

Ezeanya-Esiobu, Chika

**Working Paper**

## The rise of homegrown ideas and grassroots voices: New directions in social policy in Rwanda

UNRISD Working Paper, No. 2017-6

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Geneva

*Suggested Citation:* Ezeanya-Esiobu, Chika (2017) : The rise of homegrown ideas and grassroots voices: New directions in social policy in Rwanda, UNRISD Working Paper, No. 2017-6, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Geneva

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/186097>

**Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

**Terms of use:**

*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*



# UNRISD

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Working Paper 2017–6

## **The Rise of Homegrown Ideas and Grassroots Voices**

*New Directions in Social Policy in Rwanda*

*Chika Ezeanya-Esiobu*

prepared for the UNRISD project on  
New Directions in Social Policy:  
Alternatives for and from the Global South

May 2017



# UNRISD

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

UNRISD, Palais des Nations  
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0)22 9173020  
Fax: +41 (0)22 9170650  
[info@unrisd.org](mailto:info@unrisd.org)  
[www.unrisd.org](http://www.unrisd.org)

Copyright © United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

This is not a formal UNRISD publication. The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed studies rests solely with their author(s), and availability on the UNRISD website ([www.unrisd.org](http://www.unrisd.org)) does not constitute an endorsement by UNRISD of the opinions expressed in them. No publication or distribution of these papers is permitted without the prior authorization of the author(s), except for personal use.

## Contents

Acronyms.....	3
List of Figures.....	3
List of Tables.....	3
Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	5
State and Social Policy Action: A Theoretical Framework.....	5
Social Policy in Rwanda: A Brief History.....	6
Pre-colonial social policy in Rwanda.....	6
Colonialism and social policy in Rwanda.....	7
Belgian colonial social policy.....	7
Social policy in Rwanda after independence.....	9
Structural adjustment programme and social policy in Rwanda.....	10
Contemporary Social Policy in Rwanda.....	11
Umudugudu, Ubudehe and Social Policy Making in Rwanda.....	12
Ubudehe categorization.....	13
Ubudehe Categorization in Social Policy Formulation and Implementation.....	15
Ubudehe based health policy.....	15
Ubudehe in agricultural social policy.....	16
Education and Ubudehe categorization.....	17
Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) and Ubudehe categorization.....	18
Ubudehe: Development Partners, Civil Society and Private Sector.....	20
Criticisms Against Rwanda’s Social Policy Direction.....	22
Is Homegrown and Grassroots Based Social Policy the Way to Go?.....	22
Conclusion.....	24
References.....	26

## Acronyms

CBHI	Community Based Health Insurance
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
DFID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
EFA	Education for All–Fast Track Initiative
GBP	Great Britain Pound
GDP	Gross-Domestic Product
IRDP	Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace
MOH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PPAS	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RWF	Rwandan Franc
SAL	Structural Adjustment Loans
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
UCS	Ubudehe Credit Scheme
USD	United States Dollar
UNDAP	United Nations Development Assistance Plan
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
VUP	Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Enrolment in Rwanda’s Astrida College.....	8
Figure 2: Statistics of Aid Allocation to Social Protection in Comparison to other Sectors of the Rwandan Economy .....	21

## List of Tables

Table 1: The Current Administrative Outlay of Rwanda.....	12
---	----

## Summary

Innovation in social policy in Rwanda has placed the grassroots at the forefront of policy formulation. Escobar (2011) notes that development, to be enduring and effective, ought to be based in the assessment of local realities, which are the lived experiences and past history of a people, as inherent in these are the proper conditions for and of change. Rwanda has institutionalized several indigenous knowledge based social policies. These indigenous knowledge based social policies are formulated and implemented in such a way as to be adaptable to existing realities, and emerging or changing social demands. Certain studies have shown the cost effectiveness and high impact factor of indigenous knowledge based policies in Rwanda. At the grassroots level of governance, indigenous knowledge becomes more important as citizens are already culturally in tune and familiar with the foundational elements and basic tenets of such policies.

This paper examines the place of homegrown, indigenous knowledge and grassroots based ideas in the processes of developing social policies in Rwanda. Specifically, the paper explores what political, social and economic institutions there are that influence the strengthening of grassroots and/or local knowledge, processes and structures in social policy action in Rwanda. The major source of information for this study was drawn from government of Rwanda's policy documents, reports from international organizations and non-governmental agencies, and strengthened with existing literature on social policy action experiences of countries around the world.

## **Introduction**

At the core of Rwanda's social policy renaissance is the emphasis on the homegrown and grassroots centered generation of intellectual and material resources, utilized with the aim of ensuring a local population familiar with and favorably disposed to government social policy. In the past decade and a half, Rwanda has gradually but consistently charted this path in social policy action through the establishment of systems and processes that focus on ensuring that citizens—and not government or donors—are held accountable for development prioritization and the achievement of set goals. Indigenous knowledge, endogenous thinking patterns, grassroots based participation and cultural considerations have—as much as feasibly possible within the Rwandan polity—characterized efforts aimed at social policy action.

According to the government of Rwanda and from available studies, indigenous knowledge based social policies are cost effective and able to more easily impact grassroots development. This is because citizens are familiar with their foundational elements and basic tenets, and are traditionally equipped to innovatively build and improve on such policies with minimal need for external prodding. This study examines the place of homegrown and grassroots based ideas in social policy formulation and implementation in Rwanda. Within this goal, the paper equally explores the extent of citizen involvement in the entire process of using homegrown and grassroots based approaches to fashion social policy in Rwanda.

## **State and Social Policy Action: A Theoretical Framework**

Very relevant to this study is Kabeer and Cook's (2000:1) understanding of social policy as those processes and mechanisms championed by the state and aimed at the protection of vulnerable groups through the creation of basic economic and social conditions to encourage wealth creation; this is often in collaboration with civil society, development partners and the private sector.

Although citizen centered, it is the Rwandan state that drives social policy formulation and implementation in the nation. The Rwandan state in its social policy activities embodies Mann's (1984:6) definition of the state as an arena, a space imbued with infrastructural power which is its capacity to “penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm.” Rwanda is presently the fourth least corrupt country in Africa and the 44th globally, according to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) (2016). The CPI covers 168 countries, examining public perceptions for corruption in the public sector. There is a strong sense of institutional trust on the part of a majority of Rwandan citizens and this grants government the power to proceed with certain decisions on behalf of the masses. There is also a high level of trust extended to the government by donors who usually provide budgetary support to back government policies. Rwanda's performance in the World Bank's “Ease of Doing Business” rankings in recent years has been exemplary and has drawn the attention of international investors, and shows trust from private sector to government. Rwanda remains the third easiest place to do business in Africa in 2016. The Rwandan state further demonstrates its infrastructural power through for example strengthened public institutions and the ability to mobilize domestic revenue through various levies and taxes on its citizens. The state's ability to collect and store data on citizens, and to collate statistical information is higher than in several African countries south of the Sahara.

Together with the state, diverse groups and their overlapping functions have synchronized to strongly shape social policy in Rwanda. Indeed, despite a strengthened state elite, civil society and international development partners have historically played key, if decisive, roles in social policy action in Rwanda. Nicola Yeates (2001) avers that in understanding contemporary social policy, the need to think globally is preeminent. This is because of the need to focus “attention on the ways which individuals, families, communities, regions and countries are embroiled in international and transnational structures and processes... [and to] consider that the causes of social problems—and their solutions—are not necessarily confined to national institutions and structures.” (Yeates 2001:17) As will be seen throughout the history of Rwanda, global structures and processes such as the nature of colonial relations, the Structural Adjustment Programme of the Bretton Woods institutions and the influence of development partners, international civil society and private sector in post-genocide Rwanda have shaped the nation’s social policy. In this instance, Rwanda’s infrastructural power, which is based on low rate of corruption, measurable successes in governance as evidenced by increasing GDP and a rising number of citizens overcoming extreme poverty, confers a measure of respect on the state. Development partners, for instance, allow the state to take full decisions regarding utilization of grants and aids. On the part of civil society and private sector, there is a higher degree of trust in government policies, and with it a motivation to cooperate toward its progress.

## **Social Policy in Rwanda: A Brief History**

It is necessary to explore the history of social policy making in Rwanda, since the nation’s present day efforts builds on the foundation of indigenous practices from ancient times, which the government and citizens consider to be relevant. History of social policy in Rwanda can be roughly divided into the pre-colonial period which was between BC 1000 to the onset of colonial rule in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (a very essentialist grouping since there were many kings with differing orientations); the colonial era, which can be further sub-divided into the German and Belgian colonial periods that lasted from the later 19<sup>th</sup> century until Independence in 1962; the post-Independence and pre-Structural Adjustment period (1962–1994); and the post-genocide era (1994–date).

