

**STATE POLICIES AND LIVELIHOODS**  
**Rwandan Human Settlement Policy**  
**Case Study of Ngera and Nyagahuru Villages**

av

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# **STATE POLICIES AND LIVELIHOODS. Rwandan Human Settlement Policy Case Study of Ngera and Nyagahuru Villages**

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## **Abstract**

Through a case study of two villages of the Southern Province of Rwanda, this thesis explores the effects on Rwanda National Settlement Policy on the livelihoods of the rural population. With today 344 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, Rwanda has the highest population densities of Sub-Saharan Africa. Subsistence agriculture is the mainstay for more than 90 percent of the population. Since 1997, Rwanda has undertaken a controversial policy of grouping people in villages whereas rural traditional habitat is that of scattered homesteads on the hills' slopes. The rationale of the policy is dealing of high demographic pressure on little arable land. Grouping people in villages would free more land for cultivation. But the policy is also profoundly rooted in the history of the country for the last half century. Between 1952 and 1972, experiences of agricultural modernization were conducted through the so-called *paysannats*. A villagisation experiment was tried in 1970es-1980es in pilot villages without much success. The new habitat policy is like a continuation of those past experiences. However, the new policy was mainly driven by the genocide of 1994 and its aftermaths. Tutsi returnees after more than three decades in exile and genocide survivors whose houses were destroyed needed a safe place to stay when the genocide ended in July 1994. Some occupied properties of Hutu who left the country in the wake of RPF victory fearing reprisals. When Hutu returnees were forced back home in 1996-1997, the government needed to find a way to address the property issue, to avoid further sociopolitical violence.

Analyzing the cases of Ngera and Nyagahuru, two villages of the southern Province constructed by the Belgian Cooperation in 1998-2000, the thesis indicates the vulnerability situation of *imidugudu* villages' dwellers. A high rate of women headed households, direct consequence of the genocide, scarce natural resources, weakness of social institutions and little possibility of non farm activities are important elements which need to be taken into consideration to make a decent living for all. The government of Rwanda has initiated other policies closely related to Human Settlement Policy like Agricultural Policy, Land Policy and Environmental Policy. The thesis examines important aspects of those policies which influence the livelihoods of "imidugudu" dwellers. The thesis ends suggesting some other possible ways of rural development which should be explored.

**Keywords:** genocide, *imidugudu*, livelihoods, policies, Rwanda, settlement, subsistence agriculture, villagization.