

# Challenges of good governance in Rwanda after the genocide era: A critical review of literature

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## Abstract

*The issue of good governance has become a major concern of local, national and international development actors. It is widely believed that good governance is a crucial weapon to defend the socio-economic and political problems of the world, particularly in developing countries. This paper, therefore, assesses and analyses the key governance challenges confronting Rwanda after the genocide era. It focuses on the underlying issues of good governance that Rwanda should have to pay attention to. To this end, the paper methodology used was secondary data discovered from authenticated articles, reports and research outputs. The findings of this paper thus indicate that even if Rwanda has achieved a remarkable economic growth after the genocide era, as compared to other neighbouring countries, in the area of good governance and democracy, problems are still immense. These include, among others, a narrow political spectrum, restricted media, unresponsive leadership and the unequal distribution of national wealth. Finally, the paper concludes that the substantial economic growth that is recorded in Rwanda cannot be a guarantee for the long-lasting stability and solidarity of the society, unless the pressing challenges of good governance are well addressed, and open society and democratic government are formed in Rwanda.*

**Key words:** good governance, development, Rwanda

## Introduction

### A brief discourse of good governance

Different literature posits that good governance and development are intrinsic goals on their own and that they mutually reinforce each other (Gita and Zahra, 2006). Governance guarantees that political, social and economic priorities are on the basis of the aspiration of the public and that the most marginalised groups are given priority in decision-making over the distribution and provision of development resources (Abdellatif, 2003). By generating and defending a broad commitment to the public welfare, a high-quality democracy with good governance increases the likelihood that public resources will be used to generate public goods that stimulate investment and commerce and raise the

quality of life (Larry, 2005). Supporting this, Oksana (2008) states that good governance is specified as one of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals, an agenda for reducing poverty and sustainable development that world leaders agreed on at the Millennium Summit in September 2000.

According to Cheema (2005), cited in the UN Project Office on Governance (2007), better governance promotes gender equality, sustains the environment and provides tools to reduce poverty, deprivation, fear, and violence. In recognition of the imperative of good governance for development, African countries have made remarkable strides and commitments to partner towards good governance in Africa (NEPAD, 2007). David *et al.* (2010), discovered that evidence from the past three decades show that with the exception of a few countries such as China, Malaysia and Singapore, where some considerable economic progress was realised under autocratic or semi-dictatorial regimes, in the majority of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, poor governance has been the cause of continuing poverty and underdevelopment.

In the course of development, Liou (2007) noted that the main difference between a developed and developing country has more to do with the challenges of democratic governance rather than the availability of resources. Having an abundant resource is not enough by itself if there is no proper management and utilisation of the endowed resources. In Africa, there are countries with rich resources but they have underutilised them due to a bad governance system. This implies that democratic governance is a *sine quo non* for developing countries to achieve long-lasting and sustainable progress.

There was a promising agreement reached among African leaders through the institutional leadership of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), on the significance of democratic governance for attaining the goals of development (Fourth African Development Forum, 2004). Some literature reflects the absence of a direct relationship between governance and development (Chaudhry *et al*, 2009). However, had it been possible to develop without democracy, Africans and other developing countries would have been the first to develop had they stayed with democracy for stretches of time. Placing a great deal of emphasis on the linkage between governance and development is thus a good strategy for African leaders, though its practical implementation is still in its infancy. This is not the exception in the case of Rwanda as the country has registered a notable economic growth after the genocide era, though its entire national development is still facing different problems related to good governance such as the absence of democratic leadership and the even distribution of national wealth. This paper, therefore, tries to critically explore challenges of good governance in Rwanda's post-genocide era.

