Policy brief: Diaspora Engagement in Burundi:
The Emergence of a Migration Policy
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Introduction

This policy brief provides an overview of diaspora engagement initiatives in Burundi, a country located in the Central African Great Lakes region. The information for this policy brief was gathered during a one-week visit to Bujumbura, Burundi in September 2010. A total of 13 interviews were conducted with academics, government officials, and international organisations. In addition, data and documentation was gathered from the relevant authorities and served as background materials to this brief.

Burundi has been plagued by waves of civil conflict since its independence from Belgium in 1962. Burundi's first democratically-elected government was installed in 2005, and only recently has the country experienced a period of stability and peace. As a result of the violent conflicts in Burundi and surrounding countries, the country has experienced large migration flows. These flows mainly consisted of internally displaced persons (IDPs) seeking safe havens in other parts of Burundi and refugees fleeing over the border to neighbouring countries such as Tanzania, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the same time Burundi served as a destination for refugees from other countries as conflict raged across the whole region.

Migration and development policy in Burundi is very new, reflecting the persistence of violent conflict that only ended in 2005. The long period of conflict in Burundi shifted the priorities of the Burundian government to other pressing issues such as security and the provision of basic needs. The government is now becoming more interested in migration and development policies and is establishing different initiatives to tap the resources of the diaspora. Different international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are active in the field of migration and development in Burundi as well.

Current migration situation

Table 1 presents an overview of the current migration situation for Burundi with a focus on forced migration (UNHCR, 2010). As this table shows Burundi is still both an immigration and emigration country. Refugees residing in Burundi are mostly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, to some extent, Rwanda. The country currently hosts around 100,000 IDPs as well. Since the security situation has improved in Burundi, the number of IDPs has decreased slowly from over 280,000 in 2003 (ICG, 2003) to 100,000 (UNHCR, 2010) as of

October 2010. Most refugees originating from Burundi live in Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, and Rwanda. Tanzania currently hosts the most Burundian refugees, most of whom are located in the 'Old Settlements' created by the Tanzanian government after the 1972 inflow of refugees from Burundi.

Table 1: Burundi Refugee Statistics January 2010	
Residing in Burundi	
Refugees	24,967
Asylum Seekers	6,338
Returned Refugees	32,362
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS)	100,000
Total Population of Concern	**163,667**
Originating from Burundi	
Refugees	94,239
Asylum Seekers	4,864
Returned Refugees	32,362
Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS)	100,000
Total Population of Concern	**231,465**

Source: UNHCR, 2010

An important current migration flow affecting Burundi is the large influx of returnees. After the peace agreement between the last rebel group Palipehutu-FNL and the Burundian government in 2003 and the successful election in 2005, a large voluntary return-migration flow emerged from neighbouring countries Tanzania, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. According to UNCHR statistics, more than 500,000 former refugees returned to Burundi between 2002 and 2010. Over six percent of Burundi's current population consists of people who had fled the country and returned in this period (UNHCR, 2010).

A small but substantial proportion of Burundian refugees fled to western countries, establishing an active and engaged Burundian diaspora network around the world in countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, the United States, and Canada (Fransen & Ong'ayo, 2010; Turner, 2008a; 2008b). An estimation of the size of the Burundian diaspora is difficult to provide as this depends heavily on the immigration statistics of the different migrant-receiving countries.

In the past years new migration patterns in Burundi have emerged, with recent flows mostly consisting of highly-skilled migrants who move to Europe and Western Africa. In addition, South Africa receives a substantial amount of migrants from Burundi. These migrants can be mainly classified as economic migrants who are in search of better educational and economic opportunities. Burundi has also received an influx of new immigrants looking for business and investment opportunities, many of whom originate from China and Pakistan. Due to a lack of data, however, no official statistics on these flows are available yet.

Current migration challenges

One of the key migration challenges Burundi faces today is the resettlement and reintegration of Burundian migrants who return from their refuges in neighbouring countries. Return migration is a complex and sensitive issue in Burundi due to already-existing problems of overpopulation and land scarcity (Fransen & Ong'ayo, 2010). Many returnees, especially from the 1972 refugee wave, have found their homes and land confiscated by others and face problems of unemployment and social reintegration. Returnees are therefore recognized by international agents, such as the UNHCR, as a vulnerable group, and thus find some support from international actors in their return efforts.

Another challenge the country faces is how to actively involve its diaspora in reconstruction efforts and economic development. As described above, the Burundian diaspora has been consistently engaged with their homeland. After 2005 their role changed, however, from being political actors to potential players in nation-building and reconstruction efforts (Turner, 2008a). The Burundian diaspora has much to offer, both in terms of monetary support and the transfer of knowledge and skills. Many members of the diaspora are highly skilled and specialised in health and education (Ratha & Xu, 2008). From within the Burundian diaspora, efforts are being made to reunite diaspora members to contribute to the communities and provinces they left behind as well. In Belgium, for example, the Burundian diaspora, which is mainly comprised of refugees stemming from the 1972 and 1993 refugee waves, is becoming better-structured and organised to address collective reconstruction efforts (IOM, 2009).

The issue of diaspora involvement in reconstruction efforts has recently risen on the agenda of Burundian policy makers, which has followed the example set by neighbouring Rwanda. The migration policy adopted by Rwanda in 2009 focuses specifically on issues such as developing the tourism sector, attracting skilled migrants, stimulating investment by its

diaspora, and creating competitiveness in the private sector in order to stimulate economic development (Republic of Rwanda, 2009). Burundi is now following Rwanda's lead by creating a formal infrastructure to manage and facilitate diaspora involvement to boost its economy.

