withdraw from the study at any time. All the information given will remain confidential and be used only for academic purpose and the participants will have access on the conclusions of the study if they so wish. Therefore, the names of all the participants will not appear in the report. There is no payment given to participants and these ones will not be requested to pay any study participation fee.

In case you have any question then please contact me on +257 79472216.

- I. Consent Process

Before Proceeding I invite all the participants to willingly participate in the study.

So, I will introduce myself and the assistant and then say:

- Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. We are interested to hear your views on the current return process. This focus group it is part of a larger study aiming at exploring the reintegration process in the context of the current return.
- The information you give us is completely confidential and anonymous.
- My assistant will take notes during the discussion.
- All information and notes will be confidentially kept and finally destroyed when we have finished using the information.
- You are free not to answer a specific question or even withdraw from the discussion at any given point.
- We would like to ask you to keep as confidential any thought shared during this group discussion.
- Should you wish to ask any question even after this study you can contact me
- The discussion is going to last for about 2 hours

II. Ground rules:

The focus group members introduce themselves and agree on the ground rules and I explain how the discussion is going to be conducted and any other important information.

❖ Returnee focus group discussion:

11. What led you to leave Burundi and become a refugee? Which country did you go to and why?
12. What was life like in the refugee camps?
13. Why did you decide to come back?
14. How was the return organised? What did you like most? What did you like less? Who were the actors?
15. How were you received in the community? What assistance did you get and by whom?
16. Were your expectations met? If no, why?
17. What are the issues which you want to see addressed and how?
18. In your opinion what evaluation do you give to the current return process?
19. How could it be organised better?
20. Do you have any other thing to add?

❖ Interview Guide Focus group for Host Community

0. Before the interview say the following:

Thank you for taking an interest in my research. My name is ..... I am currently a registered Masters student in..... at..... I would like to briefly share about the research which I am going to carry, and which I hope you will get involved in, so that you may have a clear idea on what I will be doing.

The title of my study is " Exploring returnee reintegration challenges following the 2015 crisis in Burundi". The goal of the study is to investigate the level at which reintegration of returnees in Burundi is being successful as a durable solution so that the different actors

may learn from the conclusions of the study and hopefully improve on their services given to make return more successful.

If you choose to be part of this study you may be required to answer questions in an interview which I will have with you and in some cases more than once either on your own or as part of a focus group discussion.

All the participants do this on voluntary basis and can withdraw from the study at any time. All the information given will remain confidential and be used only for academic purpose and the participants will have access on the conclusions of the study if they so wish. Therefore, the names of all the participants will not appear in the report. There is no payment given to participants and these ones will not be requested to pay any study participation fee.

In case you have any question then please contact me on +257 79472216.

#### I. Consent Process

Before Proceeding I invite all the participants to willingly participate in the study.

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- Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. We are interested to hear your views on the current return process. This focus group it is part of a larger study aiming at exploring the reintegration process in the context of the current return.
- The information you give us is completely confidential and anonymous.
- My assistant will take notes during the discussion.
- All information and notes will be confidentially kept and finally destroyed when we have finished using the information.
- You are free not to answer a specific question or even withdraw from the discussion at any given point.
- We would like to ask you to keep as confidential any thought shared during this group discussion.
- Should you wish to ask any question even after this study you can contact me
- The discussion is going to last for about 2 hours

#### II. Ground rules:

The focus group members introduce themselves and agree on the ground rules and I explain how the discussion is going to be conducted.

The following questions were used during the host community focus group:

9. What was your feeling when you saw your neighbours leaving Burundi? Why did you not leave yourself?
10. How did you receive back the returnees? Who does what? How were you prepared to do this?
11. What are the challenges related to return in this community? What is being done well?
12. What could be done to improve life in your community?
13. Do you want to add any other information?

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### 13.9. Literature Review

## UNDERSTANDING THE RETURN DYNAMICS IN BURUNDI

To date, not much information is available on how the return of Burundian refugees to their home country contributes to the promotion of durable solutions as far as refugee status is concerned.

The UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations' reports talk less about the durability of return in Burundi. Following that the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) mission doesn't go beyond the voluntary repatriation, voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity requires the full commitment of the country of origin to help reintegrate its own people<sup>102</sup>. A continuing support of the international community through the crucial post-conflict phase is also needed to ensure that those who make the brave decision to go home can rebuild their lives in a stable environment<sup>103</sup>. In practice, the UNHCR promotes and facilitates voluntary repatriation through various means, including organizing "go-and-see" visits for refugees, compiling updated information on their country and region of origin, engaging in peace and reconciliation activities, promoting housing and property restitution, and providing return assistance and legal aid to returnees<sup>104</sup>.

For the case of Burundi, returnees can be provided with a package of basic domestic items from UNHCR and a three-month food ration from World Food Program<sup>105</sup>. Following that most of the returnees have special needs among them shelters, the UN Agency for Refugees contributes in providing them housing scheme. Returnees receive materials which cannot be easily made or found, such as corrugated iron sheets for roofing, nails and locally produced doors and windows. The returnees will then provide the remaining materials and labour<sup>106</sup>. The work of the UNHCR can go a little further by initiating Income-generating activities in return areas in collaboration with relevant partners<sup>107</sup>.

Although the UNHCR and partners support return as one of the best 'durable solution', it is particularly important that return is properly organised and funded if it is de facto the only option<sup>108</sup>. Following that some returnees claim to return by pressure<sup>109</sup>, it is quite important to restructure return as history has shown that the failures of previous return and reintegration processes have set the stage for the next round of displacement and ignited conflicts, including over land<sup>110</sup>. It has to be seen as a long-term process in which those who return – who are highly vulnerable as a result of their flight and conditions in exile –

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<sup>102</sup> UNHCR Africa, Voluntary Repatriation, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/voluntary-repatriation-49c3646cfe.html> (accessed, 22, November, 2022)

<sup>103</sup> Idem

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> UNHCR, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/4371d17911.pdf> (accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>106</sup> Idem

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), "They Don't Even Understand Why We Fled - The Difficult Path to Reintegration in Burundi". February 2019 (<http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Burundi-returns-report-IRRI-Feb-2019-1.pdf> accessed on November 22, 2022).

<sup>109</sup> Lucy Hovil and Theodore Mbazumutima, "Tanzania's Mtabila Camp Finally Closed." December 2012 (<https://www.pambazuka.org/governance/tanzania%E2%80%99s-mtabila-camp-finally-closed> , accessed 22 November 2022).

<sup>110</sup> International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), "They Don't Even Understand Why We Fled - The Difficult Path to Reintegration in Burundi". February 2019 (<http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Burundi-returns-report-IRRI-Feb-2019-1.pdf> accessed on November 22, 2022).

are supported over a number of years to (re)gain their livelihoods and their place as citizens in their homeland<sup>111</sup>.

It claimed that the failure of the Repatriation as a durable solution is due to it being viewed as a short-term endeavour rather than a long-term process demanding sufficient investment, according to IRR<sup>112</sup>. In addition to that, the Foreign Policy Magazine (FP) underpins the point by saying that while the number of refugees worldwide has nearly doubled in the past decade, if there is a crisis today, it is one of refugee return<sup>113</sup>.

Although some researches and publications have dealt with how the return to Burundi is organised, little has been written or published in relation to how durable the return has been in Burundi. The little information available to date is in form of online publications by humanitarian NGOs in Burundi and outside. Along similar lines, it is important to consider that the durability of Burundian 'voluntary repatriation' has to start with a clear identification of people wishing to return to Burundi. Confusing 'refugee' and 'migrants can lead to problems for refugees and asylum-seekers, and for States seeking to respond to mixed movements, as well as to misunderstandings in discussions of asylum and migration<sup>114</sup>.