### ***Pre-colonial social policy in Rwanda***

Prior to colonial interruptions in the progressive growth of the state in Rwanda, strong and closely knit extended family ties combined with cultural expectations ensured that the weak and vulnerable were shielded by the more able family members. In the event of the absence of immediate or extended family members to step in, communities would often take on the task of caring and providing for the weak and vulnerable (Mouton 1975; Illife 2005). Focusing on health care, for instance, primary health care during that epoch was very much a family affair where adults usually held knowledge of medicinal herbs, bark, roots and therapies to treat common illnesses. Provision of advanced and professional health care services was in the hands of traditional medical healers. Because they thought that charging fees for their services was forbidden by the gods, the services were mostly free (Vansina 2004). Tokens of appreciation upon recovery, according to one’s financial level, were common, but never demanded or even expected. At the minimum, however, every citizen in need could access a health care practitioner, be it a bonesetter, midwife, herbalist, physician and/or a spiritual healer. In the pre-colonial Rwandan state, there was little emphasis on social policy making at the state level as a



result of customs and traditions that readily laid the burden of social service provision on community. The Rwandan state did provide some form of minimal social services, such as the education of certain children of the elites in the art of diplomacy, governance, warfare and tradition (Vansina 2004).

### ***Colonialism and social policy in Rwanda***

European colonialism laid the foundations for Rwanda's modern state and its initial social policy structures. Colonialism established certain social policies to guide governance, and to ensure maximum benefits for the colonial authorities. During the 1885 Berlin conference, Rwanda was carved out for Germany as part of its protected territories in Africa. Germany ruled between 1885 and 1919, but was forced to relinquish that hold when the League of Nations handed the territory over to Belgium after Germany's defeat in the First World War.

Germany's social policy interventions in Rwanda were minimal. Germany displayed a thinly veiled distrust for natives within her colonial jurisdiction and made a conscious effort to prevent the transfer of technology, institutions and mechanisms from Germany to the colonies. Emphasis was laid on the preservation of colonial structures and cultures with very little novel input from the German colonizers. The Germans feared that educating the natives or providing them with basic western social services to ensure a longer and better quality life would lead to a revolution (Steinmetz 2008). What is known as Native Policy became the rule of thumb across much of German colonized territories. Native Policy was a deliberate and sustained effort to prevent the colonized from accessing German way of life, services and cultural codes. It was the centerpiece of German colonial policy typified by what is written on the masthead of a German colonial journal *Die deutschen Kolonien*, "Colonial policy is essentially native policy" (Steinmetz 2008).

In line with the terms of Native Policy, German colonialists were not actively in support of providing education, health care or other social services to Rwandan citizens. Instead, missionaries were more involved in social service delivery, specifically that of provision of health and education. German colonialists considered Rwandan natives as inferior, and possible candidates for uprising and thus withheld active support to the missionaries who provided social services, although they were careful in their treatment of the missionaries as a result of the fear of German and European public opinion. These missionaries were outside the state, but were sometimes "invited to fill official functions especially with native education" (Steinmetz 2008:5). In the late 1800s, the first school was established in Rwanda by the Catholic missionary order of White Fathers and by 1918 there were close to a dozen Catholic missionary schools operating in the territory identified as Rwanda (Hoben 1988). A handful of health centers were established as well, but in all, German colonial rule could be said to be an era when pre-existing traditional social support systems thrived in Rwanda, in the absence of clear social policy by the colonizing power.

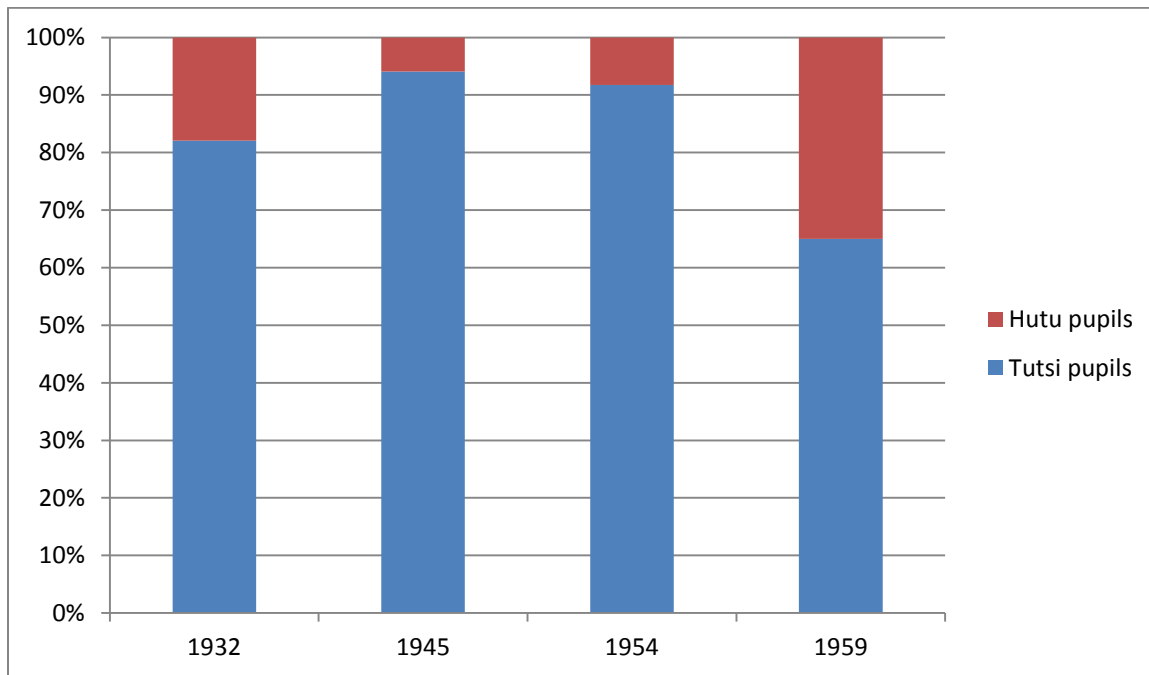
### **Belgian colonial social policy**

With the defeat of Germany in the First World War, the League of Nations handed over the administration of Rwanda to Belgium. Belgian colonial rule in Rwanda was longer and more intense, spanning the period from the end of the First World War to the granting of Independence

in 1962 and seeing to the full integration of Rwanda into the global political and economic system. Much more so than the Germans, the Belgians were interested in social policy formulation and implementation, often working closely with missionaries and other faith-based civil society organizations.

The Belgians actively courted missionary groups in the provision of social services, such that between 1919 and 1943, Belgian Presbyterians, Seventh Day Adventists, Anglicans, Baptist, Pentecostals and Methodists flooded the country in addition to the existing Catholics. The content and forms of education were shaped by the interests of missionaries and the colonizers without reflecting local needs. Some of the missionaries were interested in giving just “enough schooling for the masses to master the catechism and accept the church’s teaching...” (Hoben 1988: 11), while some wanted to also make available higher education for the production of a cadre of African clergy and lay ministers (Walker-Keleher 2006). Although at the primary level, education was made widely available to many Rwandans across class and clan, at the post-primary level, most places were reserved for the sons of favored minority ethnic Tutsi elites who were to serve as the indirect rulers for the Belgian governments (Prunier 1995). The chart below represents enrolment in Rwanda’s most prestigious institution, Astrida College, where Tutsis dominated, although they were only 15 percent of the population.

**Figure 1: Enrolment in Rwanda’s Astrida College**



Source: Prunier (1995)

The colonialists placed emphasis on the production of lower-level administrators, clerks and aides to assist in the civil services, since it would have proven too expensive for Belgians to occupy such posts. There was no interest in providing higher education to locals (Hoben 1989:13).

Regarding health care, a faith-based system was prominent during Belgian colonial rule in Rwanda, in addition to government efforts (Government of Rwanda 2005). Nevertheless, traditional medicine continued to thrive alongside missionary and government hospitals, despite a collective denigration of the indigenous health care system as barbaric and uncivilized. The vilification of Rwanda's traditional health care system by the missionaries and colonialists did not seriously affect that system at that time, mostly due to the widespread unavailability of western alternatives. It was not until the 1970s that many Rwandans gradually transited to primarily relying on western medicine as their first treatment option (Ngoga 2013).

Belgian colonial social policy—as far as it relates to health—focused on four pillars, namely: the provision of hospitals and health care units, the fight against endemic diseases and epidemics, the formulation of a public health policy and maternal and child health (Cornet 2009). Under epidemic control, for instance, the eradication and/or control of certain diseases such as Yaws was paramount. Several campaigns were organized between the years 1929–1932 and 1933–1939 in what was considered a very authoritarian and systematic manner, with little consideration given to culture and human rights of the population (Cornet 2009).

In all, colonial social policy in Rwanda set the foundation for what became social policy in the newly independent Rwanda after 1962. It was a foundation of close collaboration between government and international donors or development partners (missionaries, charity organizations, philanthropists) in the formulation and implementation of social policy, usually with minimum participation of the masses who were not encouraged by the colonialists for fear of it turning into a platform of organization by citizens to rebel against colonial rule.

