

CHAPTER II

POLICIES FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AREAS

In this chapter, we deal with the historical development of agricultural and rural policy in Rwanda. The information on these policies is important for examining the relationship between the state and Rwandan peasants. What has been the essence of the rural problem for Rwandan authority? How has the problem been tackled? After summarizing the policies from the colonial period to the 1990s, the present land reform policy and villagization policy will be especially focused upon.

1. Colonial Period

The prototype for the present policy for agriculture and rural areas can be identified in the colonial period. The beginning of the policy formation was in the period between the two World Wars. Belgium, which took over the administration of Rwanda and Burundi¹ from Germany after World War I, realized that famine broke out so frequently in the territories that some countermeasures should be adopted. In fact, Rwanda saw frequent outbreak of famine at least after the 1880s, when its contact with the Europeans started, up to the mid 1930s.² In this situation, the colonial authority took several measures against famine. Emigration of Rwandans to the Belgian Congo was promoted in this context, because Rwanda was considered as overpopulated, while the mining development in the Congo had caused a strong labor demand.³ At the same time, a series of agricultural and rural policies was adopted between the two World Wars for countermeasures against famine. These policies, which can be considered as the first step of rural development in Rwanda, are summarized next.

Firstly, several measures to guide and induce peasants to produce more

¹ Although the official names of these territories during the colonial period were “Ruanda” and “Urundi,” we use in principle “Rwanda” and “Burundi” for all periods, except for proper nouns during the colonial period, such as “Resident of Urundi.”

² According to Everaerts [1939], famine broke out in Rwanda in 1890, 1897, 1900, 1902-03, 1905, 1906, 1916, 1917-18, 1921-22, 1923-24, 1925-26, 1928-29, 1931, 1933 and 1935.

³ See Newbury [1988: 161-171] or Guichaoua [1989: 25-27]. Migration within Rwanda was also promoted (Guichaoua [1989: 47-51]).

agricultural products were adopted. Being concerned with frequent famines, the colonial authority imposed the cultivation of root crops such as sweet potato and cassava. Regulation No.96 ordered by the Resident of Urundi stipulated the obligation for peasants to cultivate food crops in at least 30 ares, in which some “non-seasonal crops”, namely root crops such as cassava, sweet potato, taro and Irish potato, must be planted. The colonial authority regarded root crops as the key to the food supply policy (Robert [1936]). In addition, the colonial government promoted the production of export crops such as coffee, cotton and oil palm. The introduction of these cash crops was aimed to provide peasants with opportunities for cash income. Although the introduction of coffee had been tackled since the period of German occupation,⁴ its production had been trivial. After the mid 1920s, the Belgians enforced the cultivation of export crops through the Rwandan administration: they stipulated, for example, a regulation in 1925 to oblige Chiefs and Sub-Chiefs to cultivate industrial crops on at least 0.5 are.⁵ The production of industrial crops therefore markedly increased in the 1930s (Everaerts [1939], Bart [1993: 162]).

Secondly, the development of wetland (swamp) had started. The swamp, between the hills, having been used as pasture in the dry season, attracted the attention of the colonial administration seeking an increase in food production. After the famine from 1917 to 1918, the government and the church began to promote the development of swamp in order to turn it into fields.⁶ In 1934, the colonial authority started drainage work on swamp, thus drastically enlarging the developed area. 20,000ha of swamp in that year and 24,000ha in the next year were drained. The development of wetland was strongly promoted at the end of the colonial period, because the cultivation of newly introduced crops such as tea, sugar cane and rice suited the condition of the drained swamp.

Thirdly, a policy attempting to foster modern peasants, called “paysannat,” was

⁴ The Mission of Kabgayi had already planted 140 young coffee trees in 1907 (Bart [1993: 162]).

