



CASE STUDY :

UNHCR builds permanent shelters for returnees to Rwanda

Between April and July 1994, no less than 800,000 people were horribly massacred in an orchestrated genocide in Rwanda. By the end of the summer, the number of people killed was greater than a million.

In the months that followed the genocide in Rwanda, an estimated 4 million refugees, 80% of whom were women and children) fled to neighbouring countries. In effect, refugees numbering more than the entire population of Greater Toronto fled within less than 6 months. The UN Refugee Agency, along with many other international humanitarian groups, worked tirelessly to provide basic shelter and protection to these waves of refugees.

The scale of this human tragedy has been well documented, but the movement of people continued for years. By 1996, an estimated 800,000 "old case" refugees (who had fled in 1959) had returned to Rwanda. In the subsequent years, more than 1.4 million "new case" Hutus and Tutsi's displaced during 1994 began to return to Rwanda from their exile in Burundi, East Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), and Tanzania.

In Rwanda conflicts arise over property and houses between the new case and old case returnees, genocide survivors and internally displaced. There simply wasn't enough shelter for all those in need.. UNHCR had already foreseen the need for housing construction and was able to start activities in 1996, thus contributing to defusing tensions resulting from the shortage.

The Government of Rwanda had initiated a policy of *imidugudu*, where all new housing was to be regrouped into villages. In a country with a tradition of scattered housing in rural areas, regrouping people in villages had to be well planned and offer an added value to the returnees in order to allow for reconciliation and social stability.

The UNHCR shelter program in this highly volatile environment was an operation much grander than just building shelter. These new homes were part of a new start for so many who had been traumatized.

After four years of the UN Refugee Agency shelter program, the whole country was covered with groups of tiny houses, all alike, whether in size, shape or type of materials. UNHCR has heavily contributed to this change by providing the materials or by building 98,447 houses in 252 settlement sites and in scattered locations all over Rwanda. The cost of each of these new homes varied between US\$730 and US\$1232, depending on the region, the timing and the nature of the construction.

As these homes were built, UNHCR also invested in rebuilding infrastructure: schools, training facilities, health care centres and public buildings. A huge water project also ran concurrently, in order to ensure the availability of the most important resource.



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