

# White Fathers - White Sisters



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# Action Batwa - Moving from the Forest

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## ACTION BATWA

The White Fathers established **Action Batwa** in 1999 in order to help the **Batwa**, a poor and underprivileged people who live on the margins of **Burundian** society. It was approved by the State the same year and its headquarters are in the Lavigerie Centre, Shantanya, Gitega.

In an attempt to get to know the **Batwa**, we decided to try and live through their daily problems with them. For five years **Action Batwa** has faced up to the problems that the **Batwa** have in their attempt to be integrated into **Burundian** society. These are problems that have been overlooked for a long time in a country that is caught up in many economic, social and political difficulties.

Here we give an idea of what we have already done such as: housing improvement; support for agriculture and animal husbandry; education; health and hygiene; the campaign against **HIV/AIDS**; peace studies; human rights education; the human, social and civic values.

## THE BATWA AND THEIR PROBLEMS

The **Batwa** are one of the three ethnic groups that form **Burundian** society. They are estimated

to be 2% of the total population, a true social minority, though this figure is not a census, just a rough estimate. The **Batwa** are part of the Pygmy peoples who are found in many parts of Central Africa. They are recognised by certain characteristics and their lifestyle. [2]

The problems faced by the **Batwa** come under three main headings: poverty, their marginalisation, and the contempt other ethnic groups hold them in. The **Batwa** are caught in a cycle of poverty mainly because they do not own land. They find it difficult to feed and clothe themselves, to find shelter, and to get medical attention. By being marginalised the **Batwa** are excluded from all levels of society, its organizations and institutions.

The **Batwa** are scorned by other ethnic groups who regard them as a lower social class. They do not socialise with the **Batwa**, nor do they eat and drink with them, marry them, nor visit their homes. When you speak to anyone about working with the **Batwa** they are astonished and many believe it to be a waste of time. The non-**Batwa** have many prejudices about the **Batwa**, and when people speak about them they say that they are thieves and do not want to work.

When something disappears, it is said that the **Batwa** are responsible. In many respects the **Batwa** are like the prostitutes and publicans of the Gospels who were scorned by the Pharisees.

## THE COLLAPSE OF THE BATWA INCOME

Like the other Pygmy groups the **Batwa** are 'hunter gatherers' and have always lived by hunting wild animals and collecting fruits and berries from the forests. They are semi-nomadic and have never

cultivated the land, which explains why the majority of them have no farmland today. They became more isolated from other people when the war began and preferred to escape deep into the forest. As a result they did not notice the arrival of the farmers who cleared their forests for cultivation and pastureland. As the forests disappear the **Batwa** are gradually losing their source of food and shelter and so are driven out.

The **Batwa** are renowned for making items of domestic terra cotta pottery. However, due to competition from plastic and metal containers, and mass-produced metal utensils they have also lost this market and, as a result, a major source of income. In short, the **Mutwa** do not have a means of support any more.

Living under such appalling conditions, the **Batwa** are even more prone to the contempt of other **Burundians**, who even avoid contact with the utensils that they use. The ridiculously

small sums of money they get from selling their pottery hardly enables them to eat once a day, not even enough to clothe themselves. This is why they only have rags and are almost naked. They are forced to beg or turn to crime in order to survive, reinforcing the negative stereotypes and making them the scapegoats of society.

Due to their extreme poverty and the contempt that they are held in, the **Batwa** are excluded and do not participate in public life. Often badly dressed they are seldom seen at political and religious gatherings. The **Mutwa** is conspicuous by his absence in public and government records, as he does not have an identity card. The **Mutwa's** semi-nomadic lifestyle means that he does not have a fixed abode, and so cannot put a permanent address on an identity card - never mind find enough money to pay for one. The **Mutwa** is not part of any institution, no matter how traditional it may be. It is rightly said that a **Mutwa** does not have the courage to call himself a **Murundi**.



