

Forum on Minorities
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Presentation on Equal Access to Quality Education for Minorities
The case of the Batwa in Burundi
By Senator Charles Masabo
Email: masaboch@yahoo.fr

Introduction

The Batwa of Burundi are the third ethnic component of this country. They are both indigenous and a minority. For a long time they have been marginalized and discriminated against by the two other dominant groups (Hutu and Tutsi), which means that the access to quality education for the Batwa of Burundi remains a worrying problem for any observer dedicated to human rights.

Main reasons for the lack of access to quality education for the Batwa of Burundi.

These reasons are the following:

Firstly: marginalization and discrimination

Dominant groups did not accept the company of the Batwa, even in the village; they did not share food and drinks together. The Batwa were always sidelined.

In the same way, children experience a huge and cruel prejudice, being deprived of their fundamental rights.

They do not benefit from education, unlike children of other ethnicities.

Currently, the situation in terms of discrimination and marginalization is gradually decreasing, and we observe a significant number of students attending both primary and secondary school (8515 primary school pupils, 429 secondary school pupils).

Secondly: remoteness of schools

In Burundi, the Batwa live in isolated groups, far from other inhabitants. Therefore, no school infrastructure has been built in their surroundings. Those who were able to study had to walk many kilometers to go to school in the morning and come back home in the evening. The distance of education centers from the homes of the Batwa has been an essential element that led not only to drop-outs, but also parents to simply “forget” enrolling their children in school.

Thridly: Education of women and girls

Traditional Burundian customs favored education of boys only. For many Burundians **“girls are there for housework”**

This practice also exists among the Batwa.

Indeed:

- girls are not enrolled in schools in large numbers;
- when they get 12 to 15 years old, they are forced into marriage, regardless of whether they are in school or not;

- the ignorance of Batwa parents lead them to not see the importance of school for girls.

Finally: the drop-outs

Despite that primary school education is free of charge, many Batwa children drop out from school. We observe that in the first years of primary school (1st & 2nd), there are many children who attend school. But in the higher classes, very few Batwa students remain enrolled. This is due to the extreme poverty of Batwa families who do not manage to properly feed their children, to provide them with the necessary clothes, and to pay for other costs directly related to schooling.

In Burundi, we observe that:

- in primary school, of the 100 Batwa students that start the 1st year, only 10 students finish the sixth year (10%)
- in secondary school, not many drop-outs are observed as at this stage children begin to understand the importance of school.

Conclusion

In Burundi, the main elements that prevent access to quality education, both for boys and girls, are discrimination, the remoteness of education centers, poverty, and ignorance. The government, donors, and other stakeholders should take specific actions for this ethnic group aiming at structural changes within this community. Awareness, the establishment of school infrastructure in their villages, and support of income-generating activities have been identified as actions that can help alleviate the situation of the lack of access to quality education.

Thank you for your attention.