# Environmental protection and internal population displacement: challenges and opportunities. Case study of Gishwati forest area in Rwanda

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**Abstract**

*This paper concerns internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the Gishwati protected area due to the 2007 landslides and flooding risks in Rwanda. Those IDPs were relocated in different resettlement sites in Nyabihu and Rubavu Districts. This paper assesses socio-economic challenges and opportunities faced by IDPs, and also suggests alternative solutions to mitigate the negative consequences of population displacement. In total, 160 heads of households were selected purposively and a snowball technique was applied. Quantitative data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS software while qualitative data from focus group discussions were classified into components for content analysis.*

*Research results indicate that IDPs were not satisfied with the way in which the displacement process was conducted because it used force and violence in some cases. Besides, IDPs encountered economic, social and psychological losses during the displacement process. These include mainly land, houses, disruption of social relationships, disturbance and stress. The majority of IDPs underestimated the value of assistance received compared to their losses because the assistance and protection provided were perceived far below their new needs. Even though their living conditions were worsened by the displacement process, they recognized the positives aspects of their displacement as they survived from floods and landslides. In this regard, IDPs access better resettlement sites and public infrastructures such as administrative services, health centres, schools, markets, roads, electricity and clean water in the new localitiesr.*

*Based on the challenges experienced by IDPs from Gishwati, the paper recommends adequate information, involvement of IDPs in the displacement process, relevant assistance including professional insertion and psychological counselling, permanent education, long-term planning and indemnity of disturbance for smooth displacement and sustainable resettlement[[1]](#footnote-1).*

***Key words*:** Environmental protection, internal population displacement, Gishwati forest, assistance, IDPs.

**1. Introduction**

The population displacements in Rwanda have a long history. Some were due to food shortage or famines, known as *gusuhuka* in Kinyarwanda. Others consisted of sporadic emigration to the Belgian Congo or British colonies of Uganda and Tanganyika in search of land and job opportunities; and definitive emigration to the new resettlement in farming communities known as *paysannats* in French. It is also noted that the populations’ displacements were observed in Rwanda due to socio-political conflicts that led to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.

In addition to population displacements due to the causes highlighted above, Rwandan people experience other types of displacements, namely those caused by development induced projects, environmental conservation programs and those imposed by natural disasters affecting particularly people located in high risk zones. In any case, population displacement is not only a matter of moving from one geographical area to another. The general definition of population displacement also includes displaced people – a wide range of people uprooted from their familiar environment not only physically but also emotionally, psychologically and economically (Gebre, 2005).

In this regard, researchers had a scientific curiosity to see to which extend rights of displaced people from Gishwati forest had been provided. In the context of this study, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) utilizes the definition held by the Global Protection Cluster Group (2007), which describes them as

“*Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.”*

The Gishwati Forest Reserve is situated in North-Western Rwanda. It lies within the greater Albertine Rift and is close to Kivu Lake. Its relief is characterized by steep hills with an elevation range of 2,000-3,000 m above mean sea level. The forested area stood at about 70,000 ha in 1930; 28,000 ha in 1960 and 8,800 ha in 1990. Deforestation gathered pace in the following 15 years and in 2005, the forest residue covered only a dismal of 600 hectares. Inappropriate land use management policies of the early 1980s led to the conversion of 70% of Gishwati’s natural forest cover into pasture and pine plantations. A further 10 % was designated as a military zone, leaving only 20% as a natural forest (REMA, 2011).

The gradual deforestation of Gishwati is pointed out by UNEP (2011). Exploitation of the forests for commercial products such as charcoal, timber, medicine and food has been the main driver of this deforestation. The 1978 satellite image shows the Gishwati Forest Reserve as a dark green carpet of dense forest nearly covering the entire protected area. The 2006 image shows that most of the forest has been cleared; the dark green areas have been replaced by patches of pink and light green where the vegetation has been largely removed. Only a fraction of the forest that was intact in 1978 remains; what is left is in degraded conditions.

Resettlement of returning refugees in the aftermath of 1994 genocide against the Tutsi saw the loss of most of the remaining natural forest to settlements and agriculture. In 1999, the government capped the resettlement beneficiaries to 818 families on a 3,000 ha site called Arusha[[2]](#footnote-2) in Gishwati. Families that had settled on areas that were especially prone to soil erosion and landslides were resettled outside Gishwati.

Even before deforestation had taken hold due to resettlement, about 2/3 of Gishwati's natural forest had already been converted into pastures and pine plantations by a World Bank project in the 1980s. Gishwati subsequently became one of the choice destinations for resettlement of old case returnees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). One major resettlement site was Arusha, where local authorities provided returnees with land inside the remaining intact forest, whereas available pastureland nearby would in retrospect have been a better option.

When returnees arrived in Arusha village in 1995, they were temporarily sheltered under plastic sheeting. As settlement became permanent, more trees were cut down for construction purposes and undergrowth was cleared for cultivation. The first 500 families received about one ha of land each, which thereafter was reduced to 0.6 ha per family. In 1999, the resettlement area in Gishwati was restricted to 3,070 ha and the Cabinet of the Government of Rwanda decided to remove people from Gishwati forest and resettle them in nearly sites. Consequently, in 2011 about 818 families left Arusha village. Currently, local authorities acknowledge the entire population of Gishwati (about 20,000 people) and resettled them along the main road Musanze-Rubavu. Plans for relocation were spurred by devastating floods and landslides in 2007, linked to intensive deforestation in Gishwati (UNEP, 2011).