Picture above: A Batwa family with their pottery in front of a traditional dwelling

*Foot Notes 1: This article has been translated and compiled by Fr. Bill Turnbull W.F. from two articles and a report. The material is: 'Burundi: Mission chez Les Pygmées ...' by Fr. Elias Mwebembezi W.F., 'Voix d'Afrique' N°47 June 2000; 'Les Files De La Forêt' by Fr. Bernard Lesay W.F., 'Voix d'Afrique' N°60, September 2003; and 'Action Batwa, Comment se pose la problématique de l'intégration sociale des Batwa au Burundi: Recherche des voies de libération' by Frs. Elias Mwebembezi W.F. 'Voix d'Afrique' is the White Fathers' magazine in France, and their address is: 'Voix d'Afrique' 20 rue du Printemps, 75017 Paris, Tel : 01 42 27 81 79 Fax : 01 42 27 50 17 E-Mail: voix.afrique@wanadoo.fr*

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*Batwa are also known as the Twa. The Ba prefix is the plural. Mu, as is Mutwa, is singular. A Mutwakazi is a Mutwa woman. Similarly with Barundi (Burundians), and Murundi (Burundian). These prefixes are commonly used in the Bantu languages of Central Africa, such as Kirundi and Kinyarwanda.*

*2: The other two groups are the Hutu (82-85%) and the Tutsi (14%). For more information about the Pygmies and the Batwa see the box on page 6*

**HOUSING**

For the majority of **Batwa** the family home is a circular hut about three metres in diameter and one and half metres high. It usually houses five people and is made from shrubs, branches, dried grass, and banana leaves. Access is by getting down on all fours. Such housing is not weatherproof and it is often destroyed by fire due to the open fires that are lit within them for cooking and heating.

**EDUCATION**

The **Batwa** children, already traumatized by destitution, do not have the family background to face going to school. They do not have enough food to eat, clothes to wear, or the necessary school materials. The children already have

an inferiority complex that is reinforced when other children pick on them, and give vent to their emotions based on the contempt and the prejudiced ideas that the other tribes have of the **Batwa**. Faced with such attitudes the children prefer to give up school rather than face the constant daily battle against such a mentality.

This explains why the majority of **Batwa** do not know how to read and write when they live in a country with a high literacy rate, and people who prize education. Our investigations show that the **Batwa** are aware of the advantages that are gained from education, but they are denied access to it because of social and economic reasons.

**THE PYGMIES AND THE BATWA**

Their word **Pygmy** is derived from the Greek *pygme*, 'fist', which was used to measure a unit of length of 34.3cms. (13.5ins). A **Pygmy** was taken to be 4.5 'fist' tall. The African **Pygmies** (*Negrillos*) are usually between 122 and 150cms. (4ft. to 5ft.) tall. Those who are slightly taller are termed *Pygmoid*. **Pygmies** live mainly in the equatorial rain forests of Central Africa, from Cameroon in the west to Zambia in the southeast.

The total **Pygmy** population is estimated at between 200,000 and 250,000. The **Pygmies** that are found along the Atlantic coast include the *Beku*, *Bongo*, *Jelli*, *Koa*, *Kola*, *Kuya*, *Rimba*, and *Yaga* in countries such as Cameroon (the *Babinda* in the southern forests) and Gabon. They are also found in Burundi (the **Batwa** [*Twa*], *Gesera* and *Zigaba*); the Republic of Congo (the *Binga*); the Central African Republic (*Aka*); Democratic Republic of Congo (the **Batwa** [*Twa*] between Lake Kivu and Lake Tanganyika; the *Aka*, *Efe* and *Mbuti* [*Bambuti* or *BaMbuti*] in the Ituri forest of north-eastern; the *Batswa* [*Tswa*] in the west); Rwanda (the **Batwa** [*Twa*], *Gesera* and *Zigaba*); and Uganda.

**Pygmies** are semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers who hunt, fish, and collect plant foods and insects in the forest. Because of their lifestyle they do not cultivate the land or breed domestic animals. They usually live in groups of twenty people and move around the forest living in temporary camps.

There is some archaeological evidence that places the **Batwa** in Burundi, R.D. Congo, and Rwanda beginning around 70,000 B.C. Some ethnographers believe that they migrated from West Africa about 5,000 years ago while others contend that the **Batwa** came from the northeast. The *Hutu* and *Tutsi* migrated into the region in the 11th and mid-16th centuries. It was during this time that the **Batwa** were incorporated into the new society and gradually adopted the new language and lost their original one. Later the **Batwa** became segregated because of their beliefs and lifestyle.

