

Problems in the Camps



You are part of an emergency advisory team that must take immediate action to set up a well-running camp. Consider the immediate survival needs of the refugees as well as the more general social and environmental problems that may arise later. Identify specific problems and possible solutions to this situation.

Introduction

Fergal Keane was a BBC journalist who was stationed in Africa during 1994. When the Rwandan massacres began to occur, he traveled there to investigate the situation. He later wrote of his trip in a book called *Season of Blood: A Rwandan Journey*, published in 1996 by Penguin Books. This excerpt tells of a visit to Benaco that he made in search of Nyarabuye, an individual who was known to have massacred Tutsis in Rwanda before fleeing to Tanzania. Later in the chapter, he describes finding Nyarabuye, who was flourishing in the camp.

Chapter Five: A Servant of the People

The smoke from the fires of Benaco found us long before we saw the camp. I suddenly found myself rubbing my eyes and beginning to cough as the fumes from unseen fires filled the air. On either side of the roadway the countryside had been stripped bare of vegetation. Only the yellow savannah grass remained and the stumps of trees that had been hacked down as the waves of refugees moved across the land in search of a safe haven inside Tanzania. Some 250,000 people were known to have travelled down this road in a single day. Many thousands more had come in the weeks since the president's plane had crashed. Most were Hutus fleeing the advancing army of the RPF, but there were scattered groups of Tutsis, some of them posing as Hutus in order to save their lives. Already stories were filtering out of the camps about the murder of Tutsis who had been exposed by their neighbours. The UN and the international aid agencies had established a series of camps around the area of Ngara, and it was here that Sylvestre Gacumbitsi and numerous others accused of complicity in the genocide had found sanctuary. They were being housed and fed by the international community and were allowed, according to every eyewitness report, to organize their people as they saw fit within the confines of the camps. We had heard from several sources that Gacumbitsi was somewhere in the system of camps, but nobody knew precisely where.

As we came closer and closer, the air thickened and became foggy. Long lines of women and children filed along the roadway. The women carried piles of firewood stacked high on their heads. Beside them children struggled with branches and twigs that scratched along the ground, causing trails of dust to rise up behind them. I rolled down the window and heard a growing murmur of voices. It swelled as we drove to the top of the hill, until the sound resembled a great swarm of bees, into which had been mixed the noise of car horns and growling lorries. At the top of the hill we pulled in to the side of the road and I found myself looking down on the UN refugee camp at Benaco, the latest receptacle for the displaced of Rwanda. From the hillside the camp spread out before us in the dusk like a ragged flag. There were patches of white where the UN had erected feeding stations, innumerable squares of blue where plastic huts had been erected, and moving between and around them a great mass of brown figures. From my vantage point on the roadway the camp seemed to be a place of incessant movement. In the middle here was a main pathway, along which thousands of people were moving up and down in an orderly line. As we drove down a track towards the UN main compound I noticed that the crowds were moving to and from a lake. They carried water buckets, pails, plastic bags, anything that could be filled.

I had never seen so many people crowded into one place. The air was by now thick with smoke; my lungs began to heave, and I coughed constantly. Down in the heart of the camp, the noise that had seemed murmur from afar had become a loud, declamatory roll that rose above the refugees and hung in the air with the smoke and the smell of displaced people. Until a few weeks ago these people had lived and worked in Rwanda. They were farmers, businessmen, teachers — an entire society transplanted on to Tanzanian soil. We followed the crowds down to the shores of the lake. As we came closer, the crowds thickened and voices shouted and argued. The people were heading in the direction of a pump, from which the nightly water supply for cooking and cleaning was being distributed. I got out of the car and followed Tony and Glenn into the crowds. People pressed in around us and we began to slip on the mud. There were children scrambling to hold on to the hands of their parents and other, older ones who weaved in and around the adults. The people were completely indifferent to our presence. The camp had been a focus of media attention for several weeks now, and the refugees had become accustomed to the presence of camera crews. There were fierce arguments among the refugees as they pushed to get to the pump. I saw a man punch the man ahead of him in the queue. They began to jostle and slide on the mud until another, powerfully built refugee struck them both on the shoulders with a stick. They stopped fighting and scowled at the man who had intervened. Mingling with the woodsmoke was the nauseating smell of overcrowding: sweat, excrement, smoke and damp clothes. The people at Benaco were in a state of wretched poverty dependent on food handouts from the international community. They lived in plastic huts without sanitation, having lost their homes and land. Yet, as I moved among them, witnessing the squalor and desolation, I could not shut out the memory of Nyarabuye or the knowledge that among these huge crowds were thousands of people who had taken part in the genocide.