### ***Social policy in Rwanda after independence***

Newly independent Rwanda continued with the governance system it inherited from the colonial masters. Succeeding administrations in Rwanda invested more in the provision of social services, working together with international development partners and a budding civil society and private sector. Rwanda's Ubuntu philosophy, which is shared by much of the Bantu occupied region of Sub-Saharan Africa, calls for the protection of the weak and vulnerable by the stronger members of the society. Post-Independence African states were mostly welfarist in nature with a paternalistic approach, and social service strongly founded on colonial policies. Education, health care, agricultural inputs, food and other social services were either free or highly subsidized since political independence was viewed as meaningless without a concomitant rise in standard of living and quality of life of the citizens. Social protection policies were also utilized as a tool for state-building and even power consolidation on the part of the political class who extended free education, health services and other amenities to their entire population. For example, Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah (1961–1966) provided free primary, post-primary and tertiary education to citizens (Kumssa and Jones 2014).

Over time, however, African governments could not sustain the generous social policy and soon ran out of resources. This is because the 1970s slump in international commodity prices upon which the countries depended added to the heavy investment in social services. Quite a few governments in Sub-Saharan Africa had also invested heavily in large, unsustainable

infrastructural white elephant projects such as building of stadiums and sports arenas, airports, five star hotels and so on, which would soon lead the countries into huge debt and invariably to the next phase of social policy in the continent.

### **Structural adjustment programme and social policy in Rwanda**

Excessive borrowing coupled with the slump in world crude and commodity prices in the 1970s would soon throw Rwanda and other African countries into a deep financial hole. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was approved by the World Bank Board in 1980 and was introduced as a specialized loan to assist developing countries to “reduce their current account deficit to more manageable proportions by supporting programmes of adjustment...while maintaining their growth and developmental momentum” (World Bank 1980:67). Structural Adjustment Loans (SALs) would be extended only to those countries who have committed to abide by specific reform policies designed by the Bretton Woods institution to decrease government expenditure and growth savings.

The SAP mandated developing nations in desperate need of loans to implement export-led growth, trade liberalization, fiscal adjustment, increased free market economy, minimum state intervention in governance, reduction in expenses on such social services as health and education, and the privatization of social services; principal components of the SAP have been enunciated in several documents (World Bank 1981, 1989, 1993; Inanga & Ekpenyong 1998; Mwege 1998).

The SAP called for a re-conceptualization of the state not as the provider of social services, but as the facilitator of business and growth. Economists and policy makers from the Global North questioned the continued investment of states in public enterprises even if directed at social welfare and public good. The argument was capitalist in bearing, being that these public ventures do not yield any monetary profits to the state, and the “subsidies spent to maintain their activities have become a drag on the wheel of government treasuries.” According to the prevailing argument for reduction in state provision of social services,

[The state’s functions], particularly the economic and social functions, must be reconsidered and readjusted...this new good governance state must ‘privatize’ itself to the maximum and ‘de-statize’ itself by giving more responsibility to private initiative while reinforcing the bases of market economy and ensuring free competition(...) The privatization process no longer spares the so-called social sectors (education, health, social affairs) up to now monopolized and essentially falling under public services. (Sine 1997, as cited by Ndiaye 2004:14,16)

Under labour market reforms, the SAP enforced measures to remove what it termed “labour market distortions”, which had to do with the removal of social security, minimum wages, unemployment benefits, worker’s benefits, etc. The reasons advanced for this were that the removal of labour market distortions would make room for labour market flexibility and have a positive effect on economic growth in developing countries (ILO 1996).

SAP tremendously transformed the social policy environment of Africa, though often with more negative than positive effects. According to the African Union’s Social Policy Framework for

Africa, “One of the major limitations of the policy prescriptions that came with structural adjustment packages was that they were based on a narrow quantitative concern for economic growth and macro-economic stability. There was little or no concern for questions of equity, livelihoods and human security” (African Union 2008:7). Sub-Saharan Africa recorded extensive social deficits as a result of implementing the SAP. In fact, in a study utilizing data generated from the International Fund for Agricultural Development, it was established that extreme poverty had increased for some countries by as much as 15 percent between 1965 and 1988 (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998). In another study conducted between 1985 and 1990, three of the best performing countries in terms of adherence to World Bank adjustment policy all recorded astronomical increase in poverty levels (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998).

In the case of Rwanda, the World Bank classified the nation as the third worst country as far as implementation of the prescriptions on adjustment was concerned. Despite the worst performance, between 1985 and 1990, poverty increased in Rwanda by 6.35 percentage points (Mkandawire and Soludo 1998). By 1993, 53 percent of Rwandans were officially recognized to be living in poverty, which indicated a marked increase from 40 percent in 1985, while average GDP per capita stood at USD 290 in 1990-1993 (World Bank 1998:1). In short, by 1993, most Rwandans were poorer than they were at the onset of the Structural Adjustment Programme; 43 percent of rural households had less than 0.7 hectares of land, the minimum that can provide adequate nutrition for a family of five people, while two percent were completely landless (Obura 2003:33).

Very important also is that the World Bank’s SAP brought about the destruction of economic activities in Rwanda and people’s means of sustenance, giving rise to an uncontrollable surge in the rate of unemployment and thereby leading to a general situation of famine and social disenchantment. The governance and state administrative systems and processes were thrown into confusion, while state owned enterprises were pushed into bankruptcy (Chossudovsky 1997:116, 119).

## **Contemporary Social Policy in Rwanda**

At the root cause of the genocide of 1994 in Rwanda where approximately one million citizens were killed is poverty and systemic inequality (Mamdani 2002). Rwanda’s immediate post-genocide government actively crafted policies aimed at both addressing endemic poverty and decreasing inequality among the populace. The government of Rwanda has stated its realization that one of the surest ways to empower Rwanda’s majority rural inhabitants and make for adequate social protection and household economic improvement lies in meeting the people where they are, in terms of their knowledge, geography and available resources. The government of Rwanda therefore began to emphasize homegrown, grassroots and indigenous knowledge based approach to social policy making that will depend very little on external parties and much on the citizens themselves.

One of the first steps taken to actualize this ideal was the transformation of the country from the unitary and centralized system bequeathed by the colonial masters to a decentralized form of administration in 2000. In May of that year the government of Rwanda adopted the National Decentralization Policy, the aim being to ensure the “political, economic, social, managerial, administrative and technical empowerment of local populations to fight poverty by participating

in the planning and management of their development process” (Government of Rwanda 2013a:10). A review of this policy in 2006 created the lowest level of administration known as the Umudugudu, which consists of a cluster of between 100–150 households, with a total of 14,837 Umudugudus created across the nation.

The Umudugudu came into being as a result of the decentralization agenda of the government of Rwanda, which is divided into phases. The beginning of implementation of the decentralization process gave birth to Phase I (2001–2005), which emphasized the establishment of grassroots democratic governance. Phase II (2006–2010), which saw the Umudugudu created, aimed at the enhancement of local level service delivery, accountability and capacity building. Phase III (2011–2015) aimed at the clarification of the legal framework, devolution of fiscal control and the continued improvement of local government capacity (MINALOC 2013). The Rwanda Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) is in charge of governance at the grassroots and stresses the importance of citizen participation in decision making. Government branches are required by law to adhere to participatory mechanisms in planning and budgeting within their areas of jurisdiction and to have five-year development plans that are generated through widespread consultations at the village, cell and sectoral levels (MINALOC 2013).

However, MINALOC acknowledges that in the actual sense, citizen participation in planning and decision making regarding development challenges is quite low. The Ministry points to a low level of awareness on the part of citizens as responsible for low participation (MINALOC, 2013:18). In a study conducted by the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP), involving 40 focus groups with local leaders and citizens across ten randomly selected districts, 74 percent of citizens stated that they have not been involved in the development of policies and programmes, while 61 percent of local authority figures notes that they do not as a habit, consult the local population during processes of decision making (IRDP 2011a:44). However, 89 percent of citizens note that they participate during implementation and execution of local programmes, through volunteering their labour and in the payment of local taxes (IRDP 2011a:45).

**Table 1: The Current Administrative Outlay of Rwanda**

Government of Rwanda : Structure of Administration 2006 – Present	
Territory/Division	Numbers
Government	1
Provinces (including Kigali)	5
Districts	30
Sectors	416
Cellules	2,148
Villages (Umudugudu)	14,837

Source: Modified from Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) (2008:8)

## **Umudugudu, Ubudehe and Social Policy Making in Rwanda**

The government of Rwanda’s efforts at establishing grassroots participation and capitalizing on indigenous knowledge or homegrown ideas in social policy action centers around the Ubudehe categorization of poverty at the lowest administrative unit, the Umudugudu. Ubudehe was drawn from ancient Rwandan history and can be rightly described as an indigenous knowledge and

grassroots based approach to community development which has been scaled up to conform to the requirements of modern rural administration and grassroots governance.

Historically, Ubudehe is a term used to refer to the culture of collective work by community members aimed at either addressing general challenges or to assist individual households who are short of labour to address their own challenges. Ubudehe in the area of agriculture, for instance, would see some members of community coming together to assist vulnerable households such as the handicapped, aged and widows to cultivate their land at no cost. The idea is that any member of the community could be in need of community efforts and that the community should be available to assist. By way of community work, members of the community can come together to repair roads damaged by use or other natural phenomena or to construct new roads or build town halls or other necessary projects that needs collective effort.