In September 2007, heavy rains caused disastrous floods and landslides that destroyed houses and agricultural fields of approximately 1,000 families in Nyabihu and Rubavu districts. A total of 342 houses were completely damaged, while 678 houses were partially damaged with walls cracked, roofs blown away and windows shattered (UNEP, 2011). In fact, the urgency of the displacement was evident. In the disaster’s aftermath, the affected families were settled in two temporary camps in Bigogwe and Kanzenze sectors of Nyabihu and Rubavu districts, respectively.

In fact, research on population displacement underlines that the involuntary displacement goes beyond movement from one geographical area to another and implies rights to protection and assistance in short run and need of support in the process settling down (Ketelers 2012). This right to protection for IDPs came into debate recently compared to the displaced people beyond national borders. Thus IDPs are seen as subjects of protection, especially by national governments, and in case of necessity, by international governments, as like any other individuals as ~~it is~~ emphasized by following international legal instruments: Article n.22 Universal Declaration Human Rights related to social security as a right for all in need, article 13 (1) of same declaration related to free movement of people, article 12(1) of the Covenant of Civil and political rights. Furthermore, in the African context the commitment of African Governments is manifested through the adoption in 1981 of African Charter on Human and People’s rights (Gebre, 2005).

Scientifically speaking, this need of protection for IDPs is recognized as of great importance, especially in an African context where population displacement is ~~eminent and is~~ seen not only as a matter of present but also as a matter of the future because of conflicts found in many coins of continent and because of proliferation of different projects of development (Gebre & Ohta, 2005). To emphasize this need of protection of IDPs is both a theoretical model and a methodological tool, Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) developed by Cernea (2000). Cernea identified four main types within the large variety of displacement processes in African context:

1. Displacement by development programs (in infrastructure, public utilities, etc.);
2. Displacement by environmental conservation programs (establishment of national parks, game reserves, and game corridors);
3. Displacement by military programs for constructing military training and testing facilities;
4. Displacement by population-transfer programs initiated by government, under either a development rationale or disaster-avoidance rationale.

Cernea states that the involuntary displacements restrict individuals’ rights, and often lead people to end up worse off. This raises major issues of social justice and equity. In fact, the outcome of those displacements is an unjustifiable repartition of development costs and benefits; some people enjoy the gain of development while others bear its pains.

Furthermore, Cernea proposes a model of measures to prevent impoverishments and to reconstruct and improve the livelihoods of displaced persons in their new localities. To do so, the IRR model proposes a set of adjustments to be taken into account in case of displacement and resettlement ~~is proposed by the IRR model~~. Similar to the way in which its risks analysis deconstructs displacement processes into distinct risks, the IRR also deconstructs risk-reversal into a set of reconstructive-pro poor support activities that can lead from landlessness to land-based resettlement; from joblessness to reemployment; from homelessness to house reconstruction; from marginalization to social inclusion; from increased morbidity to improved health care; from food insecurity to adequate nutrition; from loss of access to restoration of community assets and services; from social disarticulation to rebuilding networks and communities (Cernea, 2005).

Other ~~researches~~ findings on population displacement that applied the IRR model show two main tendencies.

The first tendency indicates that in most cases population displacement leads to different forms not only of impoverishments but also of destitution and debilitation:

Manlagnit et al. (2012) worked on internal displacement caused by landslides of 2006 in St. Bernard, one of 19 municipalities comprising the province of southern Leyte in Philippines. Findings of the study reveal that people in St Bernard experienced a set of impoverishments resulting from displacement. This includes, among others, loss of ~~materiel~~ material assets and non material, like disarticulation of social networks.

Bhide (2012) from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in India, in her article **“**Issues in Displacement in Asia” focusing on displacement due to Tsunami, discussed ~~on~~ the major causes of displacement in the region of South and Southeast Asia at the end of 2008. She found that displaced people lost not only their homes but also their means of livelihoods. During the period after the Tsunami, a massive humanitarian aid effort involved international agencies and governments, as well as a host of non-governmental and other organizations.

The reconstruction experiences of various countries by Tourism Concern (Burma, India, Maldives, Sri-Lanka, Thailand) reveal disturbing facts. In Sri Lanka, buffer zones were established for preventing disasters. While ~~the~~ several hotels were allowed to exist in the zones, the displaced are being refused permission to reconstruct ~~their~~ temporary shelters. In Thailand, the reconstruction has been seemingly done in a speedy, efficient and authoritarian manner. The private sector profited the situation for setting up illegal developments while several of the survivors appeared to have been pushed away from the beaches into small, cramped houses. In India, the reconstruction program supported by the World Bank has been used to deny housing, to displace survivors, and to deny them any assistance. In Burma, the reconstruction was accompanied by a severe curtailment of civil rights at the end all these experiences and revealed that thousands of displaced populations still continue to remain homeless and deprived of ~~an~~ access to the coasts where they had traditional claims. Indeed, those coasts are highly prized beach land and ~~then~~ the hotel industry has used the reconstruction as an opportunity to further their unhindered access to the beaches. For the survivors, the reconstruction thus represents a second tsunami, even worse in its impact as it has more permanent impacts.

The second case on displacement ~~in Orissa~~ concerns Orissa, which is one of the poorest states in India, but also one that is rich in water resources, forests, deposits of coal, iron, etc. These resources are mostly located in tribal habitats. Thus, the creation of parks and construction of dams ~~caused displacement of~~ displaced several families who received very little or no compensation, even thirty years after the displacement. Some of the families were displaced several times. Infrastructure projects that displace people are seen as public interest and thereby restrict the negotiation capacities of affected people. The impacts of displacement are not just impoverishing as ~~it is~~ underlined by the author but also ~~destituting and~~ debilitating. ~~Also~~ Additionally, marginality characterizes the identity of displaced persons who are weak in terms of entitlement, education and economic attainment, political organization, etc. ~~Also,~~ The State of Orissa is also facing of a struggle headed by a group of rebels (Naxals) who believe in waging a violent war against the state to achieve social justice.