⁵ Belgians reformed Rwandan traditional administration system in the 1920s, making it more hierarchical structure. The King was situated at the top of the country, but Belgian colonial bureaucrats effectively held the power. Belgians were appointed to governors of “Territoire”, the largest unit of the local administration, while Rwandans were appointed to the head of other smaller local units. “Chief” and “Sub-Chief” were responsible of such local administration units. Although some Hutu used to be appointed to Sub-Chiefs in the pre-colonial Kingdom of Rwanda, Tutsi came to monopolize the head of local administration after the administrative reform in the 1920s.

⁶ Bart [1993: 347-348] has shown interesting examples. “The swamp, reserved in Ruanda as pasture in the summer, can, by order of Mr. Resident, be transformed by the Bahutu into a huge field of sweet potatoes.” (Statement by P. Classe, 1917-18); “Musinga (*mwami*) ordered the Bahutu to cultivate as large areas as possible. The swamp is entirely open to cultivation.” (Journal in the Mission of Save); “If necessary, sanctions would be taken against aristocrats who obstruct the Bahutu from enlarging their fields.” (Letter of the Resident to His Grace the apostolic curate of Ruanda, 9 July 1924).

implemented. The “paysannat” was a policy implemented after the 1930s in Belgian territories in Africa: it aimed to establish the basis for future agricultural development by making African peasants settle in fixed blocks and instructing them about new agricultural techniques. Regarding African agricultural techniques as unsustainable or “predatory,” the Belgians sought to diffuse a more intensive method. In Rwanda and Burundi, the settlement of 4,209 blocks had been completed by the beginning of 1955 in a plain located east of Ruzizi River, where the colonial administration instructed an agricultural management system depending mainly on new cash crops such as rice and cotton. During this period, the area settled by “paysannat” was estimated as 50,000 ha in total (Staner [1955]).

Fourthly, as land erosion was considered as a serious problem, the peasants were obliged to carry out several measures for its prevention. The colonial authority had already begun to worry in the 1930s about overpopulation and the excessive use of land in Rwanda and Burundi. From the end of the 1930s, the Belgians started to instruct some countermeasures against land erosion such as hedge planting, excavation of drainage ditches and terrace making. Anti-erosion measures were actively implemented at the end of the colonial period.⁷ The colonial government was estimated to have taken anti-erosion measures for 180,000ha in 1947 and for 220,000ha in 1952 (Bart [1993: 344]).

Lastly, the colonial government adopted commercialization of cattle, which had the important social meaning in pre-colonial Rwanda. The government promoted, and sometimes enforced, the dealing of cattle in the market, as the demand for meat by the European settlers, army and workers at mining companies had rapidly increased. After the 1920s, pressure was exerted through European meat dealers and the local administration in order that chiefs and sub-chiefs would sell their cattle in the market (Nkurikiyimfura [1994: 173-191]).

We can summarize that the agricultural and rural policies during the colonial period were aimed at increasing the agricultural production, diffusing modern techniques, promoting commercialization and urging effective land use to prevent erosion. Such direction of agricultural and rural policy basically succeeded after independence.

⁷ An international conference on African soil was held in 1948 at Goma in Belgian Congo.

2. Social Transformation during the Late Colonial Period

Before examining the agricultural and rural policies after independence, let us summarize the social transformation that occurred during the late colonial period. The most important change was that of the land tenure system: the turbulence at the end of the colonial period brought about its radical change. Two different land tenure systems coexisted in colonial Rwanda. One was the “*ubukonde*” system, in which those who had first cultivated the land would hold the right for it. In many cases, the right of land tenure was based on lineage. This system can be considered similar to that broadly observed in Sub-Saharan Africa. The other one was the “*igikingi*” system, in which chiefs appointed by the king held the right to the land. This system, which developed after the 19th century especially at the center of the kingdom, was peculiar to the Great Lakes region: peasants who lived within a *igikingi* were obliged to pay tributes to the chief. The chief of the *igikingi* thus played a similar role to that of a landlord. As it was always the Tutsi that was appointed as chief during the colonial period, *Igikingi* became a symbol of the “Tutsi’s feudalistic domination over the Hutu.”

