



Global Campaign for Rwandans' Human Rights

# PUSHED TO HUNGER

STARVATION IN SHADOW OF STARDOM

*Hidden Famine crisis that is shattering lives in*

**RWANDA**

**NZARAMBA**

Famine in Rwanda



May 2017

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Global Campaign for Rwandan's Human Rights

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Global Campaign for Rwandan Human Rights

Website: [www.rwandansrights.org](http://www.rwandansrights.org)

Global Campaign for Rwandan Human Rights is an international human right campaign established to promote and campaign on human rights of all Rwandans.

# A - THE SITUATION OF THE FAMINE CRISIS

## 1. The overview

Our investigation has established that since November 2015 more than 3 Million Rwandans are at the verge of starvation and more than 150,000 Rwandans have emigrated out of the country mostly to Uganda due to a ravaging famine, particularly in the Eastern Province districts of Rwamagana, Nyagatare, Bugesera, Kayonza and Kirehe as well as Nyanza and Gisagara districts in Southern Province.

The famine has been named and known as “**Nzaramba**” which means “**I will live long**”

Historically in Rwanda, a situation of scarcity of food has been given specific a name only when it became widespread and affected thousands of people.

Previous famines that hit Rwanda were Ruzagayura (1943-1944); Rwakayihura (1928-1930); Gakwege also known as Ntunyajweho (1924-1926); Rumanura (1906-1908); Ruyaga (1897-1903) and Rukungugu in middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2. The Rwandan official government position

The Rwandan government has blamed the climate change as the primary responsible for poor harvests in some areas of Rwanda. However, our investigation has revealed that there are many more important causes behind the current famine and increasing poverty in Rwanda including poor

agricultural policies, decline of economy, regular distortion of population, and lack of freedom of expression.

The State has failed to appeal to the international community to provide food to the affected population simply because it does not want to swallow its pride of being labelled an economic failure, because the Rwandan government has always portrayed itself in the eyes of the International community as a shining economic example for the African continent. However, researchers are starting to piece together a darker story of lies and deceptions that paint a rather different picture of Rwanda as an economic miracle, using cooked growth statistics to portray itself as the Singapore of Africa as pointed out by Himbara (2016)<sup>1</sup>.

According to a government report<sup>2</sup>, there are 44,000 poor households (nearly 225,000 individuals) that have been negatively impacted by the drought in the Eastern part of Rwanda. This report has been confirmed by WFP field visits<sup>3</sup>. We found that these reports were very limited on the real cause of food scarcity that led to the famine crisis and also limited visibility on the extent of the problem (number of people affected).

The World Food Programme provided some emergency food. Most of those who received food were forced to do community work to compensate for the food received.

Furthermore, as the government controls the media and limits freedom of speech, there is no coverage on the full extent of the famine that would have raised its awareness to relevant stakeholders at national, regional and international level. Nevertheless, in July 2016, Kenyan based newspaper

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<sup>1</sup> Himbara, D. (2016) Kagame economic mirage. South Carolina: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform

<sup>2</sup> Government of Rwanda: Drought Assessment, 31st May to 3rd June 2016.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Joint P4P/ Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping (VAM) mission the Eastern Province, Rwanda

“The East African” reported that “The famine hit more than 100,000 in the Eastern province of Rwanda”<sup>4</sup>

Our investigation has discovered a rather worrying underreported famine which has devastated the population mainly from the districts cited above, claiming hundreds of lives and forcing thousands in exile to neighbouring countries.

### **3. International community awareness.**

According to Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA2015)<sup>5</sup> by the World Food Programme, food insecurity remains a major challenge in Rwanda particularly in rural areas which have the highest percentage of poor people and extreme poverty. Households access to food is constrained by poverty, topography and scarcity of arable land, low productivity, inadequate employment opportunities, high food prices, current climate related shocks and conflict in neighbouring countries.