The study reveals that displacement has emerged as phenomena that are socially, culturally, economically, and politically destructive. Displacement is seen as an inevitable cost of development ~~but~~ and also as a sacrifice of few for the larger cause. In conclusion, the author shows that policy response to issues of displacement is so inadequate in spite of recognition of displacement issues for some time.

The second tendency represented by very few cases indicates that population displacement results in reconstruction and prevention of impoverishment risks after displacement.

Faure’s work quoted by Cernea (2005) intended to ascertain risk with regards to impoverishment trends set in or whether they were prevented or mitigated. The author took a case study of one of the shantytowns named Kebb El Mina situated near Nouakchott center where it was needed to relocate about 30,000 people grouped into 4,800 households for infrastructure construction.

Along with this research, the author noted that the operation was so delicate because people feared having to leave an area where most of them had spent about ten years and people felt they were at a higher risk of losing all their assets. Faure noted that to curb the situation, the promoters of this relocation took measures and provided the area with both long and short-term security. In fact, before transferring people, water services, school, health center, latrine market, and transportation have been established in the new resettlement. In addition, legal entitlements have been implemented to guarantee 120 m2 per recipient family. The main findings of this research showed that in the area of study some risks were prevented, namely landlessness and homelessness. Additionally, the effects of lost employment was mitigated through cash payment for loss of income during relocation and readjustment, and new opportunities of job creation were created based on the massive population move and the sudden boom of construction. Among the main findings, Faure also noted that the risk of food insecurity did not manifest and the marginalization risk was successfully prevented. However, she noted that the new system of individual house-latrines, requiring weekly empting, may generate new serious morbidity risks.

Based on the above mentioned works it is clear that mitigation of impoverishments resulting from displacement is linked to the causes of displacement. This fact makes different, forms of displacement without avoiding similarities in consequences. The IRR plays a role of methodological indication and evaluation of the displacement process and for that it is presented as one of the helpful tools that can be used in any case of displacement risk and impoverishment mitigation.

It is in the context of IRR model that this research seeks to analyze the case of displaced people from the Gishwati forest area. In fact, the displacement in this area reflects two types of population displacement aspects underlined by Cernea, namely the displacement by environmental conservation programs and displacement by population-transfer programs initiated by government under either a development rationale or disaster-avoidance rationale. Thus, this research answers to the following main question: “what are challenges and opportunities faced by IDPs from Gishwati forest area?” Specifically, (i) how did IDPs appreciate their social integration and living conditions in hosting communties (ii) what are the socio-economic challenges faced by IDPs? (iii) what are the socio-economic opportunities encountered by IDPs? and (iv) what are the alternative solutions to mitigate the negative consequences of population displacement?

**2. Methodology**

The study population of this research is made up by 1,690 families of IDPs due to natural disaster prevention and environmental protection. The current study privileged a qualitative approach in collecting primary data rather than a quantitative approach, because the researchers wanted to find cases, events, or actions that can clarify and deepen understanding about the phenomenon being studied (Flick cited by Neuman, 2011).

Hence, the following main non-probability or non-random sampling techniques were used:

*(i) Purposive or judgemental sampling*: In this case, researchers collected information on locations of origin and/or destination for IDPs. Researchers identified also particular types of cases for in-depth investigation. This last category included IDPs who were previously leaders in the localities of origin as they were considered as key informants.

*(ii) Snowball sampling*:through this technique, researchers asked identified IDP to name other IDPs with similar case she/he knows and if possible she/he directs the researchers to reach the named IDPs.

By combining the two sampling techniques aforementioned, the sample size was comprised of 89 and 71 respondents from Nyabihu and Rubavu Districts respectively. The taken sample size was sufficient for generalization of results as Bailey (1994) argues that the correct sample size depends upon the nature of the population and the purpose of the study. Given any population size, this author affirms that 30 cases are the minimum sample size for studies in which statistical data analysis is to be done (Bailey, 1994: 97).

*(iii) Focus group discussions:* they were conducted within communities of origin and hosting ones.

Quantitative data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires and analyzed using SPSS software while qualitative data from focus group discussions were classified into components for content analysis. Results from interviews, FGDs and observations were triangulated.

**3.** **Results presentation**

This section presents the socioeconomic characteristics of the households’ heads, social integration and living conditions after population displacement, challenges faced by IDPs, opportunities for IDPs and alternative solutions.

**3.1. Socioeconomic characteristics of households’ heads**

The socioeconomic characteristics of households’ heads presented here concern their gender, marital status and family size, age group, educational level, and occupation.

***Gender of household heads***

The sample size comprised 106 males and 54 females that respectively represent 66.3% and 33.7%. The males are dominant because in patriarchal society, the males are usually the households’ heads. The proportion of female-headed households is high due to several factors: widowhood, separation of spouses, instability due to displacement situation.

In regards with the position of respondents from selected households, females were principal respondents (58.1%) to the interview because women are usually at home for domestic activities while men move away from their respective homes to search for jobs.

***Marital status of households’ heads***

Among household heads respondents, the majority were legally married (38.1%) followed by illegally married (33.8%) and widows / widowers (25.0%). These were referred to as legally married, those who were officially registered as husbands and wives. The illegally married are those living together without any legal framework due to different factors, such as polygamous custom[[3]](#footnote-3) or a status of displacement which often leads to separation between different members of families. The widow/widower status is caused also by the displacement situation itself (instability of social organization) which lead generally to death of one of the spouses. In the case of Rwanda, the widowhood is high mainly due to the 1994 genocide.