#### 1. Origins of return as a durable solution and how it developed from the beginnings throughout to today

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There are three 'durable solutions' as identified by the UNHC: the return, the local integration, and the settlement<sup>115</sup>. The prioritization of return (over local integration or resettlement options) was put forward from the late eighties and early nineties onwards, receiving strong impetus in 1992 by the then UNHCR High Commissioner Sadako Ogata, who declared the nineties as the 'decade of voluntary repatriation' (Long 2011, 240)<sup>116</sup>. To date, repatriation or in other words 'going home' is the most preferred sustainable solution put forward by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and governments to address displacement triggered by violent conflict<sup>117</sup>.

Since 2015 in Burundi, hundreds of thousands of Burundians have fled to neighbouring countries following political unrest. This exodus more or less reversed a repatriation process that had been carried out between 2002 and 2010 in which approximately half a

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<sup>111</sup> Idem

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Foreign Policy Magazine (FP) (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/27/sending-refugees-back-makes-the-world-more-dangerous/> accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>114</sup> UNHCR Africa, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), (<https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/3/56e95c676/refugees-migrants-frequently-asked-questions-faqs.html> accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>115</sup> UNHCR Africa, "FRAMEWORK FOR DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR REFUGEES AND PERSONS OF CONCERN" (<https://www.unhcr.org/partners/partners/3f1408764/framework-durable-solutions-refugees-persons-concern.html> , accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>116</sup> Jolien Tegenbos & Vlassenroot, "Going Home? A systematic review of the Literature on displacement, return and cycles of violence" in ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326392267\\_Going\\_home\\_A\\_systematic\\_review\\_of\\_the\\_literature\\_on\\_displacement\\_return\\_and\\_cycles\\_of\\_violence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326392267_Going_home_A_systematic_review_of_the_literature_on_displacement_return_and_cycles_of_violence) , accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>117</sup> Idem

million refugees had returned to Burundi<sup>118</sup>. Insecurity and political persecution have led to international displacement, with nearly 331,000 Burundian refugees living in other countries as at April 2022<sup>119</sup>.

In 2008, Burundians in Tanzania who had fled in the early 1970s were offered a choice between repatriation and local integration (with few who were settled to third countries), but those who fled in the 1990s had little opportunity for local integration and only negligible opportunities for resettlement. Instead, they came under increased pressure to return<sup>120</sup>. Similarly, for those who fled during and after the 2015 crisis, return is seemingly the only “durable solution” on the table<sup>121</sup>. This has effectively left those exiled in Tanzania and Rwanda with two options: returning to their homes or remaining in chronically under-resourced camps with little opportunity to integrate and serious restrictions to freedom of movement. Obviously, many have chosen the option to return back home.

The CCCM Cluster indicates that over 193,000 Burundians were assisted to return between September 2017 and April 2022, mostly from Tanzania and that the interest in voluntary repatriation increased after the 2020 election<sup>122</sup>. In addition to that, the number of returnees from January–August 2021 has quadrupled compared to the same period in 2021, according to the same cluster.

## 2. Why Burundians flee their country

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As it is claimed by African Arguments Magazine, “most Burundian refugees have fled to neighbouring Tanzania, Rwanda or DRC, but some have moved on to Uganda after hearing that it is more secure and welcoming”<sup>123</sup>. One thing is true: People who leave their countries are not always fleeing danger. According to Amnesty International, some of the people fleeing their country “might believe they have a better chance of finding work in another country because they have the education or capital to seek opportunities elsewhere. Others might want to join relatives or friends who are already living abroad. Or they might seek to start or finish their education in another country”<sup>124</sup>.

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<sup>118</sup> International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), “They Don’t Even Understand Why We Fled - The Difficult Path to Reintegration in Burundi”. February 2019 (<http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Burundi-returns-report-IRRI-Feb-2019-1.pdf> accessed on November 22, 2022).

