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## REBUILDING AFTER CONFLICT AND STRENGTHENING FRAGILE STATES: A VIEW FROM RWANDA

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**Rebuilding after Conflict and Strengthening  
Fragile States: A View from Rwanda**

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## Abstract

Post-conflict states face more difficulties than others to develop. This is not surprising considering the many challenges associated with ensuring peace and stability, reconstructing the state, re-building infrastructure, etc. Africa indeed has a number of examples of post-conflict states that struggle with improving their desperate condition. The new aid paradigm, that focuses on country ownership of development and the strengthening of country systems to deliver services to the population is challenged by post-conflict and fragile states where a State's capacity to manage its own affairs is low and scrutiny of the Government by the public is not possible. In case a government does not appear to make progress to improve these, how can one improve effectiveness of Development Partners support?

Rwanda is among the post-conflict countries that have demonstrated a leadership capable of successfully initiating and guiding a thorough national transformation process. After the humanitarian crisis that followed the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994, the reconstruction and the development of the country have been characterized by:

- Wide participatory processes to engage the population in defining and implementing the development agenda;
- Stringent accountability regulations and controls;
- The identification and implementation of home grown solutions rooted in tradition and values.

Yet, capacity challenges facing most African countries, especially post-conflict and fragile ones, are still blighting Rwanda's development. Conflict destroys capacity at the individual, organizational and environment level, and amplify brain drain. In this context, harmonizing skills development schemes with the market needs of an economy recovering from conflict is not easy. Rwanda's experience indicates a strong correlation between the "leading change" capacity of leadership and the country's development, and that progress, quick and remarkable, is achievable for post-conflict and fragile African States.

**Key words:** Africa, capacity development, development, fragile states, leadership, post-conflict, reconstruction, Rwanda

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## Introduction

This paper starts by highlighting the differences between Rwanda after the Genocide against the Tutsi and Rwanda today. Going through the key milestones in this process, it underlines the role of leadership in leading the country's transformation.

## Context

### Rwanda in 1994

The Rwandan conflict was rooted in colonial mismanagement and poor leadership in the first decades of national independence. It started by dividing the Rwandan people who share the same language, culture, history and values.

At the end of the Tutsi genocide in 1994, only one call could be heard, Rwanda was in a state of emergency. So many widows and orphans with the nation in the most terrible and traumatic state; all basic needs and infrastructure were destroyed and they were to be rebuilt by the very society which was itself in a desperate state. By that time, Rwanda lacked not only the foundation to build from, but also the skills to do it. To make matters worse, security was not yet guaranteed and the country had to deal with Genocide perpetrators who were based in DRC undergoing training and arming. The new government had to provide security and foster an enabling environment for sustainable development.

The death of 1 million people, the exodus of some 3 million people and the internal displacement of yet another 1 million entirely dissolved the institutional fabric of Rwandan society and resulted in a huge deficit of human and institutional capacity. Post- genocide Rwanda saw 85,000 households without an adult and a deeply traumatized population. Considerable infrastructure was destroyed in the rural and urban areas and the economy had come to a complete standstill.

### Rwanda in 2011

Today, Rwanda has developed a reputation as a country that has initiated innovative home-grown mechanisms for conflict resolution, unity and reconciliation; and has developed best practices in aspects of governance, such as well-defined property rights, efficient public administration, transparency and accountability in fiscal and regulatory matters as well as a zero tolerance for corruption.

Rwanda has regained capacity at a fast pace for a conflict-affected state. The country has developed rapidly, actually out-performing some states that were not recently marred by conflict.

Since the MDGs declaration in 2000, Rwanda has made remarkable progress towards achieving the MDGs targets and is ranked among the top performing countries in Africa. Currently most of the MDGs targets are achievable in Rwanda, and actually some targets are already close to being achieved, specifically, primary school net enrolment and women in decision making positions. It can be noted that Rwanda owes achieving the primary universal education mostly to ensuring everyone's involvement in education. The aforementioned notwithstanding, challenges to eradicating poverty remain which are inherent to the country's history and its development background. In order to achieve its targets, Rwanda requires a systemic transformation of the economic infrastructure. The maternal mortality rate is still relatively high (750 per 100,000 births, average over 2006-2010) though assistance during delivery has considerably increased. And the Government needs to make more of an impact on curbing the population growth (2.9% in 2009) that, if unchecked, will have serious impacts on environmental sustainability.

