

Exile into Tanzania was the only solution for over 200,000 Burundians when violence erupted in their home villages. Scores of thousands also fled to other neighbouring countries. After years of living in refugee camps, many appear to be overstaying their welcome. In August 2019, the Tanzanian and Burundian Governments signed a bilateral agreement to repatriate all Burundian refugees from Tanzania, amid repeated calls by the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for returns to take place on a strictly voluntary basis. Since then UNHCR reports that circa 3,000 returning each week (with the total number adding up to 74,627 as of September 2019). In one of the poorest and most densely populated countries in the world, the newcomers exert enormous pressure on the impoverished host communities (as reported by UNDP).

Pursuant to the 2019 Joint Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan (JRRRP), UNHCR, other UN agencies, and a number of NGOs – including LWF – have spearheaded significant relief efforts. This response, however, does not suffice to cover the growing humanitarian needs. More specifically, the JRRRP reports that the provinces of Cankuzo and Ruyigi, where LWF is active since 2006, feature among the top three destinations for the 96,000 returnees expected by the end of the year. LWF Burundi's needs assessment has confirmed the prevalence chronic food insecurity, stunting, and other forms of extreme poverty, along with poor access to education in the host villages. For them, the burden of absorbing thousands of returnees each week is simply too high.

The situation is even harder for women-headed returnee households (two-thirds of the total as per the JRRRP). Women have no formal right to land, inheritance and often fail to be heard by local authorities. Many are forced to adopt negative coping behaviour, such as engaging in sex work or leaving their families unattended to seek work in the cities. For those that do manage to find a plot, they lack production inputs and go hungry for months until the harvest is ready. The proposed project addresses their needs by (i) ensuring short-term food availability; (ii) fostering rapid inclusion in agriculture and (iii) promoting seamless integration and peaceful coexistence for approximately 1,000 female-headed households in the Cendajuru, Gisagara and Mishiha communes (Cankuzo), as well as in Gisuru, Kinyinya and Nyabitsinda (Ruyigi). The project's intervention logic is summarized below:

No one goes hungry

The project will ensure that short-term food needs are covered for women-headed returnee households and their host communities through a cash-intervention approach (complemented by direct delivery in selected cases where food is unavailable or local markets are dysfunctional). Additional support, including non-food items, will be made available to the neediest.

Enabling women to fend for themselves

Upon arrival, LWF will ensure that women returnees are allocated a plot of land to cultivate. The project will provide them, and their hosts, with adequate agricultural inputs (seeds, basic tools, etc.).

Extension services during the growing cycle will ensure that both locals and returnees can cater for their own food needs as quickly as possible. At a later stage, surpluses will be sold locally.

Living together in peace

In addition to helping local communities absorb the shock resulting from large scale repatriations, and to supporting the women returnees in getting back on their feet rapidly, the project will undertake a number of measures to ensure peaceful coexistence.

Project work cuts across a wide array of topics, ranging from cultural and sports events to activities aimed at sensitizing and preventing Gender-Based Violence.



Returnees on the move in Ruyigi
Photo credit: SOS Médias Burundi

Building on recent success in Burundi

The project design builds on LWF’s ongoing experience in assisting incoming returnees and host communities. It follows a tried and tested rights-based approach, based on the notion of dignity.

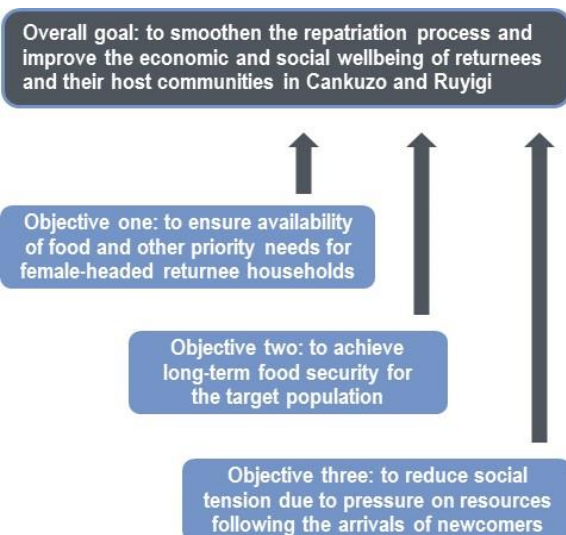
The project’s gender-sensitive approach follows the Minimum Economic Recovery Standards. Emphasis is on sustainability through increased productive capacity and market-driven agriculture. It also complies with the Core Humanitarian Standard, as well as with LWF’s policies (e.g. child protection).

This initiative benefits from LWF’s existing local presence and builds on its ongoing work locally. For example, the project will link returnees with existing groups at the “colline” and village levels to speed up social integration. Selected activities will take place in collaboration with other organizations active in the ground such as Caritas Burundi, World Vision, Accord Burundi and the Red Cross.

The project has a duration of three years, with a yearly budget of circa EUR 240,000. A total of EUR 100,000 (yearly) has already been mobilized.

The total expected number of direct beneficiaries is 800 women-headed households, i.e. circa 4,000 individuals. Additional indirect beneficiaries are estimated at 6,000.

The project’s intervention approach is schematized below:



Leveraging a global humanitarian network

Established in 1947 as the humanitarian arm of the Lutheran World Federation, LWF World Service is a recognized, international humanitarian organization currently active in over 28 countries worldwide.

LWF’s emphasis on linking relief with recovery and development enables a holistic approach to meet humanitarian needs. The organization focuses on longer term solutions addressing the root causes of poverty and conflict.

LWF is the largest implementing member of the Action by Churches Together (ACT) Alliance, a network of Protestant and Orthodox churches and organizations working in development, humanitarian response and advocacy.

LWF is fully registered in Burundi. LWF Burundi is an active member of Rassemblement, Echanges et Solutions entre ONG (RESO), the umbrella body for NGOs in the country.

LWF first became established in Burundi in 2006 to support an earlier wave of returnees arriving from Tanzania. The organization is fully operational in the provinces of Cankuzo and Ruyigi, having built a verifiable track-record.

Available for further information

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