After World War II, the colonial authority launched discussion about the reform of *igikingi*. However, the land tenure system collapsed because of the turbulence at the end of colonial period and the downfall of indirect rule. *Igikingi* was formally abolished by order (arrêté) of 2nd May 1960, stipulating a complete change to communal pasturage. Although only few records show how abolished *igikingis* were subsequently transformed, it is likely that they were generally divided by the peasants and used to cultivate crops or to afforest (Bart [1993: 71-72]).

Another important change concerns the property in cattle, the most important domestic animal in Rwanda. During the colonial period, a patron – client relationship called *ubuhake* was broadly observed. With this system, patrons entrusted one or some cows to their clients, and in return, they could expect various services such as tributes from the clients. This social institution was based on an unlimited chain of patron – client relationships starting from the king. In this network, all cattle were considered to ultimately belong to the king; the property in cattle in a modern sense had therefore not yet been established with the *ubuhake* system.

Nevertheless, *ubuhake* became unstable after the 1930s.⁸ The important factor in this change was that, as the above-mentioned rural and agricultural policies were

⁸ The *ubuhake* was not a “traditional” system originating long ago in Rwandan history. This institution came to involve ordinary people with the growth of social instability during the colonial period (Vidal [1969], Takeuchi [2000]).

adopted, the peasants were imposed on too much to perform *ubuhake* services for their patrons. The colonial government, regarding *ubuhake* as the social basis of traditional Rwanda, at first tried to protect and strengthen the institution. However, many *ubuhake* contracts came to be voluntarily abolished after the 1940s. When the system was officially abolished in 1954 by law, stipulating the division of entrusted cattle as to one third for the patrons and two thirds for the clients, no strong resistance to this decision was apparent. The collapse of *ubuhake* was also promoted by the commercialization of cattle. In addition to this, a large number of Tutsi were deprived of their cattle or escaped to neighboring countries in the turbulence during the period of independence. The ownership of cattle has drastically changed because of this political development, thus considerably reducing the number of large-scale cattle owners. We can consider that, as a result of these political changes, the property in cattle in the modern sense was finally established.

In respect of either land or cattle, large-scale owners were expelled and their property was divided among small-scale owners during and after the turbulence in Rwanda. As the ancient dominant class disappeared in Rwanda, a rural society made up of equally poor peasants appeared after independence. The agricultural and rural policies in Rwanda after independence would thus be planned on the basis of such a rural structure.

3. Period of Kayibanda and Habyarimana

In this section, we first examine the *Plan intérimaire d'urgence* designed for the period 1966 – 70 as an example of the policy during the Kayibanda administration. The most serious problem for this program to tackle was the economic pressure caused by rapid population growth. The following eight points were indicated to cope with this problem: (1) land preservation, (2) general improvement of the yield, (3) amelioration of cattle management, (4) more rational use of banana plantations, (5) development of new land, (6) promotion of industrial crops, (7) reform of the economic structure by developing the service and processing industries, and (8) alleviation of population pressure by migration. In spite of these challenging objectives, the problem of funding was serious: 71.7% of the funding for this program was required from foreign sources; in addition, 40% of the internal funding was to be covered by Rwandan peasants without payment (Guichaoua [1989: 170-171]). Such a program, depending heavily on external sources and internal non-compensated labor, must have been difficult to realize. We can

at least conclude that Kayibanda administration attempted to deal with the increase in food demand by improving agricultural productivity and enlarging the cultivated land area.

Regarding the Habyarimana administration, we examine the development plan that was applied after 1977. The government declared in this program giving priority to the agricultural sector and aiming for the achievement of food self-sufficiency. Five objectives were set in this program: (1) prioritization of measures about food crops and livestock, (2) regional optimization of production, (3) intensification of food exchange with neighboring countries, (4) alleviation of the dependence on food aid, (5) promotion of other parallel measures such as the diffusion of information about nutrition and health care. In addition, the program clarified four courses of action to achieve these objectives: (1) population control, (2) increased productivity and diversification of food crops and livestock, (3) improved storage and processing, and (4) organization of food marketing.