Despite Rwanda's land locked status, limited natural resources, high population density and troubled past, it has been able to make significant strides in moving towards MDGs achievement. This is a lesson to Rwanda itself but also should be to other developing countries. Change is possible, but countries need drivers that essentially lie in leadership.

Rwanda has made progress across a number of key areas:

- **National unity and reconciliation:** the country has been able to rebuild the nation repatriating and resettling millions of refugees in a matter of months, as well as institutionalizing a participatory justice (Gacaca) for genocide perpetrators, thereby eradicating impunity while restoring the social cohesion. Gacaca has judged more than a 1,000,000 genocide cases in few years, an exercise that was going to take more than 200 years with regular judicial system and would have risked nullifying every hope of nation-building. People live today peacefully alongside and share the same well, school, church and market.
- **Security and order:** today, Rwanda boasts well organized security organs. Such is the capacity that Rwanda provides support to the army and police in other countries, such as peace keeping missions in Darfur, Comoros and Haiti.
- **Bringing the development agenda to the local level:** empowerment of communities has taken place by effectively implementing a decentralization policy which has been inclusive of all categories in society. This has enhanced community involvement and encouraged their participation in their development. Traditional concepts were revived into current innovative solutions such *Imihigo, Ubudehe, VUP Umurenge and Umuganda*.

- **Successes in the Education sector:** Rwanda has achieved a net enrolment ratio in primary education of 95% surpassing the ratio of 89.6% for “Developing Countries” and 78,6% for its category of the “Least Developed Countries”. Furthermore, ahead of other countries, Rwanda has decided to shift from the paradigm of basic and universal primary education and the successful implementation of a 9 year basic education and is now aiming for 12 year basic education.

**Table 1: Number of students and schools at primary, secondary and higher learning level**

School year	Students enrolled at primary school level	No. of primary schools	Students enrolled at secondary school level	No. of secondary schools	Students enrolled in higher learning institutions	No. of higher learning institutions
95/96	1,039,657	1,845	55,641	228	3,948	1
2005	1,857,841	2,295	218,517	553	26,800	18
2010	2,299,326	2,510	425,587	1,399	62,734	29

*Source: Rwanda Ministry of Education, 2011*

- **Heights in economic growth:** In spite of the setback caused by the 1994 genocide, Rwanda’s economy has steadily been growing from GDP amounting 1,067 million USD in 1999, to 5,257 million USD in 2009 with a 8.2 % GDP annual average growth for the past three years. Tourism, a sector that had been almost nonexistent before, has significantly picked up and generated \$87.3 million in 2010. Rwanda enjoyed an export growth average of 21.9% per annum between 2005 and 2008. In 2009 however, the country faced an important slowdown due to the international crisis: Export Value declined then from 267.6 million USD in 2008 to 192.9 million USD in 2009.
- **Coordinated Capacity development investments:** A sector working group was created to look at capacity development and a specific institution, the Public Sector Capacity Building Secretariat was created under the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning to coordinate capacity building in the public sector and ensure the necessary linkages with the development agenda.

In the same perspective, to increase the employment opportunities, especially with the youth, an internship policy has been introduced for young graduates to allow their early exposure to various sectors of productivity and professionalism.

Furthermore an institution focusing on technical skills building has been put in place, namely, the Workforce Development Authority (WDA). It deals with the promotion of technical and vocational education and training. It has already established two Integrated Polytechnic Regional Centers, one in Southern Province and another one in the City of Kigali. Three more are projected soon, thereby covering all the Provinces. The existing centers have been equipped to ensure they meet the market required standards in terms of developing young professionals. Today WDA works around the clock to develop a standard curriculum, and a TVET qualification framework to ensure a quality education and training in those centers and harmonize skills development with the today's market needs.

- **Zero tolerance to corruption:** in its effort to strengthen good governance, Rwanda has created institutions to do away with corruption and mismanagement of public funds. Combining with efforts from top country's authorities, the Office of the Ombudsman and that of the Auditor General have brought a change and impacted the country's practices in the area. As a result Rwanda steadily improved its performance in the transparency international ranking. It was ranked 66<sup>th</sup> out of 178 countries in 2010 with a score of 4.0.
- **Private sector development:** in 2010, Rwanda was acknowledged as a top reformer in the World Bank's *Doing Business Report*. In 2011, it further improved its ranking in the same report, moving from the 67<sup>th</sup> to the 58<sup>th</sup> position.

### How was this achieved?

#### Phases in the reconstruction and development

##### a) Emergency phase (1994-1997)

After the 1994 Genocide, Rwanda needed to undo the damage that was caused by divisive ethnic hatred and poor governance. Rwandans knew that the needed change could only come from within. However the population had been misled by the divisionist ideology and was blocked by hatred and resentment towards each other.

The Government of National Unity (GNU) that was established in July 1994 was therefore faced with numerous challenges not only in assuring internal and external security, rebuilding the public administrative system, but also to:

- Promote justice and the rule of Law, promote human rights and fight impunity
- Reconcile, empower and build confidence in the local Rwandan population that had for decades been denied the opportunity to determine their own destiny, and was deeply traumatized by the events in recent history
- Resettle returning old and new refugees,
- Rehabilitate and reconstruct social infrastructure such as schools and health centers

Reconciliation was key: Rwandans critically looked at issues that prevented them from living together peacefully. Talks were introduced and the Rwandan history was taught for the first time concentrating on what brings its people together rather than their differences. Positive elements of Rwandan culture were used to bring people together again to contribute to community development and to provide space to discuss community challenges. A door to a brighter future was opened.

#### **b) Rehabilitation and reconstruction Phase (1997-2002)**

Along with progress made in the national reconciliation process and ensuring security, the Government embarked on an active, multi-faceted economic recovery and good governance programme:

- Public service reforms were effected focusing on actions to enhance transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery;
- Reconciliation programmes were promoted for Peace and Unity;
- A community policing force was introduced to enhance security at local level;
- A National Dialogue on the country's needs and aspirations is held through various forums;
- The decentralization process was initiated, facilitating the devolution of administrative responsibilities and the consolidation of the structures of local governments;
- Local leaders were elected at cell, sector and district level; and
- Social and physical infrastructure were provided at the local level.

Between 1998 and 1999, the Presidency held several meetings on the future of Rwanda and its people, with individuals from across the country and Diaspora submitting their opinions on what should be done to improve Rwandan lives. These gatherings, together with contributions from civil society, the private sector, religious congregations, academics and the support of international experts, led to the drafting of a new development plan, *Rwanda Vision 2020*.

During the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase, Rwanda was at a crossroads moving from humanitarian assistance to a more sustainable development. Progress had been made but challenges were still daunting. Involvement of people and leadership constituted a cornerstone to the deal enshrined in Vision 2020. The document was finalized in 2002 as the framework to serve as a basis for the development of policies, strategies and actions aimed at fighting poverty and at socio-economic development of the country.

#### **c) Development Phase (since 2002)**

Vision 2020's major goal is clear: to transform Rwanda's economy from low income to middle income with a per capita income of about US\$900 per year, up from US\$220 in 2000. To realize this objective, the government set to transform the country from an agricultural-subsistence economy to a knowledge-based society. With its six pillars, three cross cutting



domains and multiple objectives, Vision 2020 has become the guiding document of every Rwandan and the challenge for the country's leadership (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Pillars and crosscutting areas of VISION 2020**

Pillars	Cross-cutting domains
1. Good governance and a capable state	1. Gender equality 2. Protection of environment and sustainable natural resource management 3. Science and technology, including ICT
2. Human resource development and a knowledge-based economy	
3. A private sector-led economy	
4. Infrastructure development	
5. Productive and Market Oriented Agriculture	
6. Regional and International Economic integration	

Rwanda's *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (PRSP - 2002-2005) was elaborated in a context where the primary emphasis was on managing a transitional period of rehabilitation and reconstruction whereas its *Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy* (EDPRS - 2008-2012) made a case for consolidating and extending the decentralisation of public spending while accompanying it by robust accountability mechanisms. The EDPRS also recognised the key role of the Private Sector and assigned the highest priority to accelerating growth to create employment and generate exports.

However challenges related to skills and illiteracy remained. Initiatives were introduced to respond to this capacity issue such as the design and implementation of a Multi-Sector Capacity Building Programme (MSCBP, 2005) to which various Development Partners notably the World Bank, African Development Bank, African Capacity Building Foundation, DFID, the Belgian Technical Cooperation, to mention a few, support. The Technical and Vocational Education and Training Policy (TVET, 2009) was another noticeable programme introduced in the same perspective. A national Skills Audit was also conducted in 2008-2009. And access to primary school education was increased significantly and a nine year basic education programme introduced.

The first university in Rwanda (National University of Rwanda – NUR) was opened in 1963. Only 49 students enrolled initially. In 1997/98 Rwanda had a total of 5,571 students in higher education. Today, Rwanda has 29 Public and Private Higher Learning Institutions, with a student enrollment of 62,734 in 2010.

Throughout the Higher Education System some 100 PhDs are held, the bulk of them at NUR. A system of 'Universités du soir' (Evening universities) has also been introduced to widen access to higher learning.

### ***The role of leadership in leading the post-conflict countries' transformation***

The role of the national leadership in shaping the development agenda and addressing capacity development challenges in order to build effective and accountable institutions is fundamental.

Change processes start with establishing a sense of urgency. This sense was obviously there from 1994 in Rwanda. From there, the country's leaders were able to successfully establish a guiding coalition and to gradually create a strong vision (which culminated with the adoption of Vision 2020) and to develop strategies to realizing it (e.g. EDPRS and other strategies for which priorities are set on an annual basis through leadership retreats). The government made sure to communicate the vision to all Rwandan citizens and to involve everyone in supporting the change process. *Gacaca* (Community Justice), *Ubudehe* (Local Collective Action) to reduce poverty, *Imihigo* (Performance Contracts) to enhance results-oriented management and *Umuganda* (Community Work) are all unconventional Rwandan solutions revived to bring positive change facing the country's socio-economic development. The role of women was recognized by fostering gender equity and encouraging women to take the pivotal role in the building of the Rwandan society.

Central government institutions were restructured. Together with local government (through decentralization), they were empowered to act on the vision.

The numerous achievements mentioned earlier in this paper can be looked at as intermediate wins on the way to realizing the key objective of Vision 2020, to turn Rwanda into a middle-income economy. These reinforced the trust in the Government's capacity to bring Rwanda to its desired future state. The country is currently consolidating improvements, taking up more challenges as it reinvigorates the change process and institutionalizes the new approaches.

H.E. President Kagame pointed out that consciousness of ethics forces the setting of standards and requires leaders to lead by good example, particularly when it comes to demonstrating and imparting honesty, tolerance, participatory democracy, work ethics and understanding. Furthermore, as stated some years ago by H.E. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia, "as much as fragile states pose a challenge of good leadership in terms of State capacity development, capacity development is likewise very dependent on good leadership."

Post-conflict settings also require support from outside development partners in terms of financial resources and expertise for technical assistance.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Post conflict and fragile states face one major risk: going back into conflicts. An immediate post conflict challenge is to promote peace and security through conflict prevention and prompt resolution of disputes.

Are Africa's "fragile states" a fate that cannot be escaped? The Rwanda example points to a different story. Building capacity in post-conflict or fragile states starts with ensuring that the state can provide an enabling environment and space for re-establishing critical functions and infrastructure, the regeneration of skills and the maintenance of peace for the achievement of sustainable growth, economic development and social cohesion.

International and regional integration should be encouraged to create a platform that provides appropriate home grown/ tailor-made solutions to these states and others in almost similar situation. In order to achieve higher growth-the only response to poverty reduction: these countries will have to go for economic reforms fostering private sector development, good governance, and macroeconomic stability as well as structural and institutional reforms.

But until Africans are themselves engaged in a debate about solutions to the problems they face, no solution from outside is ever going to work. In order for a country to overcome this situation, the country needs to be determined to change its people's mindset and focus on the way forward.

Capacity challenges rooted into colonial legacies continue to face most African countries, especially post-conflict and fragile ones. Conflicts destroy the limited existing capacity at the individual, organizational and environment level; and amplify brain drain. In this context, harmonizing skills development schemes with the market needs of recovering economies from conflict is not easy, but it is a must.

Such challenges were identified and successfully met by South East Asian countries 1960s which secured rapid growth through investing in human and physical capital, an equitable distribution of income, and quick, sustained growth of exports. African nations can do the same through promoting the transformational role of leadership and partnerships for development.

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