## Network Management Theory

This theory asserts that the main task of good governance is to administer a set of connections, networks or the operation of the complex mix of actors effectively in the administration and development affairs of the country (Stoker, 2006). Bevir (2010) also argued that good governance as philosophy exercises and reflects phenomena that are mixed and multi-jurisdictional, with many stakeholders who come together in networks. Moreover, governance networks refer to relatively steady horizontal articulations of interdependent, however operationally self-directed, actors who interact with one another through negotiations that take place within a regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary framework that is self-regulating within limits set by external forces and that contributes to the production of public purpose (Torfing, 2005). This good governance refers to the synergy and collaboration of various stakeholders in horizontal networks to realise the aspiration of a society in any state at each level. Thus, the challenges of good governance in Rwanda have been analysed through the lens of the Network Management Theory (NMT). To do this, the active involvement of the public in decision-making, the prevalence of independent media, free and credible elections, competing political parties and fair distribution of national wealth among all citizens in Rwanda, have been scrutinised using the Network Management Theory of Governance. Moreover, the interplay among the different actors of development, such as the government, civil society organisations and political organisations, has been analysed using this NMT.

## Problematising good governance in Rwanda

Rwanda has achieved significant improvement in economic growth and delivering better education, health service, and transport networks when compared to other neighbouring countries in the post genocide period (Clark, 2014 and UNDP, 2008). The economy of the country grew at 8% of the GDP in the last ten years during the rule of the incumbent government (Gaynor, 2014). The progress achieved today can be very remarkable for many because being able to attain such types of economic achievement and managing the hostile ethnic conflict is not easy. Thus, as there is a need to sustain and speed up the progress that Rwanda has recently recorded, the linkage between democratic governance and development should be well emphasised and articulated. In this regard, even if it is true that the government of Rwanda itself has tried to pinpoint key governance challenges that can affect its national effort to build a prosperous and peaceful society, and identify future and strategic issues such as strengthening peace and security, promoting inclusive governance, strengthening rule of law and enhancing accountability, the list is not comprehensive and thus needs further investigation. For instance, as Clark (2014) pointed

out, in addition to the challenges of democratic governance identified by the government, the dictatorial nature of the incumbent government and weak internal party cohesion are among other problems that challenge the peace and development endeavours of the country. In various academic literatures, there are two dominant divergent views of Rwanda. The one argument applauds the farsighted leadership, economic growth, a high level of women's representation in the national legislative, and a major reform in the education, health and agricultural sectors. The other argument contends that Rwanda is among the countries with an autocratic rule, grave violations of human rights, ethnic discrimination and rural poverty. It also asserts that the frequent repression and injustice could lead to political instability. This article supports the second argument.

## The substantial drawbacks of good governance in Rwanda

Even though an inspiring economic success has been recorded in Rwanda after the genocide period, there are still unanswered questions of equity and fair distribution of wealth, corruption, freedom of expression, citizens' participation and responsive and accountable leadership. For instance, though the remarkable GDP growth improved the poverty level of its citizens, it disguises an uneven distribution of benefits and enlarges the income disparity within the society. In support of this, McDoom (2011) statistically surveyed that inequality and the poverty level is very high between the urban and rural populations, in which rural poverty accounts for 67% and a good deal of the advantages of Rwanda's economic development has been concentrated in towns, and mainly in the capital city, Kigali. The same author also noted that the major threat for Rwanda is horizontal and spatial inequality more than vertical inequality. There is huge inequality between the Tutsi and Hutus ethnic lines. Furthermore, the majority of Rwanda's rural population is made up of the Hutus. The existence of horizontal and vertical inequality can develop ethnic dissatisfaction, which may result in hostile ethnic conflict.

Such types of income difference are a result, I think, due to discriminatory policies designed for rural and urban areas. This also, in turn, causes social unrest because of the high influx of people from rural to urban areas as a way to seek a better life and job opportunities. My view is that as the huge income inequality and the concentration of wealth in the small pocket of the business class and the rapid rural-urban migration leads to social insecurity. For instance, problems like crime, sexual and labour exploitation, disease like HIV/Aids remain pervasive, and need a strong and committed leadership to tackle them in Rwanda. Needless to say, equity and an equal distribution of advantages demand accountable and transparent leadership and all-inclusive policies.

