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**The Rise of Homegrown Ideas
and Grassroots Voices**
New Directions in Social Policy in Rwanda

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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

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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 19th 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 19th 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

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