The extent of this situation and consequences to affected populations as well as acknowledgement of the existence of a famine crisis were missing in this WFP analysis.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/Rwanda/News/Famine-hits-over-100-000-Rwandan-families-in-Eastern-province-/1433218-3276076-x4q4s4z/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> World food program (2015) Rwanda comprehensive food security and vulnerability analysis. [http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp284395.pdf?\\_ga=2.156797563.1945942926.1493831928-1069122927.1493831928](http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp284395.pdf?_ga=2.156797563.1945942926.1493831928-1069122927.1493831928)

#### 4. Action need.

We are calling for international community **to act fast** and assist Rwandans who are starving as result of “**Nzaramba**” famine. We are calling on the government of Rwanda to appeal to the international community for **food assistance** and allow it to provide **humanitarian assistance unconditionally** in the affected regions.

## B – WHAT CAUSED THE CURRENT FAMINE IN RWANDA

### 1. Failed agriculture policies.

According to The Rwandan Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (2010) the agricultural sector accounts for less than 35% of the gross domestic product (GDP) although it provides a livelihood to 90% of the population but only 1% of tradable production.

Although the Rwandan economy depends mainly on agriculture, which supports 80% of the workforce and produces 42% of the GDP (UNDP 2008), the agricultural sector receives a mere 3% of the national budget, a far cry from the 10% threshold recommended by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Government spending in Rwanda is clearly oriented away from the food security of the majority, and toward those who will help the government maintain its power. It shows that the government has neglected the agriculture sector in general.

In terms of the agriculture policies, Rwanda has embarked on green revolution; a policy that forces farmers to **adopt mono-cropping** and **to abandon their multi-cropping** system of farming. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, the green revolution was supposed to increase food productivity. However, the result was the opposite.

The Rwandan government has forced farmers to take an economic risk without giving them financial guarantees with regard to the economic viability of the proposed new farming methods. This is because at the end of the production chain, there is no remunerative prices for agricultural produce. – Secondly: Rwandan farmers have traditionally practiced farming methods that ensures consistent food security. Not only farming did practices introduced by the government destroy their food security, they did not facilitate availability of substitute or basic food products.

In most cases the financial income of mono-cropping methods promoted by the government did not provide farmers sufficient means that would enable them to afford agricultural produces that they were forced to abandon. – Even though domestic labour is considered "free", the government gives no guarantee that seeds sold to farmers are of good quality, nor does it provide an undertaking to ensure farmers or to protect them from paying exorbitant debts incurred as result of buying seeds and fertilizer in the event of bad harvest.

The failed agricultural policies have resulted in food prices soaring up by 300% in the last 2 decades.

Furthermore the 2015 Auditor General's report<sup>6</sup> indicated that irrigation equipment procured by the government in the district of Nyagatare at a cost of Rwf2.7 billion was not put to use.

The government has promised to help farmers acquire irrigation equipment with a subsidy of up to 50 per cent and link co-operatives to financial institutions, this is however still a pipe dream.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://oag.gov.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Procurement/Annual\\_Report\\_2015.pdf](http://oag.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Procurement/Annual_Report_2015.pdf)

The unaffordability of basic commodities and food also became apparent to common people due to stagnant salary in public services that do not correlate with the significant increase in food prices.

*The table below gives a snapshot of increase of basic food increase in the last 10 years.*

<b>Aliments products</b>	<b>2006:</b> Price/Kg	<b>2017:</b> Price/Kg	<b>Increase</b>
<b>Potatoes</b>	66 RWF	400 RWF	500%
<b>Sweet Potatoes</b>	58 RWF	350 RWF	503%
<b>Green Banana</b>	82 RWF	350 RWF	327%
<b>Beans</b>	173 RWF	700 RWF	300%
<b>Charcoal</b>	3500 RWF/sac	8500 RWF	142%
<b>Meat</b>	700 RWF	2200 RFW	210%

*Teacher's income*

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>(A2) primary school teacher</b>	<b>(A1) a diploma holder</b>	<b>(A0) a graduate</b>
Salaries/month	RWF 44,000	RWF 90,000	RWF 120,00

The figures above show an exorbitant increase in food prices since 2006. These are some of the basic foods consumed on daily basis by many Rwandans. Many households particularly in poor status including teachers in primary schools struggle to provide food to their families. Let us take an example of an average household (3 people) headed by a teacher (A2) whose salary is RFW 44,000 per month, which consume 3kg of meat/10kg potatoes/10kg sweet potatoes, 10kg of beans and uses 1 sac of charcoal;



which equals the monthly average consumption for a small household. The total bill would amount to RWF 29,100. Still, the family will need to pay for health insurance known as mutuelle de santé (RWF 9000 ie RWF 3000 per person), school fees, clothing and other important bills which cannot be covered by this salary, including rent.