**HEALTH CARE AND HYGIENE**

Arrival in a **Batwa** village provokes pity. The children greet you with a smile, despite the majority of them being naked, with swollen stomachs and red hair as a result of *kwashiorkor* and worms. None of these children will have been vaccinated and the majority of children die in infancy. The **Mutwakazi**, or the **Mutwa** woman, never goes to a dispensary

for the antenatal clinic, to give birth, or for her child to receive the necessary vaccines. The reasons are the all-pervading poverty and the contempt she would be treated with.

**CONCLUSION ON THE PROBLEMS OF BATWA**

A **Mutwa** is a person traumatized by destitution, contempt and exclusion. This trauma is so great that the **Mutwa** has lost sight of his own capabilities that will help him overcome the problems. This confirms the attitudes and prejudices held by others that the **Batwa** are not able to commit themselves to any sort of programme of self-development. It is necessary to break down such prejudices.

The reality of the situation is that the **Batwa** need to be supported in order to overcome the many problems that hold back their social development. They have suffered these inhuman conditions and been marginalized for too long. It is necessary to work with them in order to help them regain their confidence and dignity.

**ACTION BATWA - A SEARCH FOR LIBERATION**

The **Batwa** have to survive in a country that is classified as one of the poorest countries in the world. More than 90% of the population rely on agriculture for a living where it is difficult to find any space to cultivate. Burundi is also one of the most over-populated countries in Africa with 5 to 6 million inhabitants and a density of 270 inhabitants per square kilometre. As a result, the majority of **Burundians** carry on a daily fight for their survival on exhausted land. The underprivileged **Batwa** are not able to compete in such a hostile environment.

Because the forest has disappeared hunting is now no longer possible, and the survival of the **Batwa** depends upon them changing and adapting to another way of life. In order to do this they need to be supported in various ways. We have to implement 'positive discrimination' in their favour as regards land, education, health, and housing. It is also necessary to help other

Picture above: Batwa men making bricks

**Burundians** to change the attitude that they have towards the **Batwa**. This needs to be done by creating a greater awareness, at all levels. Once this is achieved there will emerge a new social relationship between all the ethnic groups in Burundi.

#### REHABILITATION AND ADAPTATION THROUGH LAND ISSUES

This rehabilitation requires that the **Batwa** gain equality with other **Burundians**, and the most important aspect of this is land ownership. The majority of **Batwa** do not own land to cultivate. No matter how small the piece of land, it is a vital requirement for the **Mutwa** to regain his dignity because, for a **Murundi**, a smallholding equates to true citizenship. In owning land each **Murundi** can find his origin and an identity, and for the majority of **Burundians** land is life itself. With this background knowledge, it is impossible to avoid the necessity to find land for the **Batwa**. Land is the first step in creating stability for **Batwa** families and it is also the first remedy for the problem of marginalisation.

#### NEW WAYS OF EARNING A LIVING AND ANOTHER LIFE STYLE

Once land has been acquired, the **Batwa** can begin to adapt to the life style of the other **Burundians** by farming and raising livestock. These activities can then gradually take over from the small income gained from producing pottery and, in turn, solve the problem of hunger and stop the **Batwa** from begging. This can also rekindle the **Mutwa**'s creative abilities to find new ways of surviving and bringing about a completely new lifestyle.

Once the **Mutwa** has land, he has a fixed abode and he can gradually improve his housing. The pitiful hut can make way for a more substantial house that will be cleaner and more hygienic, will be weatherproof, and a guarantee of better health. Such a house is also an assurance for

the improvement of his social status, to gain mutual respect and integration into society at large.

#### CHANGE THROUGH EDUCATION

Education will play a vital role in raising future generations of **Batwa** and in helping them to integrate into society. They will have the possibility of acquiring the necessary tools to face the future with dignity and on an equal footing with others. Thanks to education, we hope that, gradually, the **Batwa** will be able to speak to a national audience. This is the process by which they will be able to air their problems, their aspirations, their projects, as well as finding answers. Only the ethnic groups that are aware of their rights can rise to take part in their own emancipation and reach their true place in **Burundi** society.

Lastly, education will make it possible for the **Batwa** to change the way they are treated by other **Burundians**. Those who succeed at primary school will be able to go on and learn trades such as bricklaying, joinery, and sewing. They will change from working with clay to creating other products that will be more powerful, more competitive. Those who are likely to go further will be able to enter public office, the administration and the private sector.

#### A CHANGE OF ATTITUDE

New social relationships with the **Batwa** must emerge if we want to help these people leave their present dead end situation. This will be accomplished by educating the **Batwa** young people and by helping everyone else to become more aware of their humanity.