As for the measures directly related to food production, the program illustrates the following actions: promoting use of modern agricultural inputs; optimal use of the land; strengthening the production-supporting infrastructure such as education and agricultural finance; promoting auxiliary action such as apiculture and fisheries (Bart [1993: 499-503]). Different from the Kayibanda period, the Habyarimana government actively promoted land preservation work such as afforestation and terracing. They decided, for example, to set the last Saturday of October as the day for afforestation, and guide the nation to plant at least three seedlings (Africa Research Bulletin [7503A]). Afforestation was thus strongly promoted after the 1970s.⁹

Comparing the agriculture and rural policies of the Kayibanda and Habyarimana governments with those of the colonial authority, they had similar objectives such as increasing productivity, diffusing modern techniques, promoting the commercialization of agricultural products, and land preservation. In spite of such similarity, it should be pointed out that the administration officially stopped enforcing measures on peasants after independence. During the colonial period, the government often depended on enforced measures to develop rural areas.¹⁰ As the government

⁹ Governmental guidance was not the only reason to explain the afforestation being actively carried out after this period. The increase in demand for charcoal was also an important factor: the peasants planted trees in order to get the materials for producing charcoal.

¹⁰ For example, the colonial authority forced peasants to work on land preservation such as excavating drainage ditches, afforestation and terracing. Due to the reaction from Rwandan peasants who were so frustrated with these enforced measures, the government could not organize communal works for land preservation for some years after independence. It was only after the period of the Habyarimana regime that the government could launch once again several measures for land preservation.

abandoned enforcement, the problem was how to achieve the objectives of these policies. After all, Rwanda, for lack of sufficient capital, had to deeply depend on external sources to implement agricultural and rural policies after independence.

4. Policy after the Civil War

After the mid-1980s, the Habyarimana regime lost its capability to implement the above-mentioned policies. The situation got worse as the food shortage became prevalent in southern Rwanda in the late 1980s, civil war broke out in 1990, and finally the terrible social turbulence with the massacre occurred in 1994. We have already examined the investment program (PIP), indicating the macro-level intention of the government for reconstruction. In this section, the micro-level intention, namely the policy for the agricultural sector, will be examined: we will deal with the strategy for food security that is the most important tenet of the present agricultural and rural policy. Although several policy papers have been published concerning food security, “*Thematic Consultation: Food Security*,” published in November 1998 by Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Environment and Rural Development, is analyzed here (Republic of Rwanda [1998]).

To begin with, the report indicates perception in respect of the constraints on Rwandan food security by pointing out the following five aspects: (1) rapid growth of the population, (2) conditions in rural areas, (3) constraints linked to poverty and vulnerability, (4) market constraints, and (5) urban problems.

Let us explain briefly each point. As for the population (1), the problem is clear. In addition to the rapid population growth (more than 3% a year) and high population density, the massive return of refugees after the civil war pushed the population growth rate much higher than before.

On the topic of conditions in rural areas (2), several points were indicated in detail such as the strong pressure on natural resources (soil and forest), the decline in natural land fertility, the shortage of agricultural inputs, the disruption of peasant organizations and extension services, and the insecurity. The problems of soil and production system were especially emphasized in this policy paper. On the one hand, the report pointed out that the decline in land fertility seemed to be serious on the high plateau of central and western Rwanda, where the population density was particularly high. On the other hand, categorizing Rwandan agricultural exploitation into three types, “*the small, dependant farm*” (type A), “*the self-sufficient producer*” (type B), and “*the*

capital production system” (type C), the report warned that, if peasants continued to divide their land without specializing in a productive unit, the number of type A cases would markedly increase and poverty would be accelerated. As a result, the government made two recommendations: strengthening farms of types B and C, and the progressive exit of micro-farms.

