

Kamenge Displaced People's Camp – Burundi **TOF 96-01**

Burundi has a population of close to 6 million. Since independence, this tiny Central African country has experienced bloody ethnic conflicts. It has 3 ethnic groups - the Hutu (85%), the Tutsi (14%) and the Batwa (1%). The conflicts have already claimed thousands of lives and although the international community and the Burundi government are trying their best to assist those who have been uprooted, the situation is so critical that still more needs to be done in order to reduce the violence and provide some form of sustainable development.



As they strive to survive, the participants of the Kamenge project encounter a number of serious problems such as lack of health care, schooling for their children, skills etc. Talking to the Kamenge participants, one can tell they have encountered more than their fair share of suffering and most of them have countless horror stories.

Born in 1980 at the height of the ethnic conflicts, the Burundi YMCA works with communities of displaced people, who live in hope of returning one day to their areas of origin. One such camp for 550 displaced persons is at Kamenge. Here a run-down technical school has shared the little it has with this desperate group of persons, mostly women and children. The participants in the Kamenge project are mostly Hutus and therefore not part of the ruling class. The project is mainly agricultural. The land has been divided into two sections: one for communal work (8 hectares) and the other into individual plots (7 hectares) where food is grown for personal consumption. The communal piece of land serves as a meagre income generator for both the displaced people and the local YMCA since the proceeds are shared.



The YMCA of Burundi gives hope to these desperate souls. Each visit by YMCA Burundi volunteers or their partners is a source of hope and inspiration. You can see the participants' love and appreciation for the YMCA in the way they receive YMCA visitors and the magnitude of their attendance at meetings.

It is thanks to partners such as Y's Men International that the Africa Alliance of YMCAs is able to give hope and inspiration to the Kamenge Project participants and many others.