The building up of an awareness of the **Batwa**'s dignity must begin with the **Batwa** themselves. The **Batwa** have to overcome their inferiority complex, they must send their children to school, develop new manual skills, be conscious of fighting for their rights, and of collaborating with the organizations that want to help them.

In addition, we must make it clear to the other sections of society that the **Batwa** are our fellow-citizens, with the same rights and the same capability as us. The rehabilitation of the **Batwa** implies the eradication of prejudices, of the beliefs and discrimination in connection with them. Rather than treating the **Batwa** with scorn, it is necessary to accept them as they are, to accommodate them in all our associations and communities, to help them overcome their difficulties, and develop their talents.

#### 'ACCOMPANYING' THE BATWA

Today, **Batwa** are in a weak situation, on the margins of society, scorned and excluded. They have not yet acquired the tools necessary to enable them to leave this dehumanizing situation. It is up to organizations to support them, to 'accompany' them, to provide them with the tools so that the **Batwa** can begin this liberation movement. The **Action Batwa** organisation has listened to this explanation. Since 1999 it has tried to live in tune with the **Batwa**. Let us not forget, however, that the **Batwa** must make a great effort themselves.

#### WORK DONE BY ACTION BATWA 1999-2004

It cannot be overemphasised, for the moment, that a **Mutwa** cannot keep pace with the lives of other **Burundians**. Our role is to bring society to the **Mutwa** while refusing to impose its rhythm on him. **Action Batwa** is not afraid to be the friend of the **Batwa**, in their miserable situation and to share the contempt they receive. To be with them in order to help free them and



to search for a better way of life. In this way **Action Batwa** is the voice of the voiceless.

**Action Batwa** gave itself the mission of helping the **Batwa** to overcome their difficult situation of being socially marginalised. We will speak about **Action Batwa**'s role with the **Batwa**, of its methodological approach, its activities as well as the distance covered in the last five years. An evaluation will be made on its activities.

#### ACTION BATWA'S METHOD

In **Action Batwa** we like to define our approach as a continuous 'accompanying' of the **Batwa**. It is founded by establishing links through personal contacts in the villages. Often a simple visit to the **Batwa** is enough to give hope to these scorned people, while other more formal activities are also of paramount importance to help their emancipation. In each village, **Action Batwa** helps the **Batwa** to identify people, both

Picture above: A **Batwa** mother and children

women and men, who have talents to be Community Leaders, and are prepared to work for their emancipation. They are volunteers who are invited to help improve the lot of their fellow Batwa.

Action Batwa also invites them to follow various training courses or seminars and involves them in the decision-making in the activities concerning their villages. In these activities, Action Batwa tries to lead the Batwa to discover their own talents and capacities, which will enable them to recover their dignity quickly. Not everything is done for the Mutwa. He is invited to work for himself, and is supported when it is seen that he cannot be left alone. This is the goal of any project and of our discussions with the various organizations of civil society.

Our organization gives a great deal of importance to continual contact with civil society, the administration, and the ecclesiastical authorities. This is done in order to seek collaboration in the various fields and to make it possible to find solutions that are more suitable and adapted to each situation.

During the last five years Action Batwa has implemented various activities to improve the life of the Batwa by 'accompanying' them in their search for ways out of their present situation. The activities are as follows: housing improvement, children's education, the support of agriculture and animal husbandry, medical care and hygiene, the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic, education in active non-violence and human rights, statutory and civic values, and specific help with household needs.

#### IMPROVED HOUSING

The Batwa understand that they cannot continue to move from place in place in the forest, because it has almost completely been cleared. Also they cannot remain on the margins of Burundian society. Housing has been a very important

instrument in changing mentalities and in improving the relationship between the Batwa and non-Batwa. It is sign of membership of a village, of a community, and gives them stability.

Some families have decided to build houses and have joined together to make dry bricks. That represents a new and considerable effort because they had to learn how to make the bricks. It takes a long time to mould them, to dry them, and build the walls. The rains fall for nine or ten months of the year which leaves only two or three months for construction work. It is a continuous effort that is not done in a day or two, but it takes at least a whole week since a minimum of 3,500 bricks are needed to build a house.

