



# World Directory of Minorities

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## Twa

### Profile

Estimated population (2000): 30-40,000 (UNIPROBA Batwa Campaign Group) There are no official statistics.

Ethnicity: Twa

First language/s: Kirundi

Religion/s: indigenous beliefs, Christianity

The Twa of Burundi are of 'Pygmy' origin, and traditionally were hunters and worked as potters or as musicians and entertainers. Some Twa in Burundi who feel they have 'developed' get insulted when called Twa and prefer to be called 'Abaterambere' ('people who are advancing'), and thus play a role in the continuing negative stereotyping of other Twa.

### Historical context

Traditionally despised by both Tutsi and Hutu, the historical links of some Twa with the Burundi court, and more significantly their recruitment by the army, link them with Tutsis in the eyes of many Hutus. In anti-Tutsi reprisals Twa have also been targeted.

Burundi has become a densely populated country, and most land is used for crops and pasture. Since the 1970s it has been illegal to hunt in Burundi, which deprived the Twa of what was traditionally one of their main sources of sustenance. Land redistribution at Burundi's independence did not benefit the Twa, and most are now landless. Twa face discrimination from Hutu and Tutsi on a daily basis.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has hit Twa communities, although data is non-existent. Despite some education about the disease, many Twa hold the view that it is something that affects the Hutu and Tutsi, and is foreign to them. Those Twa who die of AIDS are often said to have died by poisoning, which may reflect a lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS, or the stigma surrounding the disease. Twa women face particular risk of rape and infection due to beliefs among some Hutu and Tutsi that sex with a Twa woman provides a cure for backache; a new variant of this belief (or mere rationalization) holds that sex with a Twa woman offers a cure for HIV/AIDS. Infected Twa have little or no access to healthcare services.

### Current issues

Unlike neighbouring Rwanda, Burundi does recognise the distinct ethnicity of the Batwa. There are estimated to be between 30,000 and 40,000 living in the country. The 2005 constitution set aside three seats in the National Assembly and three seats in the Senate for Twa. Nonetheless this group are still mostly landless and are among the poorest people in what is a very poor country. In testimonies gathered by MRG in Burundi in 2007, Batwa complained of many difficulties relating to

land-rights, either through lack of title, discriminatory practises relating to allocation on the part of the authorities, or failure to recognise historic rights to land. According to the Forest Peoples Programme, land laws in Burundi blatantly discriminate against Batwa, as they base customary land rights on “actual and visible occupation of the land“, while the traditional hunter-gather lifestyle tends to not visibly impact on territory. However, the new Land Commission in Burundi is tasked with sorting out the complex land issues which have arisen since the end of the conflict, and the return of many refugees. The Commission has one Batwa member, and it is hoped, will tackle the question of the land rights of indigenous peoples. Aside from land issues, Batwa also complained to MRG about discrimination in social services, especially in health and education. In particular, the difficulty of educating Batwa children beyond primary level was highlighted. A survey undertaken by UNIPROBA - an organisation representing the Burundian Batwa - found just seven Batwa students in university education in 2006.

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