The third point (constraints linked with poverty and vulnerability) concerned the problem of the “poverty trap:” as a farm is small and poor, it becomes difficult for the family members to get necessary inputs, and the resulting poverty makes them vulnerable to disease. The problem is that it is difficult to devise remedial measures to alleviate the poverty, because of the intrinsic poverty itself. The fourth point means that dealing in agricultural products was too small to provide incentives for peasants to increase production. The fifth point is linked with the fourth constraint: as urbanization had not developed, the marketing zone was too small to revitalize production. The report states that dispersed settlement in rural areas was favored by the fact that trade between towns and countryside remained low.

On the basis of the above-mentioned understanding, the report emphasized the necessity to radically reform the agricultural sector in order to assure national food security. In particular, it expressed the intention to promote the redistribution of land by improving the production system and by reducing the “non-profitable farms”(p.19). In addition to the reform of production, the revitalization of food marketing was recommended. These reforms of production and marketing should be supplemented, according to the report, by securing the access of vulnerable groups (women, children, etc.) to the food and by developing the private sector capable of absorbing the labor force that had transferred from the agricultural sector.

The report presented three strategies in order to achieve these goals: (1) enhancing the food availability; (2) ensuring the stability of food supplies; (3) ensuring the access to food. The first strategy concerning production was sub-divided into two actions: planning a regional development strategy and guiding in the most appropriate production system.

The report insisted on the necessity to divide the country into three parts in order to devise development plans suitable for each region. In the plateau of central and western Rwanda, considering the environment with a high population density and high pressure on the land, food production with careful land preservation should be given priority. In central and eastern Rwanda, where the potential for production growth is relatively high, active measures to increase production such as the development of wetland should be adopted. Finally, in the suburbs of large towns, intensive agriculture

such as livestock and vegetable production should be enhanced. The report stressed that land reform would be necessary in order to carry out such a regional development strategy.

In addition to this development plan aimed at regional specialization, the report insisted on the necessity to guide peasants according to the type of production system and to the capability for access to the market.

The second strategy, which aimed at ensuring the stability of food supplies, was concerned particularly with measures about marketing and processing. The report emphasized the necessity to establish collection and conditioning centers for perishable products, and to support the various actors in marketing, or to guide them on the technical improvement of marketing and storage.

The third strategy about the access to food could be also divided into two: policy towards the poor and vulnerable groups, and the strategy on employment and income. These points can also be considered as countermeasures for those who have to leave the agricultural sector: according to the scenario explained in the report, a massive number of small landholders would leave the sector. In expecting the massive outflow of labor from the agricultural sector, the report insisted on taking measures to absorb them.

We can consequently point out three major characteristics of the present food security policy: firstly, it places priority on increasing agricultural production to ensure the food supply; secondly, it considers that this increase in production should be achieved not only by increasing the area of cultivated land, but also by regional specialization and rationalized agriculture; thirdly, the selection of farms and the outflow of small landholders to other economic sectors are regarded as unavoidable. We can therefore consider that this policy also aims to enhance the efficiency of the agricultural sector.

5. Land Reform and Villagization Policy

Being closely related to the new agricultural policy, it is important lastly to deal with the new policy of land reform and villagization. The present government is promoting these reform plans which may bring about radical changes in rural Rwanda.

The government considers that the Rwandan land tenure system has the following problems: the land tends to be excessively fractionated through heritage; settlement is generally scattered in rural areas; the written law (or “modern” law) and the customary laws co-exist about the land; and the right to land is so ambiguous that investment tends to be hindered. The government is examining land reform on the basis

of this understanding of rural Rwanda.

According to the plan (Republic of Rwanda [1998: 55-60]), the land should belong to the “family group” in order to hinder any excessive splitting. The term “family group” corresponds to “*inzu*” (pl. *amazuru*) in Kinyarwanda, signifying a small kinship group or a small lineage. The plan aims to prevent the splitting of land through heritage by giving the property right, not to each family, but to this larger unit, the “family group.” The land owned by the “family group” will be provided, after registration, with the right of disposal to sell, buy, rent and mortgage. This property right shall be allowed on the assumption that the owner productively uses the land. The right is therefore assumed to go with the duty of productive exploitation.