The exclusion of minority groups is also another problem that the Rwanda government should consider. For instance, according to Beswick (2011), the Batwa, which is the

minority ethnic group in Rwanda, have historically been alienated and continue to face a wide range of social exclusions. The worst of it is, the Rwandan Ministry of Justice in 2004 denied any non-governmental organisation (NGO) support, particularly those targeting the Batwa, by placing them into the category of vulnerable groups (ibid). This implies that domestic and international NGOs, who are working on the realisation of justice and empowerment of the disadvantaged groups, have ceased to operate. NGOs are believed to be important actors for sustainable development and empowerment of the disadvantaged groups to claim their rights. However, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) does not have a good relationship with the civil society organisations (CSO). One of the country's human rights institutions, which is called the League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights in Rwanda (Liprodhor), was disbanded, though it has been opened again due to the introduction of a new management system. Nevertheless, the dissolution caused many of the skilled personnel of the country to leave their country opposing the leadership of the government (McDoom, 2010). Most of the time, what is common, as observed in developing countries like Rwanda, is that human rights organisations and the judicial system are not independent, rather they are expected to serve as the main machinery in strengthening and consolidating the government in power. Such types of political culture can also inevitably hamper the legitimacy of the government and political development.

Maintaining unity of the divided society in a wide-ranging manner is considered a factor that creates a challenge to better governance. Inclusive governance requires transparent rules and procedures that provide a freedom for discussion of varying opinions. However, due to the fear of the previous genocide history of the nation, the restriction on freedom of expression is creating a dissenting ethnic line within the societies (Joint Governance Assessment Report, 2008). As a consequence, Rwanda was ranked 159<sup>th</sup> in 2017 and 161 in 2016 out of 180 countries of the world with regard to press freedom (World Press Freedom Index, 2017). This implies that the incumbent government of Rwanda believes that the genocide was caused due to a free press and the unrestricted freedom of expression of the society.

The constitution of Rwanda allows multi-partisanism and power sharing, but the government's view of competitive multi-party politics is very negative. This is mainly because the government believes that competition and multi-party politics triggers another type of destructive conflict within Rwandan society (McDoom, 2010). Now it seems like the incumbent government is the only one that can stand for the unity, stability and prosperity of Rwanda. The government is seeking legitimacy from the people through pinpointing the genocide scenario that is imprinted in the mind of every Rwandan as a bad legacy. It also uses the loss of public acceptance as the main propaganda to discourage the organisation of an opposition political party. Such reasoning also made the government

disseminate a 'false-dichotomy' or 'limited alternative' fallacy. The government, the government media and other international and national governmental and non-governmental organisations are disseminating this fallacy by arguing that "either the ruling government stays in power or genocide will happen again" type of erroneous argument, which systematically undermines the political parties and the development of the nation. According to Hurley (2005), a false dichotomy political fallacy disseminated when the arguer develops an idea upon the presumption that there are only two options for a given problem. Likewise, the Rwandan government prompts a limited political alternative for the public, as if there are no other alternatives to choose from.

There is also an external security threat that demands further investigation and reconciliation by the government of Rwanda. The Rwandan civil war concluded with the victory of the 'Rwandan Patriotic Front', dominantly composed of the Tutsi rebel groups, which led to the fleeing of the Hutu rebel government into exile in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (McDoom, 2011). These groups, which are commonly or officially called Ex-FAR Interahamwe and FDLR (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda), are still operating in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo and killing genocide survivors and eyewitnesses and gorilla fighting against the military forces of the ruling government (Joint Governance Assessment Report, 2008). In this case, unless the government of Rwanda finds a decisive solution such as negotiation and reconciliation, it can erupt as a big problem to disturb the nation and can possibly resume the genocide era.

Social services like 'judicial infrastructures' and trust have been deeply damaged in the aftermath of the conflict (Clark, 2012). The trust of the people in media, police and court institutions which was the catalyst of the genocide, is not easy for Rwandans (Governance Assessment Report, 2008). Besides, due to high reliance on the Gacaca court on the management of the ethnic conflict, lack of skilled and experienced judges can pose another problem in the handling of cases in the existing scenario because it can create capacity gap concerns and overwhelming case accumulation in the nation's court institutions and judicial offices.