Ubudehe was resurrected in the modern Rwandan consciousness in 2001 and was repackaged as a platform for strongly encouraging collective action toward poverty eradication based on the Umudugudu structure. Ubudehe is designed to strengthen the government effort at decentralization of governance in order to empower the grassroots. Ubudehe aims to balance governance from the top-down approach with a bottom-up or grassroots based approach, through the strengthening of “democratic processes and governance starting from the people’s aspirations, ability and traditions” (Government of Rwanda 2009:4). Economic empowerment strategies are beginning to involve the grassroots where participation is sought from the rural poor in the analysis and crafting of policies to address their peculiar situation. Local knowledge and local solutions are more and more, being considered as crucial economic development policy action, especially for the rural poor. (Zewde 2010).

The idea is for Ubudehe to build on existing community relations, social beliefs and systems and economic realities of rural Rwandans and “complement it with modern participatory techniques, which have proven their worth in community development.” (Government of Rwanda 2009:3).

Under Ubudehe, local community members at the Umudugudu levels across Rwanda are mandatorily required to gather community members together and, with the help of Ubudehe facilitators/trainers, identify and place community members into different economic categories. The steps established according to the Ubudehe guidelines are that local community members come together to establish the level of poverty among individual community members as determined by the people themselves, establish what the various root causes of poverty might be and what the outcome is, construct a social map of the community that will include the full names of heads of household and the social/economic categorization to which s/he belongs, as already determined by the people, and the construction of a social map of the village (Government of Rwanda 2009).

The above stated Ubudehe steps are composed of activities aimed at the categorization of community members in terms of their social and economic status which have been used for determining beneficiaries of government social services. Indeed, the classification of citizens among socio-economic categories is a key tool for the implementation of social protection programmes and the targeting of beneficiaries.

## ***Ubudehe categorization***

Much more than any other governmental policy, Ubudehe plays a central role in determining the flow of government resources aimed at social protection. To a large extent, it determines the politics of who gets what and how at the grassroots level. Presently, the government channels its health insurance policy, cash transfer, credit scheme, public works and education bursary assistance through the Ubudehe categorization. Each of these are discussed in more detail in the next segment.

The categorization of Ubudehe from inception until February 2015 was based on the six following categories:

1. *Umitindi Nyakuja* – handicapped, destitute and beggars who depend on alms for survival
2. *Umutindi* – able to work but little or no land and no health insurance
3. *Umukene* – no savings but access to regular if less nutritious meals, often no health insurance and limited access to education for school age children
4. *Umukene Wifashije* – owners of small land holdings with children of school age able to attend primary school, may have small savings
5. *Umukungu* – owners of large land holdings and livestock, gainfully employed and employ farm hands on own farms, health insurance and school fees are guaranteed
6. *Umukire* – wealthy with good housing, automobile and access to credit (MINECOFIN 2002)

In February 2015, the Minister for Local Government and Social Affairs launched a new categorization for Ubudehe (MINALOC 2015). Reasons advanced for the new categorization include the fact that the general economic status of Rwandans had risen dramatically over the five years since the previous categorization. The enhanced living standards have been attributed to several factors, including numerous social protection policies of the government, such as Girinka and the Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP). Other reasons include the fact that under the previous categorization, many people resisted being classified due to the derogatory names attached to the different levels. For instance, the first level, Abatindi Nyakuja, is a Kinyarwanda term for those without hands and feet, meaning one who is helpless and without hope. Being a people whose culture is firmly founded in dignity and self-respect, many Rwandans at the community level fought against being rightfully categorized due to the stigma attached to such terms, while some sought and tried to influence being placed in categories of a much higher economic status than they belonged as that will increase their respect in the eyes of other villagers.

The new categorization is as below:

**Category 1:** Very poor and vulnerable citizens who are homeless and unable to feed themselves without assistance.

**Category 2:** Citizens who are able to afford some form of rented or low class owned accommodation, but who are not gainfully employed and can only afford to eat once or twice a day.

**Category 3:** Citizens who are gainfully employed or are even employers of labour. Within this category are small farmers who have moved beyond subsistence farming, or owners of small and medium scale enterprises.



**Category 4:** Citizens classified under this category are chief executive officers of big businesses, employees who have full-time employment with organizations, industries or companies, government employees, owners of lockdown shops or markets and owners of commercial transport or trucks (Government of Rwanda 2015; MINALOC 2015).

## **Ubudehe Categorization in Social Policy Formulation and Implementation**

Data collected directly from the citizens through the Ubudehe categorization has been used to deliver social services according to the poverty level of citizens. They include public services helping the poor through social protection programmes under health, agriculture and food security, direct assistance and education. For the benefit of this study, certain social protection programmes of the government will be discussed in relation to their endogenous nature and their reliance on Ubudehe categorization.

### ***Ubudehe based health policy***

The genocide of 1994 completely destroyed the health care sector in Rwanda. Infrastructures were razed while thousands of trained health care professionals were either killed in the genocide or participated in killing others and fled the country or were jailed afterwards. The post-genocide government of Rwanda therefore had the huge task of rebuilding a dilapidated health care sector, and started rebuilding health infrastructure with the 1995 launch of the health sector reform initiative. The policy, which was adopted in 1996 has as its foundational objective the provision of quality, affordable and accessible health care services to the majority of the nation's population. In line with this goal, the Rwanda Ministry of Health in 1999 initiated the Community Based Health Insurance (CBHI) Scheme known as the *Mutuelle de Sante*. CBHI was established as an independent and functional arm of the government of Rwanda (through the Ministry of Health) in 2007 (MOH 2004:8).

When the CBHI scheme was introduced in 1999, all citizens who were interested in signing up to the service were expected to pay an annual subscription fee of RWF 1,000 (approximately USD 1.33), regardless of income level. Despite much publicity created around the scheme and government efforts at encouraging citizens to sign-up to the programme, only 7 percent of Rwandan citizens had signed up by 2003. One of the major drawbacks to signing on to the scheme, according to citizens, is that the flat rate payment system does not discriminate between the rich and the poor. While many Rwandans were unable to afford the flat rate, for some, it was so inexpensive that they doubted the quality of health care that could be provided at that rate. In response, the MOH took a decision to institute a "contribution system based on the relative revenues of members." The aim of the contribution system was to "increase equity and strengthen the financing of the CBHI system" (MOH 2010). In addition to bringing in more poorer citizens, this new system should generate more revenue and enable a better quality of services to attract the wealthier class.

In 2011, Rwanda's MOH instituted a new CBHI scheme payment rate based on the Ubudehe categorization; citizens pay the health insurance premium according to the Ubudehe level within which the citizen's household falls (MOH 2010). The poorest and most vulnerable citizens are

exempt from paying premiums and are covered by governments and NGOs, while citizens who fall under other Ubudehe categories pay according to income.

By the end of the first year of implementation of Ubudehe categorization in the CBHI scheme, the rate of coverage for health insurance in Rwanda had reached 90.7 percent (MOH 2012:12). In addition, the United Nations Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation notes that Rwanda has achieved an under five year mortality rate (U5MR) of 54 per 1000 live births in 2013, a reduction of more than 70 percent (World Bank 2013; UNICEF 2013; World Health Organization 2015). Ubudehe categorization has also helped to reduce out of pocket spending on health from 28 percent to 12 percent in 2012, while several districts report that up to 40 percent of premiums are fully pre-paid three months prior to each financial year (Makaka, Breen and Binagwaho 2012). Essentially, the Ubudehe categorization allows more citizens to afford premium payments.

Under the Paris Declaration on Aid (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action on Aid (2008), donors are strongly encouraged to align behind objectives of developing countries. Donor countries are also to make the process of securing aid a simplified one, and to share information to avoid duplication. Also, effective aid must have a real and measurable impact on development in the recipient nation. Ubudehe categorization is beneficial in ensuring aid effectiveness in Rwanda. The government of Rwanda has stated its goal of ensuring that all Rwandans come under health insurance coverage regardless of income status. Ubudehe categorization makes it possible for willing donors to more readily align with this goal and to avoid duplication of efforts. As an example, donors and organizations interested in assisting citizens pay for health insurance can do so by offering to pay the health insurance of citizens within a certain category, since Rwanda's MOH maintains a database to that effect. Additionally, the Ubudehe database makes data collection on the poverty status of citizens before and after aid interventions easy to determine.

### ***Ubudehe in agricultural social policy***

Agriculture plays a prominent role in Rwanda's economy as the majority of the country's population live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Although Rwanda aspires to move from an agrarian to a knowledge economy according to the nation's Vision 2020 document, the country recognizes the role a transformed agriculture can play since "agro-business can provide spill-overs into other sectors of the economy" (MINECOFIN 2000:20). The government of Rwanda has therefore stated its continued commitment to assist poor rural dwellers in scaling up agriculture and farming practices. In that regard, the government of Rwanda has several agro-based social protection packages that are aimed at assisting the rural poor and vulnerable. Prominent among such initiatives is the Girinka programme.