In the Gishwati area, it was observed that family size varies from 1 to 14 members. The average number of permanent residents per household is six persons (family size = 5.5 ± 2.5 S.d[[4]](#footnote-4)), which is higher than the national average of 4 individuals (NISR, 2014)[[5]](#footnote-5).

The IDPs in the Nyabihu district have larger family sizesthan those of Rubavu district. One of the reasons explaining these differences is that in some cases, more than one family live in one single house. This is because during the resettlement process, only household heads who owned houses in their locality of origin were given new houses as compensation. The young people who get married have no land and no means to build their own houses and thus choose to stay in the homestead of their parents. This is why it was easy to find grand-parents, parents and children living under the same dwelling, sharing meals and having only one person whom they all regard as the head of the household. The displacement affected the usual family structure where parents live with their unmarried children whereas the married children are normally supposed to be independent and live in a separate house. In addition, among the IDPs many families belong to "historically marginalized people" who used to live in promiscuity nearby and within Gishwati forest. Indeed poverty and promiscuity were identified in this case.

***Age of the household head***

The age of the household head ranges between 23 and 107 years. The majority (51.3%) of household heads are adults between 36 and 65 years which is most active working age. However, there is a high proportion of young people between 23 and 35 years who are heads of household (26.9%). This is in line with the national statistics which show that the Rwandan population is generally young; 25.8% are aged between 20 and 34 years (NISR, 2014).

Old people (> 65 years old) are less represented among household heads (17.5%). These old people are economically dependent. A very few were not able to reveal their age (4.4%) mainly because of illiteracy or old age.

***Education level of household heads***

The level of education is very low, with 78.1% of respondents who are illiterate. In contrast, only 20% have completed primary education level. Very few completed vocational (1.3%) and secondary (0.6%) levels. The social instability linked to successive waves of displacements reduced the access to education. Those who were more educated and had more means went to look for better resettlement in urban areas and commercial centers where more business opportunities are found.

***Occupation of household heads***

The majority of interviewed household heads depend on agriculture and livestock production (80%), which are in the case of Rwanda complementary activities for their livelihood. This confirms the national statistics which show that over 80% of Rwandans depend on agriculture (NISR, 2014). Paradoxically, the majority of IDPs do not have land and practice agriculture as laborers for neighboring farmers of the hosting communities. Most of the IDPs (94.2%) received only a small plot (0.25 ha) for house-settlement as compensation of their previous assets. In addition, the low level of education of IDPs obliged them to engage in agro-pastoral activities which occupied the majority of them even before displacement.

The IDPs from Gishwati area were pastoralists in the past. Some kept more than ten cows before displacement. But when displaced they were allowed to keep only one cow per household because there was no pasture available. Some of the animals died due to diseases or lack of food or were sold in order to handle urgent household needs, especially food after displacement.

Due to the low level of education, IDPs have limited ability to diversify their occupation. Only a few of them are occupied in trade (3.8%), handcrafts (2.5) and civil servant jobs (1.3%). There are also some activities like casual labor “*guca incuro* and *induruburi[[6]](#footnote-6)’’* for their subsistence (7.5%). Females are more engaged than males in small trading activities for bananas, maize, vegetables, tomatoes and in handcrafts. The secondary occupation is resourcefulness or *induruburi* which was mentioned above. Other secondary activities reported by IDPs include small trading, handcrafts, masonry and religious ministries.

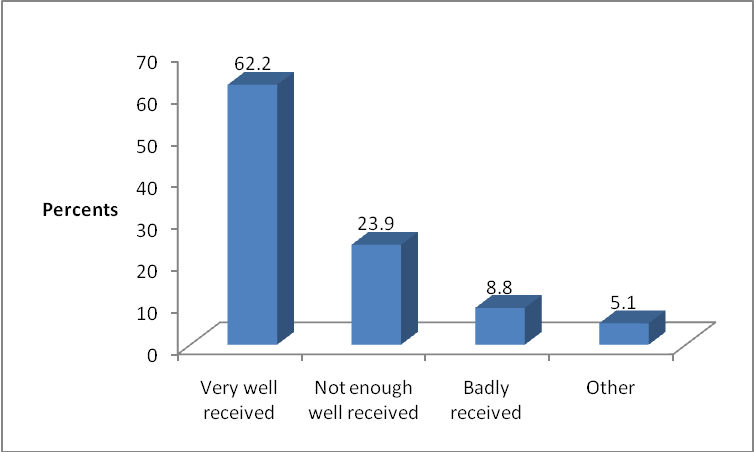
In sum, the socio-economic characteristics of household heads revealed that the majority were males and married. The family size comprises six permanent residents and this number is higher than the national average (4 persons). Majority of household heads are in the active working age (20-65 years). However, their level of education is very low and it explains partially why agro-pastoralism was reported to be the main activity and occupies above 80% of IDPs. It was noted that agro-pastoral activities constitute the main cause of progressive destruction of Gishwati forest since the 1980’s. Since Gishwati was falling under the status of protected areas, the people living there were destined to leave.

**3.2. Social integration and living conditions after displacement**

Displaced people who resettle in new localities often experience new needs to be satisfied. Some of those needs come from the losses of their previous locality; others are associated with becoming new members of hosting communities. Besides, their living conditions can be positively or negatively affected by the displacement phenomenon.

***Hospitality of hosting communities towards IDPs***

In general, displaced people were very well received in their new hosting communities.



**Figure 1: Appreciation of hospitality of hosting communities by IDPs**

The following sentences describe the type of hospitality received by IDPs:

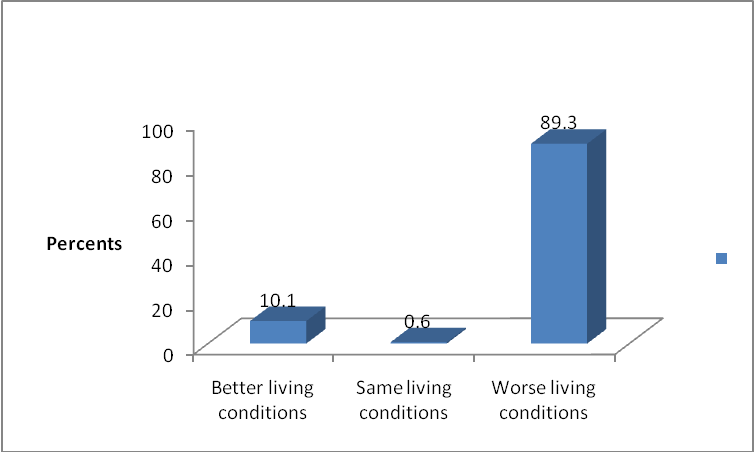
*“On the arrival we were provided food by neighbours”, “some of them accommodated us free of charge”, “others gave us houses for rent at a reasonable price”, “they frequently visited us”, “they invited us in family ceremonies such as marriages, religious ceremonies, etc.; “we were provided jobs on their farms”, “they assisted us in making our own shelter”.*

However, when the GoR obliged the host communities to share their small land with the newcomers, problems arised. The former accepted unwillingly.

Results show 23.9% respondents who affirmed that they were not well received, arguing the following reasons: *“we were considered as invaders”, “we were resettled on their farms”; “the neighbors did not visit us, but they could not chase us away where the Government had settled us”, “they did not appreciate how we invaded their space” [[7]](#footnote-7)*. Another proportion of IDPs (8.8%) asserted being badly received. In extreme cases, host communities were very reluctant and violent towards the newcomers: *“they were sometimes attacking our shelter-sheetings (burende) to claim for compensation for their respective land from the governement”*.

***Living conditions after displacement***

The population displacement boosted up the lifestyle of a poor minority while pulling down the living conditions of the majority of IDPs. In fact, the majority of IDPs (89.3%) find their living conditions worse as compared to those before displacement.



**Figure 2: Appreciation of their new living conditions by IDPs**

While explaining the reasons why their living conditions went down compared to the previous situation, they said that food, land and domestic animals were lost during the displacement. Some IDPs said:

*“Before, we had enough land to cultivate, enough food and livestock”.*

*“We had permanent job but now it is not easy to get food or job”*;

*“Currently the situation is worse because we passed a long time without farming before we received a new land”.*

*"We were farming, harvesting and eating enough but now we survive on God’s will”.*

*"We had enough capacity to feed our families, now we do not have any small business generating income and food”.*

*“No land, no food stocks, no more livestock, we live on little means and buy everything from the local market.”*

*“Nowadays, we are poor, our kids do not have school fees”;*

*“We have gone impoverished, we sold our livestock to pay school fees”, but now our cows are almost lost for nothing because the graduates for whom we paid school fees do not get jobs.”*

*"We were not purchasing food, fire wood and water, but now we do.”*

The food situation is so critical that some IDPs were stealing food in farms because of hunger while others preferred to emigrate to the DRC. Some IDPs declared that they received assistance from their relatives, which explains their increasing economic dependency. One of them declared: *“The situation is very bad, our child who is at University is supported by his brothers, and they help me sometimes with small support like these armchairs, electricity, etc.”*

Access to food depends on the availability of job and resources. Yet, the displaced people in new localities didn’t have jobs or other resources. Before their displacement, most of IDPs lived on agriculture and livestock and had larger and more fertile land. The loss of these resources exposed them to higher risk of vulnerability. Such situation leads some of them to adopt deviant behaviours such as theft, delinquency and begging.

In contrast, there are few cases (10.1%) who found their living conditions to be better than before. They said:

*“The current situation is better because the land is productive, we harvest more beans, Irish potatoes, maize... depending on rainfall. In some cases, I give surplus of beans to my neighbors”;*

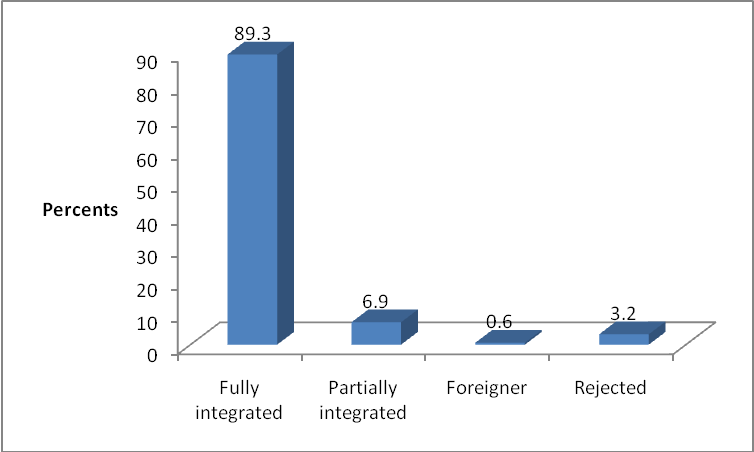
*“Our livelihoods are better now because we live near the market and health facilities.”*

*“The current situation is better, I live in a better house and I have where to farm.”*

In general, those who appreciate positively their new living conditions are those who were resettled near modern public infrastructures like roads, markets, health centers, schools and electricity or those who lived in marginalized situations before their displacement.

***Integration of IDPs in hosting communities***

The large majority of IDPs declared to be fully integrated (89.2%) within the hosting communities.



**Figure 3: Appreciation of their integration by IDPs**

The IDPs appreciated positively their integration within the hosting communities. One of them testifies: *“we invite each other in wedding ceremonies, we support each other in funerals, we share everything”[[8]](#footnote-8)*. Similar testimonies emerge from the focus group discussions: *"we share daily life without any discrimination."*

This shows that IDPs and host communities share the same culture and identity and it did not take a long time for the IDPs to feel at home in the new localities. In fact, the people of Rwanda have one culture. In addition, the majority of IDPs were resettled not far from the locality of origin.

Few IDPs mentioned that they were partially integrated (7%) or even rejected (3.2%). This was due to either diverging interests linked to land sharing with the host communities or to some small differences in behavior.

**3.3. Challenges faced by IDPs**

Main challenges cited by IDPs include among others the lack of food (86.2%), the lack of land (68.1%), the lack of firewood (67.5%), reduced income (60.6%) and a lack of job (31.2%). The change in daily diet composition (41.9%) and quality (33.1%) was also observed. These are economic challenges related to the satisfaction of basic needs of displaced people.

Social challenges are also expressed by IDPs. They include separation from neighbors (35%) friends and relatives (32.5%), or peer age groups for children (16.2%), due to the population displacement.

Additional challenges related to poor habitat and sanitation are also highlighted in some resettlements. IDPs evoked the lack of clean water (24.4%), lack of latrines (12.5%) and housing (12.5%).

Other miscellaneous challenges (40%) are expressed as follows: the cost of clean water, pests and diseases for livestock, difficulties in school reintegration for children, lack of pastures and cowsheds, increased risk of robberies, malnutrition, lack of affordable bathing, corners and kitchens, etc.

Some of these challenges are to be associated with social strain and the feeling of frustration. In fact, the IDPs found a gap between their lifestyle before and after displacement.

**Figure 4: Challenges faced by IDPs after displacement**

The challenges aforementioned result from some following losses indicated by the IDPs.

In both districts, most of the IDPs lost their main assets, including respectively houses (98.1%), agricultural land (93.8%), cattle (54.4%), and small livestock[[9]](#footnote-9) (51.2%), woodlots (35.6%) which constitute the main source of energy for Rwandan families, and commercial activities (10.6%). Few IDPs lost pastures, cowsheds, rented land, etc. (8.1%).

In addition, IDPs experienced other losses including distortion of families, when some friends (47.1%) and family members (44.2%) were separated while joining different resettlement sites. They lost also socioeconomic services such as permanent jobs (39.1%), health care services and insurance (27.5%), access to cooperatives and small financial associations (26.8%) as well as access to schools for children (14.5%) and faith based organizations (10.9%).

Furthermore, the displacement from a natural environment to grouped settlements caused the IDPs to lose free access to natural resources including firewood (73.9%), water (34.1%), fertile land for specific crops (Irish potatoes, maize, peas,…), honey, raw material for handcraft, etc.

It was noted that the IDPs lost especially large and fertile land that allowed them to get enough harvest ensuring them food, money and stocks. Some of the losses mentioned are linked to the lifestyle of the locality of Gishwati forest area dominated by agro pastoral activities. After displacement, IDPs are confronting food shortage and continued income decrease.

The lack of food mentioned by the large majority of respondents is to be regarded in the broader context of the disturbance in the entire household system of food production, after people have lost their land. As noted earlier, 80% of the displaced households live on subsistence agriculture and animal husbandry. In the Rwandan context, this means that every household is participating in producing their own food, on their own land.

Briefly, it is evident that displacement has limited, for the IDPs the ability to satisfy their basic needs, and reduced their sources of food and income, with less access to agricultural land and to permanent job.

**3.4. Opportunities for IDPs**

Even though IDPs met with challenges, they also got some opportunities to improve their livelihoods. The main opportunities that were experienced include access to better settlement and housing conditions (61.9%) as well as possibility to have access to electricity (21.8%), to health services (52.4%), proximity of schools (48.3%), access to clean water (36.7%) and latrines in better conditions (34.7%). In addition, new neighborhood networks (32.7%) and new peer groups for children (25.9%) arose.

Other opportunities (34.7%) were revealed such as proximity of public socio-economic infrastructures due to grouped resettlement *“umudugudu”*; job and small business creation opportunities, reduction of risks of disasters and more security.

**Figure 5: New opportunities for IDPs after displacement**

The displacement also helped the IDPs to meet the GoR policy of resettlement. Indeed, through this national policy, the GoR aims at improving the living conditions of its population, by giving them access to public socioeconomic infrastructure. Referring to this policy, it is difficult to achieve this goal when people are living in scattered settlements and/or in high risk zones, as it was the case in Gishwati forest area.

**3.5. Appreciation of displacement process and suggestions**

The IDPs expressed their opinions about the implementation of the displacement process they experienced and suggested ways for improving such operations in the future.

As for the appreciation of displacement process the IDPs went through, 56.1% of them were disappointed while 42.4% appreciated it.

Indeed, on one side, for those who did not appreciate the way displacement was implemented, some of them saw it as a forced displacement which sometimes used violence. The majority of IDPs deplored the fact that they were displaced from their land and houses without any other source of income in exchange.

On the other side, some IDPs appreciated the displacement process, saying that it was smoothly conducted and that the GoR mobilized transport facilities to help them to displace.

Others were disappointed and wanted to return back to neighboring countries, such as the DRC, but they were not given this alternative due to the loss of assets and lack of identity documents from a border district[[10]](#footnote-10).

Suggestions to improve smooth population displacement process were given by the respondents. Two thirds of IDPs advocated for equitable compensation (66.9%), others for giving IDPs adequate information and in due time (38.9%) while 33.8% privileged consultation and active participation of IDPs in the displacement process. Besides, 27.4% of IDPs emphasized that the government institutions should make a long term planning, 26.8% of them insisted on educating people about the appropriate behaviour to adopt in case of displacement, while 24.2% advocated giving reparation to victims of displacement.