It is true that Rwanda, under the rule of President Paul Kagame, achieved relative peace, stability and economic development compared to its neighbouring countries. The ruling party is also relying on the sole leadership of Kagame and that is why there is a plan for the amendment of the constitution to allow Kagame to stand for a controversial third term (Al Jazeera, 2015). He said in a televised address: "You requested me to lead the country again after 2017. Given the importance and consideration you attach to this, I can only accept. But I don't think that what we need is an eternal leader" (*The Guardian*, 2016). Consequently, the law-making organ of Rwanda urged for the amendment of the constitution, which allowed Kagame to run for the third term election in 2017. US Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region of Africa Russ Feingold argued that changing constitutions

and eliminating term-limits to favour current incumbents are inconsistent with democratic principles, reduces confidence in democratic institutions, which often leads to serious instability, and undermines the legacy and legitimacy of any individual who demands such steps (US Institute of Peace, 2015).

This implies that the American government was against the removal of term limits to pave the way for President Paul Kagame to seek re-election. Furthermore, article 23 of the African Union Charter on Democracy, Governance and Elections in which Rwanda is a state party, outlaws any undemocratic change of government, including “any amendment or revision of the constitution or legal instruments, which is an infringement on the principles of democratic change of government” (African Union, 2007). However, it did not take a decisive decision when the Rwandan government and its cliques amended the constitution to ensure a single person autocracy and the Rwanda’s Patriotic Front’s unfettered supremacy.

Dependence on the single party and specifically on President Kagame developed the concern of what could happen in his absence. When the parliament decides on this issue, it should not take into account the plausibility of another type of ethnic tension that can place the relative peace and stability of the nation at risk. It also magnificently indicates the uncertainties of the people about the future of Rwanda. Furthermore, Clark (2014) noted that there is a disagreement among the highest government officials and the main challenge to the RPF appears from RPF itself, not from the Rwandans. Even though the ruling party dominates all levels of government from the national up to the local levels, instability within the RPF party is occurring while the ruling party top officials are being endangered, factions have formed in the party and administrative bottlenecks prevent them from functioning well.

There are not many other countries except Rwanda where, in the absence of regime change, so many ministers, MPs, high-ranking army officers, civil servants, judges, diplomats, and civil society leaders have been jailed, killed, ‘disappeared’ or driven into exile (Reyntjens 2010:13).

According to Reyntjens (2010), Rwanda has changed from genocide to dictatorial government. This is basically because, “the regime seeks full control over people and space, and the country becomes an army with a state, rather than a state with an army”. The political spectrum of the nation is considered non-democratic and oppressive. These political pitfalls coupled with unhealthy ethnic groups’ quests for historic and socio-economic injustices remain critical challenges of good governance in contemporary Rwanda.

## CONCLUSION

The following is not an acceptable strategy in the 21st century: An authoritarian regime is necessary in Rwanda, because the country is still politically fragmented and rapid economic growth can address the political demands and anxiety. Rather, this damages the democratic spirit and national cohesion of the state of Rwanda. It is empirically insignificant to argue that narrowing the political space is necessary to achieve sustainable and long-lasting development. However, many pieces of literature revealed that the Kagame-led government is marked by a grave violation of human rights, corruption, and assassination of opposition political elites and the imprisonment of journalists. Not only this, Rwanda is also characterised by an incredible and disputable election, which was organised only for the sake of consolidating the power of the ruling government. This is most often the manifestation of a dictatorial government.

Substantial economic developments in Rwanda cannot be a guarantee for the long-lasting stability and solidarity of the society, unless open and democratic society and government is formed and problems related to good governance are adequately addressed. For achieving this, discriminatory policies should be rearranged to equally benefit the people of Rwanda. Moreover, the government of Rwanda should respect the constitution. More importantly, the false promises and improper strategies of the Rwanda ruling party used to weaken the opposition political parties through promulgating a false propaganda need to be corrected in order to encourage the political participation of citizens and political parties, and thus promote the fundamental principles of democracy and good governance in Rwanda.

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