The Girinka, or one-cow-per-poor-family, programme (Girinka in Kinyarwanda translates to "may you own a cow") is an age old practice where rich cattle owners gift cows to poorer peasants. It is important to note that cattle-rearing plays a central role in Rwanda's political, social and economic relations. Cows are given or exchanged at every important social event in Rwanda, including births, deaths, marriages, conflict resolution and in recognition of some form of service rendered (Rwanda Governance Board 2013).

In its modern practice as a social protection mechanism, the government of Rwanda through the Rwanda Agriculture Board (an agency of the Ministry of Agriculture), gifts a pregnant dairy cow to identified poor and vulnerable community members. The recipients of these cattle will gift the first female offspring produced to another household that has been identified as poor and vulnerable by the community. The major aim of the Girinka programme is to address the challenge of endemic malnutrition among rural Rwandans and to reduce poverty through dairy cattle-rearing (Rwanda Agricultural Board 2013).

The Girinka programme depends on the Ubudehe categorization to determine who qualifies for the gift of a cow from the government and who can receive the first female offspring from the original recipient. At the Umudugudu level, local community members, through a generally acknowledged person of integrity, are requested to submit a list of poor and vulnerable citizens who need a cow to the cell and sector level leaders, who in turn forward the list to the Rwanda Agriculture Board. After due processes have been followed, individuals are given the cows at specially organized events at the village level. To prevent elite capture of this process, all beneficiaries are vetted by the entire community as being in need of government assistance, although a person of integrity acts as the focal point and spokesperson on behalf of the community (Ezeanya 2014).

In the nine years since it was first established, the Girinka programme has given away approximately 200,000 cows to as many households, making the country to post “an average of 5.7 cows per household reared by the use of zero grazing” (Feed the Future 2016). In a population of a little less than 12 million inhabitants, that number is not negligible. Benefits recorded are numerous and include improved nutrition among Rwandans as beneficiaries and organized school milk feeding programmes in conjunction with Girinka beneficiaries. Between 2006 and 2012, there has been a noticeable decline (from 28 percent down to 21 percent) in the number of households classified as food insecure in Rwanda (IFAD 2012). As a result of improved nutrition, the percentage of underweight children in Rwanda dropped from 18 percent to 11 percent while that of children with stunted growth was lowered from 51 percent in 2005 to 44 percent in 2010 (Rwanda Governance Board 2013). In addition, production of milk at the national level has increased by 11.3 percent, between 2009 and 2011, while beef production increased by approximately 10 percent during the same period (IFAD 2012).

### ***Education and Ubudehe categorization***

Rwanda is a poor country where the majority of qualified students are unable to pay tuition fees, especially at the higher education level. Prior to the genocide, very few Rwandans had the opportunity of attending the only university in the country, the National University of Rwanda. From its establishment in 1963 until the genocide of 1994, only about 2,000 students graduated from the National University of Rwanda (MINEDUC 2008:4). All the students that graduated from the university were on a full scholarship and bursary. The post-genocide government of Rwanda began a commitment to expand access to higher education among the Rwandan population. Several policy actions were undertaken to that effect, including the liberalization of higher education to attract private investors and the establishment of many other universities.

Rwandan students, hungry for education but denied such opportunities prior to the genocide, responded in large numbers. Many students qualified for higher education, but few could find the

financial means to pursue their dreams. According to Rwanda's higher education policy, "the government will provide financial assistance for the majority of full-time students attending public sector institutions through a means tested loan scheme. The government will ensure that no qualified student is barred from higher education solely because of their own or their family's inability to provide support" (MINEDUC 2008:18). In order to keep to this policy statement, the government set a very high benchmark for qualification into higher education in government owned institutions that offered the full government sponsorship and bursary. Candidates falling short of the benchmark sponsored themselves in private education. Outside the working class and a few candidates from privileged homes, many Rwandans could not afford private higher education and relied on government assistance in order to obtain higher education.

The burden of bursary and scholarship payment for students would soon become unbearable for Rwanda's Ministry of Education. It is important to note here that budget allocated for education in Rwanda is at 22.1 percent of the national budget, which is well over 20 percent target recommended by the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) (UNESCO 2012). Rwanda's budgetary allocation to education ought to be understood within the context of the country being dependent on foreign aid for about 40 percent of its national budget, and that most development partners, although gradually undergoing a paradigm shift, are still hesitant to fully support higher education in developing countries.

By 2008, the Ministry of Education acknowledged its inability to fund all qualified students in government universities. A new policy was introduced which sought to provide support to only those students who are proven to be poor and unable to pay for higher education. The challenge for the Ministry of Education was to establish guidelines for determining affordability of higher education by prospective university students (MINEDUC 2008:14). After trying several strategies, all of which failed to adequately place students in wealth categories in a transparent and candid manner, the government of Rwanda decided to use the Ubudehe categorization to determine who qualifies for what kind of government education subsidy (Ezeanya 2015).

Implementation of Ubudehe in Rwanda's public higher education has taken the form of a graded payment of scholarship with or without bursary, depending on the Ubudehe categorization of the student's primary household. For students coming from households classified within the first and second Ubudehe categories, the government pays full scholarship and a monthly stipend. For students from households falling within the third and fourth categories, the government pays half of their tuition and fees with no bursary while those within the fifth and six categories are required to pay one hundred percent of their tuition and fees.

Since its implementation in Rwanda's public higher education sector, Ubudehe has received both positive and negative feedback. While the government has been able to free up funds to invest in other pressing educational issues such as infrastructure and staff development, there are complaints from several students who are convinced that they have been placed in the wrong Ubudehe categorization (Ezeanya 2015). The revised Ubudehe categorization was most likely an effort to respond to the questions surrounding the utilization of the scheme in the higher education sector.

### ***Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) and Ubudehe categorization***

The Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) is the flagship social protection programme of the government of Rwanda and comes under the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (EDPRS I from 2008 to 2012 and EDPRS II from 2013 to 2018). EDPRS I and II are contained within the Government of Rwanda's Vision 2020 document, which is the core and overarching plan for leading Rwanda to attain the per capita income of a "middle-income country in an equitable way," by the year 2020 (MINECOFIN 2000). VUP Umurenge comprises of three components.

First is the public works component where villagers come together under the Ubudehe community development arm to agree on specific projects that need to be carried out, using community-based participatory approaches. These projects include terracing, irrigation, watershed management, access road construction, etc. In addition, community members who are considered poor under categories 1 and 2 of Ubudehe, but who are able to supply labour, are employed to work on the projects and are paid at a locally determined wage rate. In 2010/11, for instance, a project of radical terracing and construction of anti-erosion trenches fetched a payment of RWF 700/day (approximately USD 0.93) for 6 months of full-time work. As at 2013, public works has "already employed 104, 425 households and has produced at least 400 community assets.... Public Works employment is dictated by sector budget allocations, project cycles and the number of workplaces on specific projects." (Devereux 2012:3)

The second component under the VUP Umurenge is the credit scheme, which seeks to tackle extreme poverty and create off-farm employment by fostering entrepreneurship among the rural poor. Through a system of public private partnerships, loan packages are designed and extended to the rural poor in order to engage in businesses such as farming and animal production, trading, capacity development, etc. The Ubudehe Credit Scheme (UCS) was launched in March 2010 and both individuals and cooperatives can borrow from the scheme. Households from all Ubudehe categories can borrow from the scheme to finance a range of enterprises and agri-businesses. Loans are due to be repaid in full within one year, at a rate of two percent, which is well below the market rate (Devereux 2012:18). There are numerous success stories of entrepreneurs made through the UCS, although there are challenges of low aggregate repayment rates (Devereux 2012:3).

The third component of the VUP Umurenge is direct cash transfers, which are reserved for those within the poorest first and second Ubudehe categorizations who are unable to supply labour. According to the government of Rwanda, one of the aims of the unconditional cash transfer is to allow for the redirecting of "social protection to the neediest people who are landless and unable to work, thereby rationalizing and improving the effectiveness of social protection programmes, along the social protection strategy" (Government of Rwanda 2007). Such unconditional cash transfers aim to "expand health and education coverage as well as to encourage the development of "appropriate" skills, handicraft, or social service activities" (Government of Rwanda 2007). A total of 18,879 households, which covers 45,204 individuals, received direct support through the programme in the 2010/11 financial year (Devereux 2012:15).

VUP was designed with several avenues through which the poor can graduate from dependency to independence, and from one Ubudehe categorization to another. This is because one of the aims of the VUP Umurenge is to “release the productive capacities of the poor and extremely poor” (Government of Rwanda 2007:75).