Case Study: Rwandese Refugees in Tanzania, May 1994

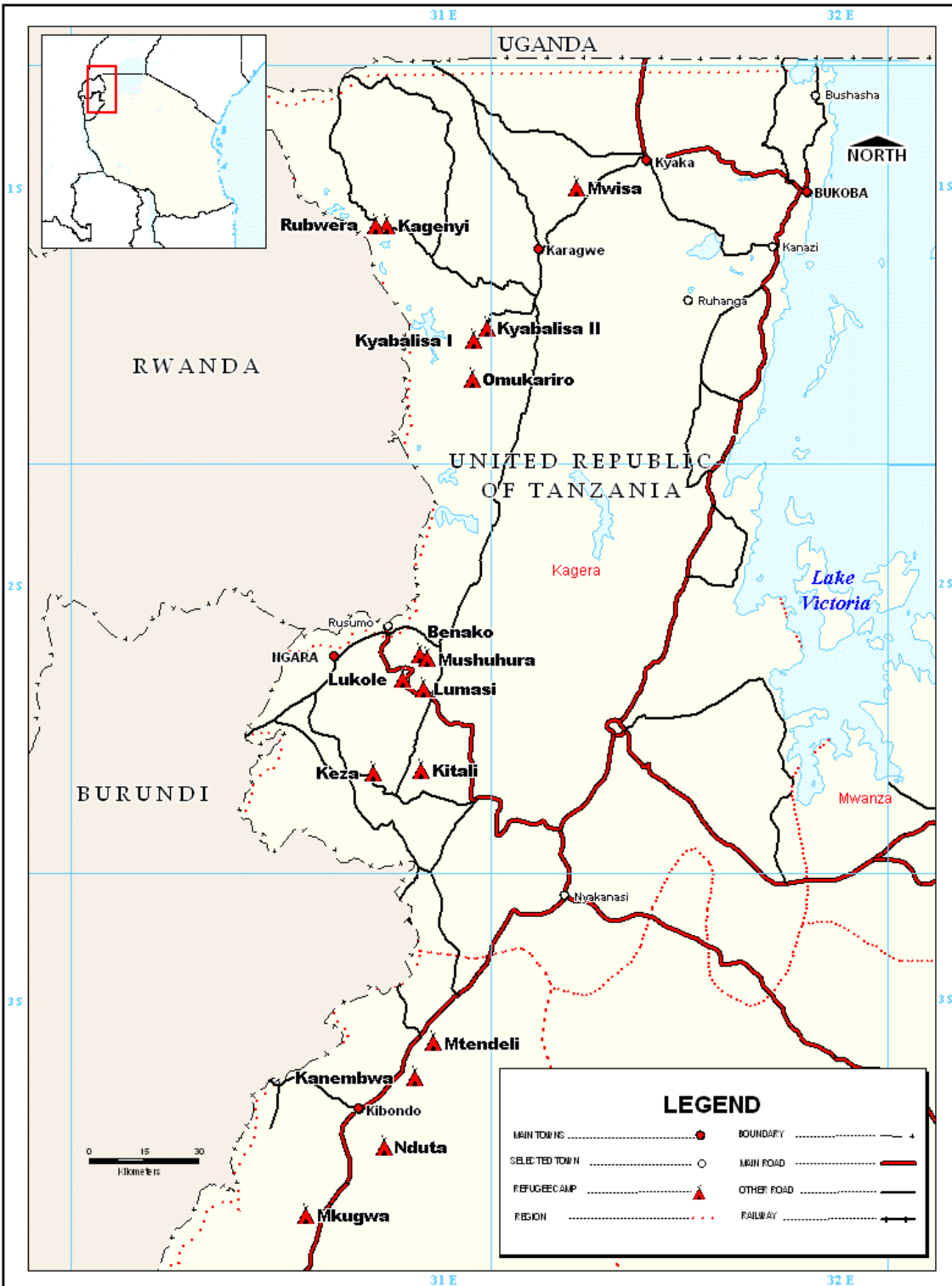
On the 28th of April, only three weeks after the fighting began, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that some 200,000 refugees were crossing the border into Tanzania and called on international agencies to assist in supporting them. Doctors Without Borders/Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) sent a two-person team (a logistician and a doctor) to evaluate the situation. They described the situation they found as follows.

Excerpt from the MSF Team Report:

The people arriving are on foot, exhausted, and carrying only a few belongings. Among them are many women and children. Small groups of unaccompanied children are walking around the camp and new refugees are arriving daily according to the UNHCR. People living in the same area in Rwanda are organizing themselves into communes and spontaneously settling down at the foot of a mountain called Benaco where there is a small lake from which they collect water. Many have started to build shelters with local materials, and since trees are being cut down on a massive scale, wood is becoming scarce.

Villages or other human settlements are some 10 km away. The area seems to be fertile agricultural land recently harvested. The rainy season is expected to start in a few weeks. The major health concerns are the high incidences of HIV and tuberculosis in the Rwandan population. Furthermore, camps of one million Rwandans in Goma, Zaire, are reporting the first cases of cholera. Many people in the settlement complain about fever with joint pain, diarrhea and quite a number are observed coughing. Community leaders have pointed out that there are some health workers among the refugees.

RWANDAN REFUGEE CAMPS, KAGERA REGION TANZANIA



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BENACO PROBLEM/SOLUTION WORKSHEET

Work as a group to identify potential problems in setting up the Benaco refugee camp. Then, propose some solutions to those problems.

PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS