

Fleet management in the land of a thousand hills

By the INSEAD Humanitarian Research Group

Over the past four years, the INSEAD Humanitarian Research Group (HRG) has been a major academic partner of UNHCR, specifically on the topic of fleet management. Through rigorous research and evaluation projects, HRG has studied several aspects of UNHCR's Global Fleet Management (GFM) unit and its vehicle leasing program. This year, the scope has been extended to the field.

In September 2018, two researchers from our group (Olivier Guerinault and Joachim Mikalsen) travelled from Paris to Kigali to meet with the fleet management team in Rwanda. UNHCR Rwanda serves as a best case example in the way it manages its fleet, and we were interested in knowing why. The overall objective of the trip was to observe and document the end-to-end process of fleet management in Rwanda. This includes ordering vehicles, importing vehicles, day-to-day operations in the country, and finally, disposal of vehicles. By visiting the field and having in-depth discussions with all stakeholders, we were able to see and experience best practices and challenges.

On our first day, we visited the UNHCR Branch Office in Kigali, the home of the fleet management team. A five-man team controls a reasonably sized fleet in the landlocked country. The transportation infrastructure in Rwanda is decent. However, driving to remote locations, such as refugee camps, can be strenuous, especially in rainy seasons. In the Branch Office, we got an introduction to all the processes the fleet team has in place for controlling the fleet in Kigali and six UNHCR field offices.

The term "Road trip" would summarize days two and three in Rwanda, as we were almost continuously travelling between various field offices. The second day we set the course north and headed towards Byumba. The Northern Rwandan city has 70 000 residents and hosts a refugee camp with 13 000 inhabitants. In the field office, we met with UNHCR personnel engaged with fleet, UNHCR drivers, and implementing partners. Day three was spent in the southern city of Butare and the UNHCR's field office located there. After several interviews we headed for the Mugombwa Refugee Camp and witnessed the difficult driving conditions one can face in a country like Rwanda.



The final day was centred around maintenance services. UNHCR is in fact running its own garage in Rwanda. Regular maintenance of the entire fleet is conducted in this facility, which

has three full-time mechanics. Vehicle repairs are outsourced to an external garage. We conducted interviews at both of them.

The field trip was a first step in enhancing our knowledge of fleet management operations on field level in UNHCR. By having in-depth discussions with people from all levels, we got a better understanding of challenges and needs from implementing partners, Branch Office, field offices, and external stakeholders. The final outcome of the project will help identifying best field fleet management practices, which will be disseminated to UNHCR country programs worldwide. By analysing both global and local fleet management practices, HRG hopes to assist UNHCR in better serving its beneficiaries.