With better housing the Batwa have gained pride in themselves as human beings. They are then seen as on an equal footing with everyone else, and the other ethnic groups begin to respect them. Indeed, they have seen the non-Batwa begin to visit them in their own homes. The taboos are being broken. The improved housing positively influenced the stability of the Batwa families, health, schooling, the farming and animal husbandry. Housing has become the engine of all Action Batwa's activities. In five years 620 dwellings have been built.

#### BATWA CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

It is impossible to avoid the important role of the education of Batwa children in resolving the social integration of the Batwa. The number of children who we provide education for is increasing: 476 in 2000, 575 in 2001, 753 in 2002, and 1,760 in 2003. Action Batwa makes sure that these children have uniforms, school materials, soap, and in some case spectacles and school fees are available for the children who are really needy.

At all times Action Batwa is conscious that the availability of school materials encourages the children to work well. It also helps the parents

realize the importance of visiting the school in order to discuss various things with the teachers. As yet the parents are not fully aware of the benefit of education and so they do not encourage their children. If the children want to leave school, the parents will not say to them: "it is necessary to continue at the school". Too bad, because the Batwa children are aware and have begun to do well.

It is important to help the Batwa schoolchildren to reach secondary school. For this reason a board-

ing school was created for them in Gitega. It caters for the last two years of primary school and ensures them food; lighting in the evening; supervised revision and exercises to help them to pass the national examination at the end of the primary school; and the necessary input for secondary education. It did not take long for the results to be seen. After a few years a small group was selected to continue studies at the college of Gitega. This is one of the keys to the evolution of the whole of the Batwa people.

In the long run this boarding school will support the emergence of skilled workers and people who can take charge of the various meetings in which the Batwa have to take part as full citizens. For this reason, as far as possible, we support the boarding school for Batwa children.

We must work, not only so that the Batwa children go to school, but also so that they are accepted in the schools, and are neither bullied nor scorned there. It is necessary to insist



that the teachers help the Batwa stay at the school and to work closely with the parents.

#### AGRICULTURE AND ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Some Batwa families already had smallholdings to cultivate. Where possible, Action Batwa has tried to buy more land for those who do not have any. We give them seeds and seedlings of some basic crops such as corn, beans, cassava, sweet potato, banana and fruit trees, like avocado and guava, so that each family has its own field. Each family is also given hoes to help them cultivate the land.

As for animal husbandry, we supported small animal breeding projects by giving goats to some Batwa families. Fortunately benefactors from Germany gave us a helping hand with this interesting project. By keeping the goats, they gain manure for their gardens and begin to improve their incomes. The Batwa are very happy to have goats like everyone else, but you must make sure that the goats are not sold - they are tempted to sell for that needed money!

Picture above: Batwa children - in the background the old and new accomodation

Action Batwa also supports beekeeping by promoting the use of modern beehives in some of the Batwa villages (237 hives). Honey is very much appreciated here but it is very expensive. With these hives the Batwa are able to make a little money, as the honey is easy to sell. From time to time we encourage the Batwa to work in Community groups.

#### HEALTH CARE AND HYGIENE

The price of medical care has become very expensive in Burundi because of the economic conditions that have worsened due to the war. This means that the situation is unbearable for the Batwa who are already very poor. We decided to provide some basic health care because the Batwa were particularly faced with the problems posed by malaria. While visiting the villages we supervise, we realized that many Batwa communities were decimated by malaria. When the Batwa went to the government health centres, they ran up against several problems: not having enough money for treatment; social barriers; a lack of understanding from others.

In agreement with the proper administrative authorities, Action Batwa opened an infirmary, in the Lavigerie Centre of Shatanya, Gitega, to look after common ailments such as: pulmonary infections, malaria, worms, and diarrhoea. This infirmary currently deals with 200 people a week. In medical care we give particular attention to children, especially schoolchildren.

Most of the care is given at the Lavigerie Centre of Shatanya, but Action Batwa is often asked to pay for the health care for the Batwa in other public health facilities such as: the Hospitals at Gitega and Mutoyi; and the Health Centres at Nyabikere, Nyabibuye, Mbogora, Munanira, and Murayi.

As for hygiene, Action Batwa began to help the Batwa become aware of the need to dig pit latrines, to encourage cleanliness and to fight diseases simply due to lack of hand-washing.

It contributed to this action while building ninety-seven pit latrines in several villages.

#### THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has become a danger to the whole of society, to families and to youth, and the battle against it is a concern for the whole of humanity. However, the Batwa live on the margins of society, and the majority are illiterate, and less informed on this problem that concerns us all.

Moreover, risky behaviour is found in their everyday life such as early marriages, marrying within the one tribe, and frequent divorces. This is why Action Batwa judged it wise to integrate HIV/AIDS awareness into its activities to help the Batwa learn about the pandemic and enable them to make suitable provisions in their lives.

Training courses on the prevention of HIV/AIDS are given at the Batwa village level to help a greater number of people to become aware of the problem.

#### EDUCATION IN HUMAN RIGHTS

Through seminars and talks Action Batwa encouraged the Batwa to learn more about their rights, to be interested in social and political issues, and to respect the laws, as a first stage that will guide them in the fight for the recovery of their dignity. Some villages have already been trained in the spirit of active non-violence. Teams of 'Nduwamahoro, the non-violent activity' were formed by listing all of those who lived in the villages (men, women, young people, children).

The war situation that prevails in the country, the need to support the schoolchildren, and those families that are in a state of extreme poverty, often justify specific assistance to the Batwa. We help the really needy by giving them blankets, cans, clothing, soap, baby-cereal (special additional food supplements for the children with malnutrition).

#### THE IMPACT OF ACTION BATWA

Though the Batwa have taken the first steps towards their emancipation, much remains to be done. The work to liberate these people is a long-term commitment. However, we can already mention certain positive points in the Batwa villages that we supervise.

The activities of Action Batwa have played an important part in changing the people's mentalities by breaking down

prejudices and by improving the relationship between the Batwa and the other ethnic groups:

- ❖ The Batwa were instilled with a new work ethic. Their desire to play a positive part in society has been awakened and they realise that this can be a reality.
- ❖ The communities assisted by our organization can now break with the infernal cycle of poverty, the begging, the marginalisation and the contempt. They understand that violence cannot solve internal conflicts.
- ❖ The children have been gradually integrated and are accustomed to attend school regularly. Mutual relations and respect between the ethnic groups have been established.
- ❖ The people in charge of the administration and connected with the church have woken up and express their willingness to contribute to, and continue with, the emancipation of the Batwa.



In short, you can now see an evident joy in life; Action Batwa has helped improve the standard of living and the wellbeing of the people.

As far as possible Action Batwa always takes care to integrate people close to the Batwa into its programmes and activities. Thus some poor families, living near Batwa villages, now have a decent house and their children are regularly assisted with school materials. In the meetings, people are invited to take part in HIV/AIDS awareness, and the education for peace programmes we run for the Batwa. All take part in our programmes of 'Food for work'.

When we build houses, part of the manual work (bricklayers and labourers), as well as necessary materials (poles, tiles, doors, windows), are provided by the Batwa neighbours. This allows all Batwa, and near neighbours, to get to know each other, to develop mutual consideration, and to break down prejudices. In this way, it fulfils the aims of our mission of integration.

Picture above: Making bricks for the new houses

## EVANGELIZATION

When the missionaries arrived, at the beginning of the colonial period they ignored the **Batwa** and directed all their efforts towards evangelising the **Bahutu** and **Batutsi**. These two ethnic groups were well-organized farmer-stockbreeders and there were many conversions.

At the time of the first evangelization, the **Batwa** were not a priority for the missionaries. However, the **Batwa** are people who ask to interact socially and who want to be evangelised. What is astonishing is that it is they who ask to join the catechumenate. When they do, they are put in contact with a parish that is ready to accommodate them. This year, at Easter, there were baptisms among the **Batwa**. When they are baptized, a change in their behaviour can be seen. They come to church and have contact with the others. It is necessary to encourage them and for them not to be discouraged.

At present a major problem is that as yet there are no **Batwa** catechists. Even if there was a **Mutwa** catechist, it is not known how other **Burundians** would react if he gave out Holy Communion. If there were a **Mutwa** priest, would he be accepted by the people? There is always the problem that a **Mutwa** may not be accepted. It is necessary for **Burundians** to change their way of thinking. It is not enough to work with the **Batwa** to help them to evolve, it is also necessary to work as hard with the other **Burundians** so that they lose their prejudices, so that they stop looking at the **Batwa** as a race apart. It is very complicated but, with time, we will arrive at a better society.