Although the land can be sold, bought or mortgaged, it is in principle indivisible. In fact, the Rwandan parliament has already adopted a law prohibiting the division of land by heritage, if it is smaller than 2 ha. The aim of this land reform plan is to promote efficient land use and prevent fragmentation. For this purpose, the government pays strong attention to not splitting the land by heritage. This is why it regards, not an individual or a household, but a “family group” as the unit of the property.

As we have already explained, settlements are generally scattered in rural Rwanda. Such a way of housing and land use has often been blamed, since the colonial period, as hindering the efficient use of land. Although the colonial authority had a negative view in regard to this dispersed settlement, no radical measure to change it was adopted. The colonial government, on the one hand, might have taken into consideration the economic and political cost of such a policy. On the other hand, it regarded that settlement would become concentrated without any political intervention in the long run by the development of an exchange economy or off-farm employment (Guichaoua [1989: 135]). No policy to group the houses was adopted in either the Kayibanda or Habyarimana period. Nevertheless, the situation changed after the civil war in the 1990s when the government ardently started to tackle the problem.

One of the most important factors explaining this policy change is the shelter program carried out since 1996. Two million refugees flowed after the end of civil war in 1994 to neighboring countries (especially Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania). Many of them came back to Rwanda during relatively the short period from the end of 1996 to 1997. Consequently, many returnees were faced with housing problems: for example, their houses had been destroyed or others had already taken possession during their absence. In order to tackle this problem, international organizations such as UNHCR, as well as a good number of NGOs, launched shelter programs. The result was that 85,000 dwellings were constructed up to the end of 1998 (Hilhorst & van Leeuwen

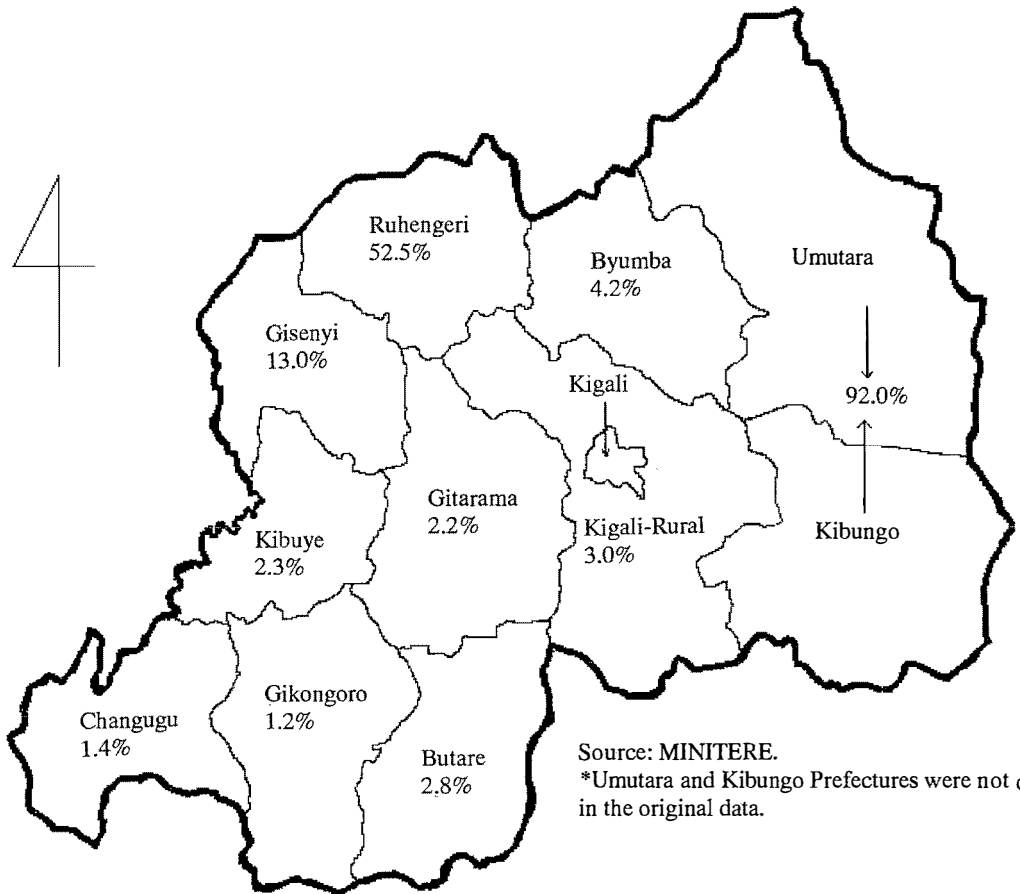
[1999: 6]). These shelters are called “*umudugudu*” in Kinyarwanda, signifying “village” or “agglomeration of houses,” because, in the shelter program, the houses are constructed in a cluster like a village. Such a way of constructing houses is understandable, as the emergency of the program and the efficiency for providing basic services like water and food had to be taken into account.