## **2. The myth of economic success shadowing an economic crisis.**

Rwanda has portrayed itself as an economic lion of Africa (a Singapore of Africa as President Kagame described it) boasting an average of 8% GDP growth for the last ten years with unprecedented economic performance envied by the rest of Africa. It has boasted to have built a modern economy with world class infrastructures, an important ICT and an environment that attracts domestic and foreign investment.

The world continues to hear of the Economic miracle that has been achieved after the 1994 Genocide. Much of those miracles are credited to the leadership of president Kagame. However, we now know that the said economic progress is a fabrication of the Kagame government that has mastered the art of lying. In fact, the government has learned that the world will buy into exaggerations of their achievements.

The economic growth has been inflated, statistics cooked and worst of all most of the financial institutions who have pumped enormous amounts of money into rebuilding the country know about it but have failed to denounce the country methods mostly because they are in dire need of getting a success story for the aid they give out.

We read stories about the praises and admiration from multilateral donors such as the World Bank, IMF and the European community from time to time, about the successful economic performance made by Rwanda.

Compliments made by the World Bank and IMF, as well as by the European Union that “Rwanda has been an economic success story” in the last decade have been welcomed by the Rwandan government and particularly by the President Kagame who proudly quotes those references in his economic speeches on the world stage.

If Rwanda’s economy had been performing successfully as claimed, thousands of Rwandans would not have been affected by the famine; leading to hundreds of thousands of others fleeing to Uganda in search of foods and lands to cultivate without restrictions.

Below are some of the highlight of Rwanda’s economy:

### **Low GDP**

Rwanda has got a GDP per capita of USD 1,660 at purchasing power parity (PPP) and gross domestic product of USD 7.8 Billion which is lower than some post conflict countries such as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Haiti. Only 16 countries in the world have got a lower GDP per capita. Only two countries in the Great Lakes Region of Africa Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo have lower GDPs than Rwanda. Of course, the GDP alone cannot paint the whole picture of the Rwandan economy but shows the overall performance of the economy.<sup>7</sup>

### **High unemployment**

Rwanda’s population is around 12 million with 56 % constituting economically active population aged between fifteen and sixty four years old. The number of people holding a job in Rwanda’s formal economy is 157,827 based on establishment census 2014<sup>8</sup>. Half of those jobs are concentrated in Kigali City

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<sup>7</sup> Himbara, D. (2016) Kagame economic mirage. South Carolina: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform

<sup>8</sup> National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. “Establishment Census 2014”.

which contains 1.1 million people, another half scattered around the country<sup>9</sup>. Only 3% of the active population holds a job in the country's formal economy.

Furthermore, Rwanda has almost no economic sector in which the output is traded internationally. The tradable economic output adds very little to the overall economy. 91% of Rwandans earn a living in service sectors that are overwhelmingly informal, concentrated in only three economic activities – 52,8% percent in wholesale, retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; 30% in accommodation and food-service activity and 8.5% of services activities including education, health and transportation (ibid).

The majority of establishments are tiny according to the 2014 census. The large majority of establishments in Rwanda is characterised as either micro (90.1%) or small 8.7% totalling 98.8%, whereas the large establishments which employ a hundred or more workers make up 0.2 %. This has had a bearing on tax collection according to Rwanda Authority data 2013 which shows that 0.3 % of all tax payers was responsible for 63,6% percent of tax collection<sup>10</sup>.