The Catholic Bishops have begun to be very conscious that it is necessary to do something with and for the **Batwa**. Previously they did not speak about the **Batwa** in a pastoral context. Now we all have begun to speak about them. On this level the Church has progressed a great deal.

## ACTION BATWA IN THE FUTURE

The evaluation of **Action Batwa's** activities that we have undertaken shows a great deal of success in the aims of the organization. For this reason members of **Action Batwa** would like to develop the work further in order to reach the many **Batwa** families that are scattered in other parts of the country and that have not been contacted yet. We would like to do this so that they too can take advantage of the programmes we provide, such as: housing improvement; education of their children; medical care and hygiene; support for agriculture and animal husbandry; education in human rights and statutory values; and the fight against the **HIV/AIDS** pandemic.

We will consolidate these activities while leaving the possibility for starting new projects such as a job creation scheme centred on the training of young people, both school leavers or the uneducated, to help them gain the skills for small trades such as: sewing, joinery, and bricklaying. Many assets make the implementation of this plan Possible:

- ❖ The initial experience that **Action Batwa** has had over the last five years working with the **Batwa** on a village level
- ❖ The **Batwa** have understood that they are the first players in their being fully integrated into **Burundian** society
- ❖ The personnel and those connected with the ecclesiastical authorities have said that they would like to do more on top of what has already been done
- ❖ Several organizations, that have the same ideals as **Action Batwa**, would like to collaborate in order to help **Batwa** in their fight for a better life.

Let us hope that the work that has already begun by **Action Batwa** will continue to bear fruit.

## SOME INFORMATION SOURCES ON THE PYGMIES IN GENERAL, THE BAKA AND THE BATWA

The following are some web sites that may be of use if you would like to follow up and find out more about the **Batwa** people and other Pygmies in Africa. The web sites tell of the pygmies and the major problems that they face which endanger their way of life and, in some cases, their very existence. With the gradual destruction of the forests where they live and the prejudice they face the Pygmy peoples who are caught between their old lifestyle and creating a new one within which they can develop and save themselves.



**PYGMIES IN GENERAL:** The Africa Guide at <http://www.africaguide.com/culture/tribes/pygmies.htm>; BBC News at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>; The Forest Peoples Programme at <http://www.forestpeoples.org/>; Foundation Pygmy Kleinood at [http://www.pygmee.nl/pygmy\\_algemeen.html](http://www.pygmee.nl/pygmy_algemeen.html); Minority Rights at <http://www.minorityrights.org/>; National Geographic Pygmies Lesson Plan at <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/10/g68/geopygmies.html>; The Pygmies of the Great Lakes (Eldis) at <http://www.eldis.org/static/DOC16889.htm>; Pygmy Information on Search Spaniel at <http://www.searchspaniel.com/index.php/Pygmy>; Pygmies in R.D Congo cities at <http://forests.org/archive/africa/fofrfore.htm>; Refugees International at <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/3203>; Survival International at <http://www.survival-international.org/>; UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (IRIN) at <http://www.irinnews.org/>; UN ReliefWeb at <http://www.reliefweb.int>; UN Indigenous Peoples at <http://www.unhcr.ch/indigenous/main.html>; Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation at <http://www.unpo.org/member.php?arg=10>.

**THE BAKA PEOPLE:** Baka Pygmies at <http://www.maurocampagnoli.com/baka/>; and Baka Forest People at <http://www.baka.co.uk/baka/>.

**THE BATWA PEOPLE:** Batwa in Africa Renewal (Africa Recovery) at <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/newrels/indigen.htm>; Edirisa.org at <http://www.edirisa.org/batwa/>; Catholic Relief Service-Action Batwa at [http://www.catholicrelief.org/our\\_work/where\\_we\\_work/overseas/africa/burundi/partner.cfm](http://www.catholicrelief.org/our_work/where_we_work/overseas/africa/burundi/partner.cfm); on the White Fathers' 'Voix d'Afrique' web site: 'Burundi: Mission chez Les Pygmées ...' at <http://peres-blancs.cef.fr/lesay.htm>; 'Les Files De La Forêt' at <http://peres-blancs.cef.fr/pygmees.htm>; and Photos Batwas at <http://peres-blancs.cef.fr/batwa.htm>.

Picture above: Sharing a laugh and a smile in their new lives

# Action Batwa - making a difference