<sup>119</sup> Global CCCM Cluster, Burundi (<https://ccmcluster.org/operations/burundi#:~:text=Over%20193%2C000%20Burundians%20were%20assisted,April%202022%2C%20mostly%20from%20Tanzania>. Accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>120</sup> International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), “They Don’t Even Understand Why We Fled - The Difficult Path to Reintegration in Burundi”. February 2019 (<http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Burundi-returns-report-IRRI-Feb-2019-1.pdf> accessed on November 22, 2022).

<sup>121</sup> Idem

<sup>122</sup> Global CCCM Cluster, Burundi (<https://ccmcluster.org/operations/burundi#:~:text=Over%20193%2C000%20Burundians%20were%20assisted,April%202022%2C%20mostly%20from%20Tanzania>. Accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>123</sup> Africa Arguments Magazine, in “Why Burundians Continue to Flee”, (<https://africanarguments.org/2017/08/why-burundians-continue-to-flee/> accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>124</sup> Amnesty International, “WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE THEIR COUNTRIES? » (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/refugees-asylum-seekers-and-migrants#:~:text=There%20are%20many%20reasons%20why%20it%20might%20be%20too%20difficult,change%20or%20other%20Natural%20disasters>. Accessed on November 22, 2022)

There are lots of different reasons for people to start a journey to build a life in a new country. The hard job is to know who is who.

According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), sorting out people eligible for refugee status among other immigrants especially during the mass influx is the hardest task to do. One should know that “Refugees move within broader population flows that are also composed of economic and other categories of migrants. With only limited migration options available, many persons who are not refugees try to enter countries as asylum-seekers”<sup>125</sup>.

Although many Burundians who fled to surrounding countries was due to the war, political inconsistency and human rights violations and that hundreds of thousands of refugees who have fled Burundi since 2015 have ‘refused to return’ until it was safe<sup>126</sup>, there are some other reasons that make Burundians to flee the country. According to IOM, “Burundi’s highest population densities among the world’s poorest countries is one of the causes of large migration flows”<sup>127</sup>. A substantial number of economic migrants has been adventuring for better socioeconomic stability elsewhere in the neighbouring countries.

In addition to that, both the UNHCR and the OIM reports are veracious in one point: Not everyone labelled ‘refugee’ is a ‘real refugee’. Some of them are economic migrants, asylum-seekers, among others. For the case of Burundi, IOM underpins that some of the Burundians who fled the country in 2015, following the political instability that was prevailing in Burundi, “were not fleeing because of political reasons”<sup>128</sup>. In the research that IRRI conducted in Burundi, it was concluded that poverty had been a key factor in driving them to flee in 2015. As one returnee said, “We did not flee the war. In fact, we fled because of hunger”<sup>129</sup> However, in most cases, we find all of these groups of people are labelled ‘refugees’, a concept that is often mistakenly interchanged with “migrants”<sup>130</sup>.

In fact, labelling all the people on the move as “refugees” affect their lifestyle once abroad, the way they plan to return, and what contribution is expected to them once in their home country as far as return as one of the durable solutions is considered. Following that most Burundian returnees would prefer resettlement (over local integration and return) while only a few “refugees” can be resettled due to the fact that

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<sup>125</sup> UNHCR Agenda for Protection, Third Edition, October 2003

<sup>126</sup> The Borgen Project, “The Fleeing of Burundian People”, (<https://borgenproject.org/burundian-refugees/#:~:text=The%20Fleeing%20of%20Burundian%20People,return%20until%20it%20was%20safe>. Accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>127</sup> IOM, Making Migration for All, in <https://www.iom.int/countries/burundi> (accessed on 18 November 2022)

<sup>128</sup> Relief Web, “Supporting Burundian returnees to build a more prosperous and stable future” in (<https://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/supporting-burundian-returnees-build-more-prosperous-and-stable-future> accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>129</sup> International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), “They Don’t Even Understand Why We Fled - The Difficult Path to Reintegration in Burundi”. February 2019 (<http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Burundi-returns-report-IRRI-Feb-2019-1.pdf> accessed on November 22, 2022).