The 0.3 % represent 354 of 113,198 of taxpayers in the whole country and is considered as large paying category which is defined as an establishment or an individual with an annual turnover of USD1.4million. Ironically, unlike the Rwandan government, Kenya, a country that considers large taxpayers as an establishment or an individual with a turnover of 7.2 million USD dollars has recently asked the international Community for assistance with the famine that has affected the country.

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<sup>9</sup> ibid

<sup>10</sup> Rwanda Revenue Authority Annual Activity Report for 2012/2013.  
[http://www.old.rra.gov.rw/IMG/pdf/Rra\\_Annual\\_report\\_2012-2013.pdf](http://www.old.rra.gov.rw/IMG/pdf/Rra_Annual_report_2012-2013.pdf)

### **Dependency on foreign Aid.**

Rwanda's dependency on foreign aid is unprecedented. However, such aid is vital because Rwanda is a poor country. According to the World Bank (2016)<sup>11</sup> 63% of Rwandans are poor. Rwanda has the highest Aid per capita in the region. It received USD 10 billion in official aid between 1994 and 2013. This annual aid has increased from USD 321 million in 2000 to USD 1 billion in 2010. The highest amount in a single year was USD 1,2 billion in 2011 before falling to USD 878 million in 2012 due to aid suspension as a result of Rwanda's sponsorship of militias in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In 2013 and 2014 it rose once again to slightly over USD 1 billion.

However, there has been some general criticisms about aid dependency which affect domestic governance, such as accountability, state expenditure and corruption as well as volatility.

**Accountability:** Stephen Crack (2004)<sup>12</sup>, stresses that if donors provide majority of public finances through aid, recipient governments are accountable to those external agencies, therefore it may not be possible to expect a credible social contract to develop between the government and its citizens; perhaps because it still easier for those countries to manage donors demand than managing the political process of building or improving domestic revenue collection. Aid may consequently undercut its original intent of promoting accountability, participation and ownership. That is exactly what has happened in Rwanda.

**State expenditure and corruption:** A number of observers have examined the impact of the large aid volume on expenditure and the overall spending and concluded that aid result in excessive and unsustainable spending that lead to macro – imbalance. The higher macro aid of course may negatively affect

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<sup>11</sup>“ Poverty Rates at International Poverty Lines” Word Bank, <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/2.8>.

<sup>12</sup> Knack, S. (2001) Aid Dependence and the Quality of Governance: Cross-Country Empirical Tests. Southern Economic Journal, 68(2), pp. 310-329.

institutions in various ways such as the potential loss of competitiveness that results in lower exports and slow economic growth, fewer jobs, and increased dependency on external assistance (Booth 2011).<sup>13</sup>

If in a country, the political system is sustained by clientelist relationship and the power means access to states' privileges, aid becomes more desirable for the political management of economic crises. Therefore, states that find it difficult to pay their civil servants are more likely to politicise aid funded workshops, scholarships to study abroad, and other types of bribes which in the end turn aid into government consumption rather than public investment (Vand de Walle 2001)<sup>14</sup>

**Aid volatility:** Booth (2011)<sup>15</sup> found that aid is more volatile than domestic fiscal revenues and that volatility lessens any potential positive benefits of aid on recipients. Aid often leads to poor budgeting and underestimation of revenues particularly since aid commitments tend to overestimate actual disbursement.

The fiscal uncertainty of dependency on external assistance makes long – term planning extremely difficult. Therefore, it may undermine the government priorities and policies.

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<sup>13</sup> Booth, D (2011) Aid, Institutions and Governance: What Have We Learned? Development Policy Review, 29(S1), pp.S5-S26

<sup>14</sup> Van de Walle, N. (2005) Overcoming Stagnation in Aid-Dependent Countries. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

<sup>15</sup> Booth, D (2011) Aid, Institutions and Governance: What Have We Learned? Development Policy Review, 29(S1), pp.S5-S26.

### 3. Extortion of the population

Some of the Rwandan government practices that have contributed in pushing Rwandans to become moneyless are endless schemes that extort money and assets from them.

These schemes are organised from the local administrative level so that the state can ensure that everyone has participated in monetary contribution to those schemes.