VUP Umurenge is one of the pivotal programmes that the government of Rwanda has strategically implemented with the target to reduce extreme poverty from 24 percent in 2013 to 9 percent by 2017/2018, and more general poverty from 45 percent to below 30 percent within the same timeframe (Government of Rwanda 2013c). In a study on the benefits of VUP Umurenge to beneficiaries, Gahamanyi and Kettlewell note that, 41 percent of households that received VUP Direct Support for the year 2010–2011 moved up in the Ubudehe category the year after. However, that number should be placed alongside the 35 percent of households who were eligible, but did not receive direct support from VUP Umurege, but who also moved up the Ubudehe categories (Gahamanyi and Kettlewell 2015:55). Under public works, over 30 percent of VUP Umurenge beneficiaries have improved their Ubudehe status, again, this figure should be placed alongside approximately one third of households who were eligible but did not receive VUP benefits, but who also improved their Ubudehe status. It becomes quite challenging to attribute poverty reduction to any specific interventions, including VUP (Gahamanyi and Kettlewell 2015). Nonetheless, studies present strong evidence that VUP Umurenge has improved food consumption and agricultural investments, especially in the short-term (Hartwig 2013).

## **Ubudehe: Development Partners, Civil Society and Private Sector**

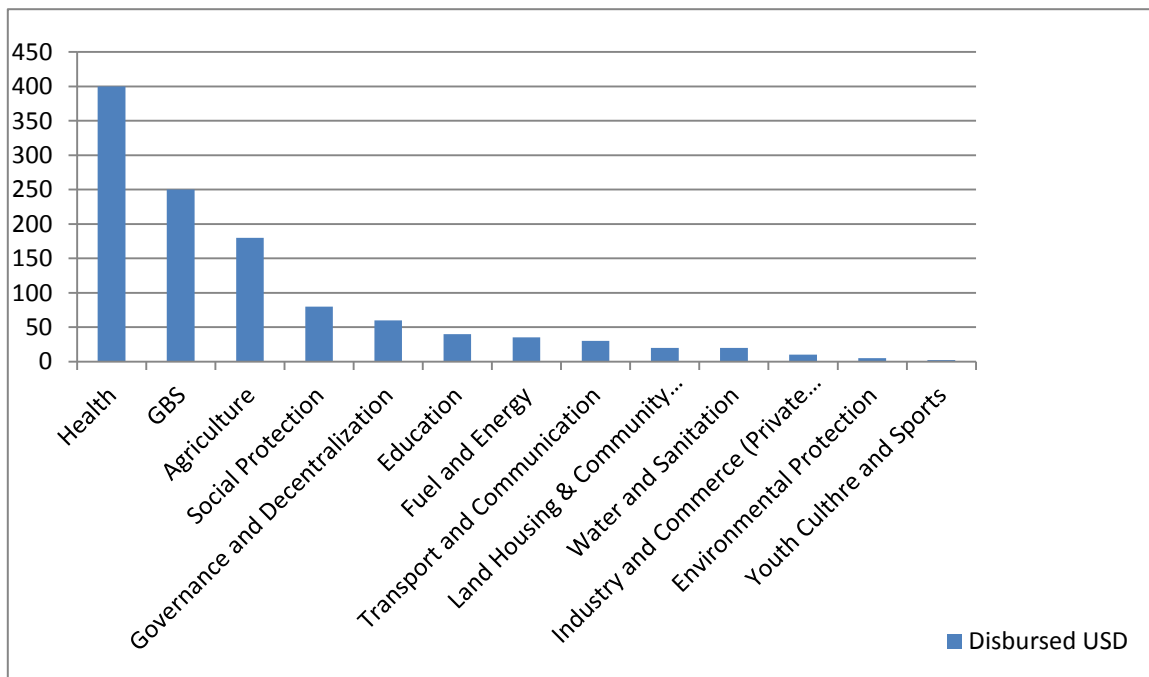
Historically, development partners have always played a determining role in social policy action in Rwanda, from the missionaries and the NGOs through to the Bretton Woods and other institutions, development partners presently fund up to 40 percent of the country’s budget. According to the World Bank Economic Update 2015, one major characteristic of Rwanda’s economy is the high reliance on aid. Rwanda’s “net official development assistance (ODA) inflows far exceed the Sub-Saharan Africa and low-income country averages”(World Bank 2015c:12). Overall, since the genocide of 1994 the government of Rwanda has enjoyed the strong support of development partners. Rwanda’s private sector is still very much in need of growth and expansion, although in their own way they have demonstrated strong support for the government in area of social policy funding as follows.

Vision 2020, the overarching plan under which much of Rwanda’s social protection policies claim lineage, was formulated with the full cooperation of civil society, private sector and development partners (MINECOFIN 2000). The government of Rwanda worked in close collaboration with DFID, the EU and Action Aid in 2001 to craft the aspect of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) that requires a participatory approach at the grassroots level.

In 2006, Rwanda formulated its aid policy which strongly encourages donors to support the Government’s general budget and projects, rather than a system that promotes many “project islands” (MINECOFIN 2006). Donors have directly supported certain programmes under Rwanda’s social policy. Under the Girinka programme, the African Development Fund has so

far provided 8,200 local breed cattle and 3,000 crossbred cattle, while other donors include World Vision, Heifer Project International, Send a Cow Rwanda, the World Food Program, the Food and Agricultural Organization, The Global Fund, the International Fund for Agriculture Development, Rwanda Police, Rwanda Private Sector Federation and numerous others (Ezeanya 2014). ODA, running into several millions of dollars have been advanced to the government of Rwanda to directly support some of its social policy. Among the more recent are; GBP 9m from the British Department for International Development (The Guardian 2013) and the World Bank’s USD 70m grant (World Bank 2015c). The chart below shows available statistics on the allocation of aid to social protection when compared to other sectors of the Rwandan economy.

**Figure 2: Statistics of Aid Allocation to Social Protection in Comparison to other Sectors of the Rwandan Economy**



Source: Modified from Republic of Rwanda Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (2013)

Rwanda’s private sector has also directly supported several social protection strategies, such as the donation of cows to the Rwanda Agriculture Board for onward distribution to community approved beneficiaries. The government has actively courted the organized private sector, by encouraging it to show corporate social responsibility through support for government social protection policies. The Girinka programme is one way the private sector can gain favor from both government and citizens since it entails the purchase of cows by the private sector and handing over same to government in highly publicized events. The Private Sector Federation donated the equivalent of USD 500,000 to support the Girinka programme (Crisafulli and Remond 2012). On the part of civil society, there has been significant support for social policy in Rwanda. However, in some instances, a section of civil society was quite critical, evident in the Ubudehe based approach to determining higher education government sponsorship where some students were asked to pay fees they could not afford. Pressure from citizens and civil society was instrumental in the revision of the Ubudehe categorization, as stated earlier.

Support for the government from development partners, civil society and the private sector can be attributed to the low rate of corruption, highly improved ease of doing business in the past decade and clear evidence of good governance in the country, a general perception by the population that the government is working in their best interests economically and the (Transparency International 2016). Another factor that has contributed to the growth in the Ubudehe process is the freedom of information that encourages transparency of the Ubudehe categorization process, since community members come together to agree on who should be placed at which Ubudehe category.

## **Criticisms Against Rwanda's Social Policy Direction**

Rwanda's social policy efforts have the subject of several studies by researchers, some of whom have argued that the country's recorded successes are directly linked to a very high dependence on foreign aid for implementation of the numerous social policies enacted. Rwanda's dependence on aid for its budgetary support is currently at between 30–40 percent (World Bank 2015b), with foreign loans constituting about 13 percent. As a result, Rwanda is vulnerable to external shocks, including changes in donor policies. In 2012, for instance, when allegations of involvement in the rebel uprising in neighboring Congo were leveled against the government, many development partners suspended aid to the country and economic growth slumped to 47 percent.

Another criticism leveled against a dependence on donor funds is the risk of citizens becoming free-riders and having welfare dependency regarding social and other, even unrelated, services (United Nations Rwanda 2013).

Further, despite government efforts to provide social services particularly education and training, Rwanda still has a very high rate of youth unemployment. According to an African Development Bank report, in Rwanda, “youth unemployment remains a major challenge to achieving inclusive growth with an estimated 42 percent of young people, who also constitute nearly 40 percent of the population, either unemployed or underemployed in the subsistence sector” (AFDB 2013a).

In addition, inequality in Rwanda still exists in certain sectors, such as in the distribution of electricity across the population. As at 2013, only 16 percent of Rwanda's households were connected to the grid, yet this figure represents a 160 percent increase in number of citizens connected between 2008 and 2011 (AFDB 2013b:10). The goal of the government is to expand electricity access to 70 percent of the population by 2017, but the possibility of its fulfillment seems far-fetched. Indeed government of Rwanda has noted that “the energy sector is key to Rwanda's economic development and poverty reduction goals” (Government of Rwanda 2014).

## **Is Homegrown and Grassroots Based Social Policy the Way to Go?**

African countries have long overlooked homegrown strategies and grassroots based approaches to governance and public administration, settling instead for foreign concepts and ideas. The reason can be traced to the colonial era when ideas and strategies imported from the countries of the colonial masters formed the bedrock of policy making, and were universally imposed across



the controlled territory. Decades after colonialism, some African countries are now beginning to question the effectiveness of inherited governance mechanisms due to their failure to generate much needed development for the region. Woodman and Morse (1987) note that the difficulty of designing viable development strategies in Africa is a result of the disconnect between modern development thinking on the one hand, and the reality, culture, values and principles of the indigenous communities within national boundaries, on the other hand.