Other suggestions for 45.9% of IDPs include: providing them assistance after displacement including material and psychological support as well as income maintenance; planning and providing in advance basic necessities in the new localities, as well as making regular follow up of the IDPs. In addition, some respondents recommended the prevention of conflicts between IDPs and hosting communities and providing support to ensure IDPs professional insertion. Others suggested to be resettled near their localities of origin. Furthermore, repetitive displacement and the use of violence in the displacement implementation should also be avoided.

**Figure 6: Suggestions for improving displacement process expressed by IDPs**

Suggestions from FGD recommended public assistance to IDPs, smooth displacement, appropriate methods to displace people with respect to human rights, providing IDPs with other alternative means of living through gaining new skills, organization in cooperatives, trainings in income generating activities, opportunity to choose the new locality, etc.

Globally, even if some IDPs asserted that the displacement was violent; there were others who recognized its necessity due to the increased frequency and cost of disasters within Gishwati forest area. In fact, those who accepted to displace willingly were given transport facilities while those who resisted were chased from the area by force.

Consequently, based on this experience and for smooth displacement in the future, IDPs proposed long term planning and involvement of IDPs in the process; giving disturbance indemnities in addition to equitable compensation to victims of displacement; as well as educating and accompanying IDPs for their adequate insertion in the new localities.

**4. Results Discussion**

This research attempted to find answers to the following research questions:

*(i) how did IDPs appreciate their social integration and living conditions in hosting communities?*

In relation with care and hospitality received by IDPs, it is revealed that the majority of IDPs (89.2%) did not experience any problem of integration. This is because the IDPs did not relocate far from their locality of origin, thus it was easy for them to feel in group as do hosting community members. There was a small proportion of IDPs declared that they were not fully integrated. This can be explained by the fact that population displacement gives place to the emergence of *new* *poverty* which is a side effect of development programs (Cernea, 2005). In fact, some IDPs were provided with houses in new localities without kitchens and latrines. In addition, some of them experienced conflicts because they were resettledin plots taken from their neighbors in host communities.

However, even if there was not a big problem linked to integration, the living conditions of most IDPs faced the impoverishment risk of losing access to common property and natural resources (Cernea 2005). In fact, 89.3% of IDPs said that their living conditions were pulled down by the displacement process because they lost forests and their products and other available services in place of origin. Such a kind of impoverishment generated other types of impoverishments like food insecurity because at the same time they lost land, job and resulting income, all associated to the Gishwati forest area.

*(ii) what are the socio-economic challenges faced by IDPs?*

Based on the results presented above, the IDPs faced different challenges which can be interpreted in terms of various impoverishment risks including mainly:

* Landlessness which caused to them not only important economic losses because they lost physical land and its products by considering the relationship between agriculture and livestock for farmers.
* Joblessness, which is linked to the landlessness, to the impoverishment risk of losing access to common property natural resources and to the food insecurity. In fact, IDPs lost permanent job, as their main activities as famers were associated to the forest in itself. The exploitation of forest allowed them to access to fertile land available for necessary harvest for household feeding, and surplus for market and within the forest it was easy to maintain their livestock and to have free access to water and firewood.
* Social disarticulation: the findings showed that the IDPs experienced separation from members of community of origin firstly and secondly because the displacement has not been done in block. Thus, some of relatives, friends and neighbors were relocated in different villages and this created for them a kind of disempowerment because not only they lost companionship but also the created useful social networks and the associated mutual support necessary to maintain the livelihoods.
* Psychological disturbance (Ataguba, 2014): the above mentioned impoverishments generated for IDPs a psychological disturbance linked to emotional pains, feeling an involuntary detachment from their land (Cernea, 1998) as well as impairment of family ties and human relations (Nayak, 2000).

*(iii) what are the socio-economic opportunities encountered by IDPs?*

The findings showed that IDPs got some opportunities after displacement. Those opportunities underline the responsibility of national government as the first protector of IDPs (Global Protection Cluster Group, 2007). Those opportunities can be expressed in terms of protection and assistance for all in need as it is emphasized by Article 22 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights which lays down the necessity of providing protection to all people in need. That is why the opportunities obtained by IDPs consist of small plots of land averaging about ¼ ha, together with a constructed house or construction materials. In addition, the IDPs got access to better resettlement sites and public infrastructure such as administrative services, health centres, schools, markets, roads, electricity and clean water; small business opportunities and more security.

Referring to Cernea's model of Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR), the IDPs benefited better resettlement sites “*Imidugudu*” which gave them more access to public services and infrastructure. This illustrates a situation of reconstruction, from loss of access to restoration of community assets and services. IDPs also moved from high risks zones to secured areas. They previously settled in isolated zone and the displacement moved them from marginalization to social inclusion (Cernea, 2000).

*(iv) what are the alternative solutions to mitigate the negative consequences of population displacement?*

As regards the research results, the IDPs appreciated the GoR's efforts to save their lives. However, they were not satisfied with the way the displacement process was conducted because in some cases it used force and violence. The compensation was only given for the immovable assets on the irregularly occupied land. Therefore, in the IDPs’ view, the assistance given was perceived far below their previous assets. For these reasons, the IDPs provided some suggestions for smooth displacement process. These include equitable compensation of their assets (66,9%), adequate information in due time (38,9%) and participation of concerned population (33,8%) in the displacement process. Among other strategies, they mentioned long term planning to avoid repetitive displacement (27,4%), population education (26,8%) including psychological support to IDPs, their professional insertion, and prevention of conflicts between IDPs and host communities. They also recommended provision of basic amenities in new resettlement sites and disturbance indemnities (24,2%) in case of displacement.