The most popular schemes are:

**Agaciro funds:** A UN report accused Rwanda of fuelling a conflict in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo by supporting and arming an armed rebellion. Many European countries and international institutions suspended their financial support to the Rwandan government budget as a result.

In August 2012, the Rwandan government reacted by creating Agaciro Development Fund<sup>16</sup> in order to *'contribute to different development projects that would have otherwise been supported by terminated financial support in the process of increasing financial autonomy of Rwanda'*

The issue with this fund is that the population is required to contribute to it without considering their financial means. Poor families have been forced to sell their lands, livestock and even their houses in order to contribute to this fund. Most businesses have also been ordered to contribute. As result, small businesses ended up shutting down, mostly because Agaciro Funds bills were unaffordable.

There are cases in some public services such as hospitals and local authorities where patrons are required to provide proof of contribution to Agaciro Funds

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.agaciro.rw/index.php?id=2>

as a condition for receiving service. Individuals have also been arrested and imprisoned as result of failure to contribute to that fund or failure to provide proof of their contribution.

**Ishema ryacu fund:** 'Our national, our pride'' This fund was established in June 2015 as result of the arrest of former Rwandan chief spy General Karezi Karake in London on an international arrest warrant issued by Spain. This fund aimed to cover the USD 1Million of conditional bail granted to him<sup>17</sup>.

Between June and August 2015 across the country, individuals and businesses were forced to contribute to this fund as a way of demonstrating their patriotism. When General Karake was finally released and got back his bail money, none of the contributors were reimbursed. According to a local newspaper<sup>18</sup>; more contributions were requested from the population in order 'to be ready in a case a similar problem arise in the future''

**The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) political party contribution:** also known as ''*Umusanzu w'icyama*'''. This fund is collected from the population and businesses by local Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) party officials. Contributing to this fund is not officially compulsory, but in practice officials go door to door collecting this money from people.

Contributing to this fund is considered as a sign of gratitude to the RPF for '*having ended the genocide, saved the country and providing security*'''. Regardless of their financial situation, people actively contribute to that fund to avoid being labelled enemy of the State.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/article/2015-07-07/190387/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.kigalitoday.com/amakuru/mu-rwanda/Hatangijwe-ikigega-Ishema-ryacu-Fund-kigamije-kugoboka-Abanyarwanda-bahuye-n>

**Local night guards (also known as abanyerondo) fund:** This fund is collected by local authorities or local nominated community leaders. The money collected are used to cover expenses and sometimes to pay members of the local community that have volunteered their time in patrolling their neighbourhoods during night time to ensure local security.

## C - WHY IS THE WORLD NOT AWARE OF THIS FAMINE?

### 1. Lack of freedom of speech

Freedom of speech is a fundamental right in any democracy. The Rwandan constitution stipulates that freedom of the press and freedom of information are recognized and guaranteed by the State.

Political and civil rights give people the opportunity to draw attention forcefully to general needs and to demand appropriate public action according to Amartya Sen (1999). The response of a government to the acute suffering of its people often depends on the pressure that is put on it. The exercise of political rights (such as voting, criticizing, protesting, and the like) can make a real difference to the political incentives that operate on a government.

In the terrible history of famines in the world as suggested by Amartya Sen (1999)<sup>19</sup>, no substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent and democratic country with a relatively free press. We cannot find exceptions to this rule, no matter where we look: the famines of Ethiopia, Somalia, or other dictatorial regimes; famines in the Soviet Union in the 1930s; China's 1958-61

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<sup>19</sup> Amartya Sen (1999) Democracy as a Universal Value. *Journal of Democracy* 10 (3) pp 3-17



famine with the failure of the Great Leap Forward; or earlier still, the famines in Ireland or India under alien rule.

China, although it was in many ways doing much better economically than India, still managed (unlike India) to have a famine, indeed the largest recorded famine in world history: Nearly 30 million people died in the famine of 1958-61, while faulty governmental policies remained uncorrected for three full years. The policies went uncriticised because there were no opposition parties in parliament, no free press, and no multiparty elections. Indeed, it is precisely this lack of challenge that allowed the deeply defective policies to continue even though they were killing millions each year. The same can be said about the contemporary famine occurring in Rwanda.