Homegrown and grassroots based approach to social policy formulation and implementation in Rwanda has contributed to improving the living standards of Rwandans—especially among the poor and vulnerable in the rural areas. The fact that Rwandans, even with little formal education, can easily understand and actively participate in making decisions for their welfare and wellbeing has contributed immensely to the success of social interventions in this previously war-torn East African nation. The indigenous or local knowledge based approach to social policy has resonated strongly with the poorest of the poor, which is also usually the population with the least access to formal education.

Local knowledge, it should be emphasized, does not necessarily need to be traced to thousands of years back within a community. Any form of information and knowledge that reflects local realities and thus can easily be understood, assimilated and built upon by the majority of the unschooled population of a nation can be termed local knowledge (Ellen and Harris 2000). In the case of nations that were joined together by colonialism, for instance, where different ethnicities have come together to form countries, individual ethnic nationalities often retain aspects of their culture and knowledge system, but there are also new cultures and local knowledge that have been constructed together by these nations. Social policy formulation ought to arise from the point of knowledge and understanding, based on the spoken and unspoken norms, values and general beliefs held by majority of the populace. When citizens perceive social protection policy to be an enhancement, a value-add to what is culturally acceptable, they are more motivated to participate in its implementation. A good example is the Girinka programme where the organized private sector, wealthy citizens and churches have donated cows to the government agency in charge of Girinka, for onward distribution to beneficiaries (Ezeanya 2014).

Societies where diverging realities across geographical and ethnic zones coexist, might need to decentralize social policy, in order to ensure that regions generate their own unique, homegrown and grassroots based approach to social policy. In countries such as Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal and so forth, for example, where there are significant differences across the geo-political zones, this might be of immense importance.

Homegrown and grassroots based approaches to social policy such as the Ubudehe approach and the Girinka programme can engender a harmonized and coherent approach to social policy action. The World Bank's Social Protection and Labour Strategy (2012–2022) notes that “many social protection and labour programmes are fragmented and lack harmonization, hampering their effectiveness.” The document goes on to note that “reducing fragmentation across programmes, actors and levels of government can decrease inefficiencies, enhance coverage, and improve responsiveness to risks” (World Bank 2012:xiv). The Ubudehe approach provides a platform or spring board from which social protection programmes such as Girinka, Mutuelle de

Sante, scholarships and VUP Umurenge are hinged, and this provides a strong platform for coordination.

In addition, social protection programmes in developing countries have been frequently criticized for their tendencies to exclude the vulnerable, failure to connect beneficiaries to productive potentials, and for being so rigid and unable to constantly accommodate the recently impoverished (Norton, Conway and Foster 2001; Holmes and Lwanga-Ntale 2012). The homegrown and grassroots based nature of Ubudehe in its mode of implementation tries to address these three challenges as follows: first, the communities at the lowest administrative level come together to place citizens in categories with the approval of the citizens themselves. This ensures that no member of the community is excluded. Secondly, Ubudehe facilitates economic and social mobility since the aim is to move people from one Ubudehe category to another and has been adjudged successful in doing so. Third, Ubudehe is responsive as evidenced in the existence of an Ubudehe database. The Ubudehe database, which is reviewed annually at the community level with changes made according to individual social mobility, ensures that those recently affected by systemic shocks are included in their new category as candidates to benefit from social protection. Fourth, Ubudehe lends itself to accountability and transparency since all members of the local community are involved in the process from the beginning to the end. Fifth, Ubudehe lends itself to effective and simplified monitoring and evaluation process as a result of the database compiled at the community level, but available at all government administrative units. In June 2010, Rwanda's Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Health partnered to develop a national Ubudehe database. The database is a repository of information that is generated from communities on the social and economy situation of all households in that locale. According to Fidele Kayira, an Ubudehe community based programme coordinator:

This database will allow every social protection program to use a common targeting approach, access a common database with socio-economic information about each household, facilitate information sharing among programs and beneficiaries and avoid overlapping interventions. It will improve coordination and maximize the impact of interventions in the social protection sector. This initiative is highly supported by development partners and other ministries who may also be interested to use it for their own programs. (Kayira 2011:2)

This central, province, sector and district administrative units all have access to this database and it is updated constantly in order to capture current social and economic situation of households.

It is fair to say that Ubudehe has many features of social system which has a potential to move toward systematic approaches to social protection. For instance, it has five characteristics of a "SMART" of the World Bank's Social Protection and Labour Strategy. They are:

- Synchronized across programmes
- Monitored, evaluated and adapted
- Affordable, fiscally and in terms of cost effectiveness
- Responsive to crises and shocks
- Transparent and accountable (World Bank 2012:xv)

## Conclusion

Challenges to social policy formulation in Africa can be traced to the region's paradigms of development, which are largely foreign. Social policy, to be effective, must be relevant to the needs of the people and be suitable to the community within which it is pursued, it must also be adaptive and growing—that is, responding to existing and emerging demands from members of the society by accounting for the shared aspirations and understandings of development. In *Development as Freedom*, Amartya Sen notes that sustainable and deep-reaching development happens when development strategies are developed within agreeable norms and pre-existing social dynamics (Sen 1999).

The government of Rwanda is determined to anchor social policy in indigenous knowledge and homegrown solutions that are grassroots based. Social policy making in Rwanda has mostly taken the form of an emphasis on what the ordinary Rwandan—minimally acquainted with formal education but with a basic understanding of the nation's oral history and culture—will readily embrace. Often very much modified to account for modern technology, contemporary technical know-how and emerging global progressive ideas, Rwandan homegrown and grassroots based approach to social policy is firmly based on the local knowledge of the majority of the citizens and has been quite instrumental in the overall progress recorded in the country in terms of developmental goals achievement.

## References

- AFDB. 2013a. *African Economic Outlook 2012: Rwanda*. Abidjan: African Development Bank,
- AFDB. 2013b *Rwand Energy Sector Review and Action Plan*.  
[http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/Rwanda\\_-\\_Energy\\_Sector\\_Review\\_and\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/Rwanda_-_Energy_Sector_Review_and_Action_Plan.pdf), Tunis: African Development Bank Group.
- African Union. 2008. *Social Policy Framework for Africa*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: African Union.
- Chossudovsky, M. 1997. *The Globalization of Poverty: Impacts of IMF and World Bank Reforms*. London and New Jersey: Zed Books; Penang: Third World Network.
- Cornet, A. 2009. *Medical Policies, State and Religious Missions in Rwanda (1920-1940). An Authoritative Design of Colonial Medicine?* *Studium* 2(2):105.
- Devereux, S. 2012. *3rd Annual Review of DFID Support to the Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP), Rwanda*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
- Crisafulli, P. and Remond Andrea. 2012. *Rwanda Inc: How a Devastated Nation Became and Economic Model for the Developing World*. New York: Palgrave- Macmillian.
- Ellen, R. and Holly Harris. 2000. "Introduction" in *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and its Transformations*, by Bicker, Allan; Ellen, Roy and Peter Parkes. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Escobar, A. 2011. *Encountering Development—The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Ezeanya, C. 2015. "Homegrown and Grassroots based Strategies for Determining Inequality Toward Policy Action: Randa's Ubudehe Approach in Perspective." *United Nations University: World Institute for Development Economics Research WIDER Working Paper 2015/008*.
- . 2014. "Indigenous Knowledge, Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship in Rwanda: The Girinka Approach." *Journal of Pan-African Studies* 6(10):241-263.
- Feed the Future. 2016. *Animal Source Food Production and Marketing*. Gainesville, Florida: Feed the Future.
- Gahamanyi, Vincent, and Andrew Kettlewell. 2015. "Evaluating Graduation: Insights from the Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme in Rwanda." *International Development Studies* 46(2):48-63.
- Government of Rwanda. 2015. "Community Led Ubudehe Categorization Kicks Off." *Government of Rwanda Official Website*.  
[http://www.gov.rw/news\\_detail/?tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=1054&cHash=a315a8b0054e76f9c699f05ce24d3eb8](http://www.gov.rw/news_detail/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1054&cHash=a315a8b0054e76f9c699f05ce24d3eb8). Accessed 14 August 2015.
- Government of Rwanda. 2014. *Sustainable Energy for all: Rapid Assessment Gap Analysis Rwanda*. [http://www.se4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Rwanda\\_RAGA.pdf](http://www.se4all.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Rwanda_RAGA.pdf), Kigali: Rwanda Ministry of Infrastructure.
- Government of Rwanda. 2013a. *Governance and Decentralization Sector: Strategic Plan 2013/14-2017/18*. Kigali: Rwanda Ministry of Local Government.
- Government of Rwanda. 2013c. *EDPRS2 Social Protection Strategy July 2013*. Kigali: Government of Rwanda.
- Government of Rwanda. 2009. *Ubudehe mu Kurwanya Ubukene: Concept Note*. Kigali: Rwanda Ministry of Local Government.