<sup>130</sup> UNHCR “viewpoint: ‘Refugee’ or ‘migrant’ – Which is right?” in (<https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html> accessed on November 22, 2022)

one must prove to the IOM and UNHCR that repatriation and sustainable reintegration to Burundi is not a viable option to him<sup>131</sup>, return becomes a compelling option to most of Burundian “refuges”. Moreover, since resettlement may represent a disincentive to repatriation by encouraging some refugees to remain in the host state hoping to be resettled<sup>132</sup>, return is now often regarded as the most desirable durable solution—provided that return is genuinely voluntary and sustainable<sup>133</sup>.

Following that return is regarded as the most desirable durable solution over resettlement and local integration, isn't high time we refined “return as a durable solution” to achieve the sustainability it embodies?

### 3. Return: a concept to redefine

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Talking about return involves knowing who is returning, why someone is returning, and the aftermath of life upon the arrival of the returnees in their home. Along similar lines, the UNHCR reiterates that voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity requires the full commitment of the country of origin to help reintegrate its own people<sup>134</sup>. Jolien Tegenbos & Koen Vlassenroot in their article express that the cycles of violence, displacement, and return are intimately related and often inherently part of one another<sup>135</sup>. It is thus important to consider return as a ‘process’ not as a ‘destination’. I assume redefining the concept of return as a long-term process can lead to the durable solutions the concept embodies.

### 4. When should one return?

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According to the UN Agency for Refugees (UNHCR), every refugee has right to return on a voluntary basis once peace and stability have prevailed in his/her home country.

Recently in 2021, the UNDP, the UNHCR, the government of Burundi, and partners signed a joint plan to support sustainable solutions for returning refugees, in a manner that enables them to rebuild their lives with dignity and in peace<sup>136</sup>. The initiative of the consortium paved a pathway for many organizations to intervene in the sustainable reintegration of the returnees. The government and partners have since then been running clockwise sensitizing refugees in the region to return.

As a result of the propaganda and following the election of President Ndayishimiye in June 2020 and his call for Burundians living in exile to return, an increase in interest in voluntary return has been observed in various countries hosting Burundian refugees<sup>137</sup>. However, the reality on the ground proves that the return has not always been as voluntary as it is portrayed by the Un agencies, the hosting countries, and the

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<sup>131</sup> IOM “Resettlement of Burundian Refugees Begins” in (<https://www.iom.int/news/resettlement-burundian-refugees-begins> accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>132</sup> UNHCR, “Rethinking durable solutions” in (<https://www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/4444afcc0.pdf> accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>133</sup> Idem

<sup>134</sup> UNHCR Africa, Voluntary Repatriation in <https://www.unhcr.org/voluntary-repatriation-49c3646cfe.html> (accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>135</sup> May 2018 POLITICS OF RETURN WORKING PAPER No.1 ISSN: 12345678

<sup>136</sup> 2021 Burundi Joint Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan

<sup>137</sup> Idem



Burundian government. The UNHCR on its side believes significant development assistance to the returnees is one of the best pathways to sustainable return in Burundi<sup>138</sup>.

However, IRRI underpins “Repatriation is being driven primarily by insufficient humanitarian assistance and rights violations in the camps”<sup>139</sup>. In addition to that, “even though no returnees reported that they had been forced to return, living in underfunded and neglected camps with no freedom of movement and no prospects for integration had left most feeling pressured to return to Burundi, even though their return was clouded with uncertainty”, according to the same International Refugee Rights Initiative Organisation.

## 5. What happens when the returnees arrive in Burundi?

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Burundi being one of the poorest countries in the world, the socio-economic situation continues to adversely impact the lives of Burundians<sup>140</sup>. According to the Human Development Report 2020 (as written by World relief), Burundi ranks 185 out of 189 in the Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>141</sup>. The situation is as so while returnees continue to arrive with an average of 2,000 people being assisted to voluntarily return each week from Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Tanzania<sup>142</sup>.