Famines are often associated with what looks like natural disasters, and commentators often settle for the simplicity of explaining famines by pointing to events such as: the floods in China during the failed Great Leap Forward, the droughts and crop failures in Ethiopia and Rwanda. Nonetheless, many countries with similar natural problems or even worse manage perfectly well because a responsive government intervenes to help alleviate hunger including seeking help from the International community. Even the poorest democratic countries that have faced terrible droughts or floods or other natural disasters (such as India in 1973, or Zimbabwe and Botswana in the early 1980s) have been able to feed their people without experiencing a famine (Amartya Sen 1983)<sup>20</sup>.

However, it is not the case in Rwanda, simply because the government is known to undermine the political and civil rights by accumulating power through elimination of potential competition, intimidation of the population by security forces, forcibly killing or jailing journalists who criticize the government. The Rwandan government also has the reputation to inflate

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<sup>20</sup> Amartya Sen (1983) Development: Which Way Now?" Economic Journal 93.

economic development and to use propaganda to exaggerate social economic conditions<sup>21</sup> (including the near absence of unemployment). Therefore, the Rwandan authorities have refused to declare a state of emergency in the worst affected regions where famine has killed hundreds and forced thousands to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, particularly in Uganda.

Rwanda has deliberately refused to acknowledge the famine. Due to its control of the press and public freedom of expression, the International community is not fully aware of the extent of the current famine.

## **2. Extensive positive image promotion**

The Rwandan government has worked hard to promote a positive image internationally. UK and US based Public relations firms have been hired to help Rwanda to beautify its profile and reputation at the international scene<sup>22</sup>.

Those firm's roles include "highlighting President Kagame and his visionary leadership" and "The Rwandan Miracle: Healing of a Nation"<sup>23</sup>. As a result, the president of Rwanda has been invited to speak at Harvard<sup>24</sup> on international development by sharing his success story.

The story of a ravaging famine would not fit with the positive image that the Rwandan government is striving to sustain by spending more than \$50,000 per month on self-promotion, while the income of the average Rwandan is less than \$1000 per year.

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<sup>21</sup> Himbara, D.(2016) Kagame economic mirage. South Carolina: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/how-a-us-agency-cleaned-up-rwandas-genocide-stained-image/article542612/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.fara.gov/docs/6055-Exhibit-AB-20110812-1.pdf#page=17>

<sup>24</sup> <https://college.harvard.edu/college-events/conversation-his-excellency-paul-kagame>

## D - CONCLUSION

Our report has demonstrated a clear picture, causes and consequences of the hidden famine in Rwanda that is affecting millions of Rwandans and thousands leaving the country in search for food.

It is important that the Rwandan government cease to ignore this problem and take its responsibilities by undertaking all steps necessary that would alleviate suffering of victims of Nzaramba.

The international community should put pressure to the Rwandan government to allow them to fully access all affected areas in order to assess the needs and provide all required support.

## E- RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Short term:**
  - ❖ International community should intervene in Rwanda and provide immediate food assistance.
  - ❖ The Rwandan government should allow the International Community to establish the exact number of people and regions affected by the famine.
  - ❖ Organise an international appeal for funding that will be used to address this urgent famine situation.
  - ❖ Neighbouring countries, particularly the Ugandan government should provide humanitarian assistance to Rwandans fleeing the famine crisis.

- ❖ The Rwandan government should unconditionally allow the international humanitarian and aid agencies to intervene freely in investigating and addressing the famine crisis identified.
  - ❖ The Rwanda government should provide the necessary support and assistance to those agencies in their intervention.
  
  - **Long term:**
    - ❖ The Rwandan government should undertake steps to open political space and allow freedom expression and media.
    - ❖ The Rwandan government should undertake steps to review the current agricultural policies.
    - ❖ The Rwandan government should undertake steps to put in place robust mechanisms and procedures that would effectively collect accurate social, economic and health wellbeing of population in order to inform policy making and service delivery.
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**GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR RWANDANS HUMAN RIGHTS**