While the international organizations and NGOs continued with this program, the Rwandan government clarified the intention of promoting a villagization policy. In December 1996, just after the massive return of refugees, the Cabinet Council of the government expressed the opinion that the dispersed settlement pattern in the countryside was a waste of space, and therefore “all the rural inhabitants should be regrouped in villages (*imidugudu*)” (Hilhorst & van Leeuwen [1999: 11]). Several objectives are incorporated within this villagization policy. While the policy aims to provide the returnees with shelter, at the same time the government seems to expect other effects such as peace keeping and national reconciliation. In addition, related to the above-mentioned land reform, villagization is expected to promote more efficient land use by gathering rural settlements.

The development of the villagization policy varies very much from region to region. Figure 2.1 shows the proportion of inhabitants living in “villages (*imidugudu*).” While almost all inhabitants live in “villages” in the Kibungo and Umutara prefectures, the proportion is trivial in such prefectures as Gikongoro, Changuu, Gitarama and Butare. The reason for this difference is related to the shelter program. Prefectures where many inhabitants live in “villages” were seriously affected by the civil war and the lingering turbulence. In the Kibungo and Umutara prefectures, on the one hand, many inhabitants fled to Uganda and Tanzania after the war in the 1990s, and at the same time, numerous refugees, having escaped from Rwanda before, came back from neighboring countries. For these “new” and “old” refugees,¹¹ an extensive shelter program was implemented in these prefectures. In the Ruhengeri prefecture, on the other hand, rebel attacks continued after 1994, thus causing devastation of the rural areas and regrouping of the inhabitants in camps. The villagization has been therefore carried out, at least so far, as a result of the aid from international organizations and of the turbulence after the civil war, rather than by the political will of the present government.

¹¹ The first clash with massive violence in Rwanda occurred in 1959. After this first turbulence, many refugees flowed into neighboring countries in the 1960s and 1970s. These refugees, many of them Tutsi, and those who fled as a result of the civil war in the 1990s, many of them Hutu, are often distinguished: the former are called the “Old Case Load,” the latter, the “New Case Load” (Hilhorst & van Leeuwen [1999: 8]).

Figure 2.1
Proportion of Inhabitants in “Villages” (December 1998)



Source: MINITERE.
*Umutara and Kibungo Prefectures were not distinguished in the original data.

These two rural policies, namely the land reform and the villagization policies, that are being promoted by the present government entail the possibility of radical change to Rwandan rural society. Their objectives to reform the agricultural sector are clear. Both policies aim to rationalize the agricultural sector by promoting more efficient land use, and foresee land accumulation by selective exploitation. Some objections will certainly be raised against these policies, as they may cause a massive outflow of labor from the agricultural sector. The biggest problem is how to create an industrial sector capable of absorbing such labor movement. As most of the villagization policies so far adopted in Africa have been assessed as a failure, it is easy to point out possible problems in future. However, we should also know that the present situation in rural Rwanda is very serious. If no measure is adopted, there is a great risk that social tension will be heightened to cause further turbulence. An interviewee working in the administration told us, “We are sitting on a time-bomb named the ‘rural problem’.”