- Government of Rwanda. 2007. *Vision 2020 Umurenge: An Integrated Local Development Program to Accelerate Poverty Eradication, Rural Growth, and Social Protection - EDPRS Flagship Program Document*. Kigali: Government of Rwanda.
- Government of Rwanda. 2005. *Health Sector Policy*. Kigali: Rwanda Ministry of Health
- Hartwig, R. 2013. "Public Works as Means to Push for Poverty Reduction? Short-term Welfare Effects of Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme." *UNU-WIDER Conference on Inclusive Growth in Africa*. Helsinki, 20-21 September 2013.
- Hoben, S. 1989. *School, Work, and Equity: Education Reform in Rwanda*. Boston, MA: African Studies Center Boston University.
- . 1988. *Language and Educational Reform in Rwanda*. Boston, MA: African Studies Center Boston University.
- Holmes, L. 2012. "Social Protection in Africa: A Review of Social Protection Issues in Research - Policy and Programming Trends and Key Governance Issues in Social Protection. A Scoping Study." London: Partnership for Africa Social Governance and Research.
- IFAD. 2012. *Enabling Poor Rural People to Overcome Poverty in Rwanda*. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development.
- Iliffe, J. 2005. *The African Poor: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ILO. 1996. *World Employment 1996/97: National Policies in a Global Context*. Geneva Switzerland: International Labour Organization.
- Inanga, E.L, and D.B. Ekpenyong. 1998. "Financial Liberalization in Africa: Legal and Institutional Framework and Lessons from other Developing Countries." In *African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment Vol.2*, edited by T Mkandawire and C.C Soludo. Ottawa: International Development Research Center.
- IRDP. 2011. *Citizens' Participation in Governance – One of the Challenges to the Rwandan Democracy*. Kigali: Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace.
- Kabeer, K, and S Cook. 2000. "Re-visioning Social Policy in the South: Challenges and Concepts." *IDS Bulletin* 31(4):1-10.
- Kayira, F. and Atrid de Laminne de Bex. 2011. "Innovation Developed in Rwanda to Support Social Protection Interventions." <http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/RessourcePDF.do?ressource.ressourceId=23180>. Accessed 14 August 2015.
- Kumssa, A. and John Jones. 2015. "Post-independence African Policy: African Socialism and the Organization of African Unity." *Public Administration Research* 4(1):12-23.
- Makaka, A., Breen, S. and A. Binagwaho. 2012. "Universal Health Coverage in Rwanda: A Report of Innovations to Increase Enrolment in Community Based Health Insurance." *The Lancet* 380(2):S7.
- Mamdani, M. 2002. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Mann, M. 1984. "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results." *European Journal of Sociology* 25(2): 185-213.
- MINALOC. 2015. "Minister Kaboneka Launches New Ubudehe Social Categorization." *Rwanda Ministry of Local Government Website*. [http://www.minaloc.gov.rw/index.php?id=469&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=402](http://www.minaloc.gov.rw/index.php?id=469&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=402). Accessed 29 August 2015.
- MINALOC. 2013. *Governance and Decentralization Sector Strategic Plan 2013/2014-2017/2018*. Kigali: Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC).

- MINALOC. 2008. *Programme Ubudehe Devis Programme No. 1 (Periode 2005-2006), Rapport D'Activities, Government of Rwanda*. Kigali: Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC).
- MINECOFIN. 2006. *Rwanda Aid Policy*. Kigali: Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.
- MINECOFIN. 2002. *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper*. Kigali: Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.
- MINECOFIN. 2000. *Rwanda Vision 2020*. Kigali: Rwanda Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN).
- MINEDUC. 2008. "Higher Education Policy." *Rwanda Ministry of Education*. July [http://mineduc.gov.rw/IMG/pdf/Higher\\_Educ.pdf](http://mineduc.gov.rw/IMG/pdf/Higher_Educ.pdf). Accessed 28 June 2014.
- Mkandawire, T. and C.C. Soludo. 1998. *Our Continent, Our Future; African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment*. Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA).
- MOH. 2012. *Annual Report: Community Based Health Insurance*. Kigali: Ministry of Health Rwanda (MOH).
- . 2010. *Rwanda Community Based Health Insurance Policy*. Kigali: Ministry of Health Rwanda (MOH).
- . 2004. *Mutual Health Insurance Policy in Rwanda*. Kigali: Ministry of Health Rwanda (MOH).
- Mouton, P. 1975. *Social Security in Africa: Trends, Problems and Prospects*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- Mwega, F.M. 1998. "Financial Sector Reform in Eastern and Southern Africa." In *African Perspectives on Structural Adjustment Vol.2.*, by T Mkandawire and C.C. Soludo. Ottawa, ON, Canada: International Development Research Center.
- Ndiaye, A. 2004. "Economic Reforms and Social Policies in Senegal." In *Globalization and Social Policy in Africa*, by T. A. Aina, C.S. Chachage and E Annan-Yao, 109-134. Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA).
- Ngoga, S. 2013. "Major Health Problems in East Africa: Rwanda." *Health Problems in Africa: Is there any hope left? 10-11 January 2013*. Khartoum, Sudan: African Medical Students Association Conference.
- Norton, A., Bird, B., Brock, K., Kakande, M and C. Turk. 2001. *A Rough Guide to PPAS: Participatory Poverty Assessment - An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Obura, A. 2003. *Never Again: Educational Reconstruction in Rwanda*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Prunier, G. 1995. *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- Republic of Rwanda Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. 2013. *Official Development Assistance Report FY 2011/2012*. Kigali: MINECOFIN
- Rwanda Agricultural Board. 2013. *Girinka Program : A Success Story*. Kigali: Rwanda Agricultural Board.
- Rwanda Governance Board. 2013. *Documentation of Homegrown Initiatives and Solutions for Policy makers Researchers and the Public Volume 1*. Kigali: RGB.
- Sen, A.1999. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sine, B. 1997. "Introduction." in *Bonne Gouvernance et Developpement en Afrique*, by B. Sine, 14-16. Dakar: Editions Democraties Africaines.

- Steinmetz, G. 2008. "The Colonial State as Social Field: Ethnographic Capital and Native Policy in the German Overseas Empire before 1914." *American Sociological Review* 73(4): 589-612.
- The Guardian. 2013. *UK to Channel GBP 9m in Aid through Rwanda Government Programme*. <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/mar/13/uk-aid-rwandan-government-programme>. Guardian UK.
- Transparency International. 2016. *Corruption Perception Index 2015*. Berlin: Transparency International.
- UNESCO. 2012. "Rwanda EFA Profile."  
[www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Dakar/pdf/EFA%20country%20profile%20%202102-%20Rwanda.pdf).<http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Dakar/pdf/EFA%20country%20profile%20%202102-%20Rwanda.pdf>. Accessed 29 July 2014.
- UNICEF. 2013. *Estimates Developed by the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation*. New York: UNICEF.
- United Nations Rwanda. 2013. *Rwanda United Nations Development Assistance Plan (UNDAP) July 2013-June 2018*. <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/rwanda/drive/RWANDA-UNDAP.PDF>, Kigali: United Nations Rwanda.
- Vansina, J. 2004. *Antecedents to Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Kingdom*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Walker-Keleher, J. 2006. "Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Conflict and Education: The Case of Rwanda." *Praxis: The Fletcher Journal of Human Security* (31): 35-53.
- Woodman, G. and B. Morse. 1987. "How State Courts Create Customary Law in Ghana and Nigeria." In *Indigenous Law and the State*, by Gordon Woodman and Morse Bradford. Dordrecht (Holland): Fows Publications.
- World Bank. 2015a. *Rwanda Economic Update June 2015: Financing Development - The Role of a Deeper and More Diversified Financial Sector*. Washington D.C.: World Bank
- . 2015b. *Rwanda: Country Overview*.  
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/rwanda/overview>.
- . 2015c. *World Bank Group to Help Rwanda Improve its Social Protection System*.  
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/01/22/world-bank-group-rwanda-social-protection-system>
- . 2014. "A World Bank Website." *WB Supports Rwanda's Efforts to End Extreme Poverty with Support for Social Protection System*.<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/03/13/rwanda-poverty-social-protection-system>. Accessed 30 August 2015.
- . 2013. *World Development Indicators [online database]*.<http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>. Accessed November 2013.
- . 2012. *Resilience, Equity and Opportunity: Social Protection and Labor Strategy*. Washington D.C.: World Bank
- . 1998. *Rwanda Poverty Note. Rebuilding an Equitable Society: Poverty and Poverty Reduction after the Genocide*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- . 1993. *The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- . 1989. *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*. Washington D.C.: World Bank,
- . 1981. *Accelerated Development for Africa: An Agenda for Africa*. Washington D.C.: World Bank
- . 1980. *Annual Report 1980*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

- World Health Organization. 2015. *Success Factors for Women's and Children's Health*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
- Yeates, N. 2001. *Globalization and Social Policy*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Zewde, A. 2010. *Sorting Africa's Developmental Puzzle: The Participatory Social Learning Theory as an Alternative Approach*. Maryland: University Press of America.