The suggestions of IDPs aforementioned are linked to their ignorance of some existing policies in relation with their rights and protection, insufficient information on the government development strategies especially those related to environment protection. Also, considering the nature of displacement, there was no room for negotiation. Thus the government intervened in evacuating exposed lives to risks and in providing the minimum assistance with IDPs.

**4. Conclusion, recommendations and policy implications**

The last part of this research summarizes the key findings, highlights the main recommendations to different stakeholders involved in internal population displacement process, and puts emphasis on the implications of these findings for the Rwandan society.

The overall objective of this research consisted of analyzing the challenges and opportunities faced by IDPs from Gishwati Forest area in Rwanda. In fact, as Rwanda is among highly anthropogenic landscapes (UNEP, 2011), population displacements due to natural disasters are frequent. In addition, this country is eager to move from low income to medium income countries in accordance with its long term strategic development plan (MINECOFIN, 2013). Thus, development induced projects implemented in this framework displace a lot of people.

The research was conducted in Western Province and focused on people displaced from Gishwati forest area due to natural disasters and the government policies to protect this area. Although the research used both quantitative and qualitative methods, it focused more on qualitative approach to understand the phenomenon under this study. A structured questionnaire was directly administered to 160 respondents displaced from Gishwati forest area.

The main findings of the research indicated that IDPs experienced different types of impoverishment risks.

The IDPs from Gishwati forest area were compensated in resettlement scheme where they received houses and small parcels of land in resettlement sites provided by the Government of Rwanda. Consequently, the living conditions of most IDPs were pulled down due to displacement. Indeed, results revealed that they lost their important assets in terms of natural capital, mainly large and fertile land and livestock; social capital, i.e. distortion of families and friendship; and financial capital through which they lost jobs and income opportunities. In particular, they experienced food insecurity, social disarticulation and lack of access to free firewood and potable water. Despite the fact that IDPs affirmed having access to better settlement conditions, to public infrastructure and services as well as being easily integrated in their host communities by both leaders and population, the majority of them live in deplorable conditions.

At the end of this research, it is worth to make some recommendations to different stakeholders involved in internal population displacement process for preventing its negative impacts on local communities.

a) To the *Government of Rwanda*, it is recommended to:

* Involve different concerned stakeholders in displacement process, particularly IDPs in order to build common understanding of the reasons pertaining the displacement and obtain their support and ownership of the process for a smooth implementation;
* Train all involved stakeholders in internal population displacement process on rights and protection of IDPs before the displacement takes place;
* Sensitize and disseminate at large scale all policies and programs in relation with environment protection, settlement and establishment of public infrastructures;
* Provide specific interventions with IDPs, in case of resettlement, that facilitate them their economic insertion;
* Plan for long term induced development projects in order to prevent new forms of poverty after displacement.

b) To *Civil Society Organizations*, it is recommended to:

* Advocate for IDPs so that they receive adequate information related to their rights as IDPs;
* Assist the Government in the implementation of displacement process in a sustainable way through trainings, material and psychological support.

c) To *IDPs*, it is recommended to:

* Cooperate with the public institutions and other involved stakeholders during the displacement process;
* Rely on self-help and struggle for better life through creativity, innovations and openness to new opportunities;
* Participate actively in the displacement process through meetings, trainings, non formal education, etc.

As far as the policy implications are concerned, the findings of this study are expected to contribute in preventing risks associated with internal population displacement in Rwanda; thereby ensuring sustainable relocation and resettlement of IDPs. Thus, different stakeholders would benefit from the findings.

In the light of new knowledge generated by this study, IDPs would adopt adequate behaviors towards internal population displacement. Besides, the government institutions would improve their policies to make them more responsive to IDPs’ needs, with particular emphasis on educating and encouraging local communities to adopt positive behavior and practices towards internal population displacement.

In addition, the study findings would help Civil Society Organizations and local communities to improve their practices, advocacy and interventions in the case of internal population displacement, and deliver more adequate interventions towards the IDPs.

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1. They were commissioned by ICK to carry out a research project “Preventing risks related to population displacement; defining model of educational actions” jointly sponsored by ICK and the Centre for Coordination of Research of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (CCR/IFCU). This paper is extracted from *“Population displacement and its socioeconomic impact on internally displaced people in Rwanda: A case study of the communities from Gishwati forest area and Nyabarongo hydropower plant zone”*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Arusha village was a name given after the agreements between the former Government of Rwanda and RPF-Inkotanyi that took place in Arusha, Tanzania. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Many IDPs were originated from DRC where polygamy is usual. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. S.d. means Standard deviation [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. NISR, 2014, Fourth Population and Housing Census, Rwanda, 2012; Main indicators report [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Induruburi in Gishwati area refer to casual job including working on others land *(guhingira amafaranga)*, carriage of luggages *(kwikorera imizigo, umucanga, gukarata)*, small trading *(gucuruza uduconsho)*, etc. This is called resourcefullness by respondents. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Whereas the Rwandan culture recommends good neighbours to visit each other *(ifuni ibagara ubucuti ni akarenge)* some newcomers were surprised by not receiving any visit. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The sharing explained by respondents includes fire and water. In Rwandan culture, it is common for neigbouring families to help each other in case one does’nt have fire, salt or water to cook his food *“bararahurirana, bagahana umunyu n’amazi”*. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. IDPs took along their livestock during displacement. However, they lost a lot of their animals due to lack of pasture and diseases. In addition, livestock was sold to survive after they lost their land which was their main source of income. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For inhabitants of border districts, it is allowed to travel to neighbouring countries like CEPGL zone (*Communaute Economique des Pays des Grands Lacs*) using only ID cards. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)