Once in Burundi, the IOM together with the partners can contribute in the provision of shelter, NFI kits based on needs assessments and in-country standard composition, among others. In addition to that, the returnees are entitled to the same rights as well as equal access to civil documentation, services, productive assets and opportunities as other citizens<sup>143</sup>.

Moreover, in order to recognize “the importance of promoting durable reintegration, in 2017, Burundi published its National Strategy for the socio-economic reintegration of victims affected by forced displacement 2017-2021 (Stratégie Nationale de Reintegration socio-économique des personnes sinistrées au Burundi) that articulates the three government priorities for reintegration, namely 1) enable displaced people to have access to land and shelters upon return to the chosen areas of residency; 2) provide economic opportunities with support to the local markets and job creation; and 3) allow full social cohesion with participation in community and social lives”<sup>144</sup>. However, for all of these government priorities to be successful, “robust support by

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), “They Don’t Even Understand Why We Fled - The Difficult Path to Reintegration in Burundi”. February 2019 (<http://refugee-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Burundi-returns-report-IRRI-Feb-2019-1.pdf> accessed on November 22, 2022).

<sup>140</sup> Relief Web, “Burundi : Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan”, in (<https://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/burundi-refugee-return-and-reintegration-plan-january-december-2021> accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>141</sup> Idem

<sup>142</sup> Relief Web “Starting over is not easy but Burundian refugees are hopeful as they return home” in (<https://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/starting-over-not-easy-burundian-refugees-are-hopeful-they-return-home> accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>143</sup> Relief Web, “Burundi: Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan”, in (<https://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/burundi-refugee-return-and-reintegration-plan-january-december-2021> accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>144</sup> Idem

donors and other stakeholders is crucial to ensure the sustainable reintegration of refugee returnees who have already returned, and those who are expected to return in the coming year(s)”<sup>145</sup>.

While durable reintegration costs money which is often not available, IRRI has suggested “other things that can be done without a huge financial investment such as sensitising local communities and better supporting local authorities”<sup>146</sup>. In addition to that, “return and reintegration needs to be viewed as a community endeavour rather than an individual process; and while individual returnees and returnee families might require specific assistance, the process needs to be cognisant of the wider context of return in which whole communities are struggling, not least from the aftermath of decades of instability”<sup>147</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

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First, it is clear that most of the publications conclude that actors admit return is the most preferred durable solution for many. However, some humanitarians believe “return” as it is defined by the UNHCR should be “redefined” as some returnees and humanitarian believe it is not being as voluntary as it should be. I am on the view that return should not be taken as a simple process, it should rather be taken as a complex and long-term process in order to make it durable.

Second, it is clear that neither the UNHCR, IOM or the host countries do care about the categories of mass influx they receive, as well as poverty as being one of the reasons that push people to flee the country. Considering that this can directly or indirectly affect the process of return, I am on the view that this lack of clear identification of “the kind of refugees” they receive is part of the hindrances of a sustainable return in Burundi.

Thirdly, it has been obvious that every effort the UN agency for Refugees and partners have been doing to assure lasting and durable integration of returnees in Burundi is time-limited. While reintegration takes time, I believe that much effort should be deployed in assisting the returnees once back home. In doing so, deep causes of the inefficacy of the return will be known and thus dealt with promptly.

Finally, it may be possible to conclude that the concept of return as it is defined by the UNHCR doesn’t guarantee sustainability as far as ‘durable solutions’ are concerned. Following that not much has been written regarding the sustainability of return in Burundi by exploiting the angles of “deep reasons that make people flee a country”, it is clear that some of the “efforts to bringing durable solutions in Burundi will still be doomed to failure. The present study is an attempt to find out what didn’t go well with the return in Burundi, and how can the findings be used to restructure return as a ‘real’ durable solution in Burundi.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibidem

<sup>146</sup> Relief Web, “Burundi : Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan”, in (<https://reliefweb.int/report/burundi/burundi-refugee-return-and-reintegration-plan-january-december-2021> accessed on November 22, 2022)

<sup>147</sup> Idem