Actors involved in migration policy in Burundi

In Burundi there are both state and non-state actors currently active in the area of migration. The main state actors originally included a conglomeration of ministries and departments. Migration management was mainly addressed by the Ministries of Public Security and Interior. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has created the Directorate of Diaspora, and the Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) programme established by the IOM was run locally by the Ministry of Labour and Civil Service. Recently, however, the Ministry of Public Security in Burundi has been given exclusive responsibility to address migration management issues and to construct the migration and diaspora involvement policy.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has been the traditional international organisation working with migrants in Burundi. Other international organizations are also currently active in Burundi as well, however. Recently, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has opened an office in Bujumbura. Other United Nations (UN) agencies are on the fringe of operations. Agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) becomes involved when migration deals with women and children, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) becomes engaged when there is a development aspect to the migration dynamics, and the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) steps up to address integrated rural villages for returned refugees. UNHCR has been the international organization traditionally working in the area of migration in Burundi due to the forced nature of the largest migration flows over the last four decades owing to ongoing conflict and civil war in the country. UNHCR in Burundi deals primarily with refugees and return. The organization also deals with repatriation of (mainly) refugees and reintegration issues, and it has established eight integrated rural villages (previously referred to as peace villages) with UNDP, UNICEF and FAO to support refugee returnees who lack access to land. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) conducted a scoping assessment before opening an office in Bujumbura in early 2010. The main tasks of the IOM include family reunification and resettlement of individuals like in many other countries where the IOM is active. At the same time, the IOM is charged with the task of assisting the government in migration and development policy development and capacity-building in migration management.

Figure 1: Geographic Location of Burundi

According to the 2009 Assessment Paper written by the IOM, the priorities in the field of migration are not defined by the Burundian Government (IOM, 2009). The same report explains that there are seven departments directly affected by migration (although this does not necessarily mean that migration is in their mandates): the Ministry of Interior; the Ministry of Public Security; the Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation; the Ministry of the Affairs of the East African Community; the Department of Justice; the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Security, and; the Ministry of National Solidarity, Repatriation of Refugees and Social Reintegration. Other ministries (such as the Ministry of Planning and Reconstruction; the Ministry of Finance; the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism; the Ministry of Decentralization and Municipal Development; the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, and; the Ministry of Information, Communication and Relations with Parliament) could play a role in the future but are currently not directly involved. As stated earlier, the ministry of Public Security is now the main government body to develop the migration policy.
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs created the Directorate of Diaspora in October 2009, which became staffed in January 2010. The Directorate is very young and seems to be a step in the right direction with regards to migration and development policy making, but it lacks the capacity to be effective. The Directorate of Diaspora in Burundi is currently run by a department of only three people.

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Current migration policy initiatives in Burundi

The Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) program is an Africa-wide program run by the IOM in conjunction with local governments, and its primary objective is to engage highly-skilled members of the diaspora in periods of short-term return for capacity building. The MIDA program in Burundi has existed since 2001, is run through the Ministry of Labour and Civil Service, and is part of the "MIDA Great Lakes" program. The program is currently in its fourth phase and is run in conjunction with the IOM in Kinshasa and IOM Brussels, where it is also financed. In the case of Burundi, MIDA is focused on the diaspora in Europe and particularly in Belgium. The first three phases of the program, from 2002-2008, dealt exclusively with education projects. Currently, there are eight projects running in the areas of education, health, and rural development. A total of 131 people have moved through the program since its inception in 2001, and 22 will have completed the program in 2010 alone.

Future perspectives on migration policy in Burundi

A few years after the conflict in Burundi came to an end, the Burundian government is now ready to explore possibilities to tap into the potential of its migrants abroad. Although migration and development policy-making in Burundi is still very young, the future looks bright in that many agencies and the government are beginning to address diaspora engagement. Even though no formal structure for diaspora engagement exists yet, the diaspora is now increasingly recognized as an important partner in re-building the war-torn country. Within the Burundian diaspora the willingness to contribute to nation-building is present as well (Turner, 2008a), which provides a promising ground for future cooperation. The level of willingness of the diaspora, however, heavily depends on the political and security context in Burundi, which is still fragile.

Thus far, the appropriate measures have been taken to move toward a more coherent migration/migration and development policy. Trust is a major issue in Burundi and within its internally-divided diaspora (Turner, 2008b), however, and having effective policies will also depend on security and trust-building to foster cohesive action. For effective policy making, cooperation between ministries and among different organizations such as IOM and UNHCR is important. Especially for migration to contribute to development, it is important that Burundi adopts clear migration policies and builds an institutional framework in which migration is specifically addressed (IOM, 2009).

The IOM has already set out a number of recommendations and guidelines to help harness the development potential of

Picture by Nora Stel

migration in Burundi. Their report explains how important it is to reach out to the diaspora, to explain to them what is needed in the country, and to disseminate information. Members of the diaspora can be mobilized, and their contributions can be targeted specifically, when this strategy of engaging them in the policy development process is employed. An important aspect of diaspora engagement is, thus, communication. Another important strategy for the Burundian government is to invest in remittance channels. Costs have to be reduced and safety guaranteed in order to create competition in the remittances market, which, in turn, will stimulate and facilitate remittance flows from the Burundian disapora as well as investments and the return of diaspora members.

For all initiatives to succeed, however, it is important that Burundi's security situation remains stable and becomes more robust in the near future. In the years after the democratic elections, human rights abuses and corruption in the government were still reported (see e.g. HRW, 2008; HRW, 2009; Lemarchand, 2006). Recently, news reports have provided indications for the emergence of new rebel groups in the north of the country. These developments form a serious threat to the country in general and to Burundi's efforts to create an effective and sustainable migration policy in particular.

Acknowledgements

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