



Linkages between poverty, inequality and exclusion in Rwanda

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Question

How is poverty linked with inequality and exclusion in Rwanda?

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The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

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1. Summary

With long-term development goals outlined in its “Vision 2020”, the government of Rwanda aims to create a set of conditions becoming a middle-income country by the year 2020. The strategy includes reducing poverty to 20% (from 44.9% in 2011) (Republic of Rwanda, 2012: 6), alongside moving Rwanda away from ethnic divisions, social inequalities and limited opportunities for social mobility (Williams, 2016: 10).

Poverty and inequality are distinct but related concepts. Inequality in outcomes and opportunities tends to be a key driver of poverty, shaping a country’s poverty profile and individuals’ life experiences. Global studies have shown that high inequality hinders economic progress – tending to reduce the pace and durability of growth – as well as the achievement of widespread human (material, relational and subjective) well-being (UNDP, 2013: 2; Bhorat et al, 2015: 1; UNICEF et al., 2014; Ostry et al., 2014; see summary in Rohwerder, 2016). It can also weaken democratic life and threaten social cohesion (UNDP, 2013: 2). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the need to address broad inequalities to “leave no-one behind” (Odusola et al, 2017). Effective poverty reduction strategies and policy responses require understanding how inequalities and exclusion drive and shape poverty, and – in turn – what drives the inequalities and exclusion.

The data on inequalities in Rwanda is provided in a related K4D helpdesk report (Ornert, 2018). This review summarises analysis in the literature that provides more detail behind the quantitative data, exploring the nature of inequalities and exclusion in Rwanda, the drivers of these, and how this shapes Rwandans’ vulnerability to poverty. Undertaken in six days, this review draws largely on academic studies as well as reports by international development agencies (most notably the World Bank). Many of the poverty and development studies include some form of gender analysis; there is also work that focuses solely on women and girl’s situations in Rwanda. There are a few studies looking at the linkages between poverty, exclusion and disabilities in Rwanda.

Key findings are:

- The review found few studies looking in-depth at the relationship between poverty and inequality in Rwanda, with a lack of disaggregated analyses or detailed case studies (Dawson 2018). Understanding the relationship between poverty and inequality in Rwanda is further complicated by the polarisation of opinions in the literature on Rwanda’s developmental path and poverty and inequality data and trends.
- Rwanda has achieved impressive sustained economic growth since the 1990s, considerable reduction in poverty and important gains in health, education and other development outcomes (for example meeting most of the Millennium Development Goals by the end of 2015). Income inequality statistics have decreased in recent years.
- Rwanda continues to face considerable challenges: poverty is widespread and it remains the most unequal country in East Africa. Stunting – “a major outlier” in Rwanda’s achievement of the MDGs – shows how inequalities shape the distribution of deprivations and outcomes, limiting progress on development goals (World Bank, 2018: iv).
- Analysis by the World Bank and others finds that economic growth during 2001-2010 was pro-poor, driven by “exceptionally strong growth rates for the extremely poor”. This may be due to the policy focus on reducing extreme poverty and investments in agriculture and social protection. Meanwhile during this period mean growth rates for the poor were lower than for the non-poor. (Hernandez, 2013: 35).

- The NISR (2016b: 35) reports that between 2010/11-2014 a reduction in poverty gap and poverty severity suggests that “poor households were able to reduce their consumption shortfall relative to the poverty line”, with gains “larger amongst the poorest groups”.
- Qualitative in-depth field research tends to report more negative findings on poverty and inequality, providing insights into “how poverty ‘works’ in everyday life” (Ansoms et al, 2017: 47). A key finding is the critical importance of land and livestock for many Rwandan’s wellbeing, for material, cultural and social reasons (Dawson, 2015: 81).
- The World Bank’s 2015 poverty assessment finds Rwanda’s high inequality driven by location, education and occupation (Bundervoet et al, 2015). There is a deep rural-urban divide, with those most at risk of poverty dependent on agricultural waged labour or smaller/less productive farms, and household heads with no secondary education.
- The same assessment finds improvements in agricultural productivity and diversification into non-farm activities the main drivers of consumption growth and poverty reduction for 2006-2011. Reduction in inequality for 2006-2011 is largely explained by an increase in households headed by persons with some secondary education, and a shift from farm employment to higher-earning non-farm occupations (Bundervoet et al, 2015: 22-23).
- Other studies highlight how rapid social transformation leads to winners and losers (in absolute or relative terms), and explores the difficulties faced by many in attempting to escape poverty (Verpoorten, 2014: 4; Abbott et al, 2015). Abbott et al (2015: 932) highlight that about a third of the population face a daily struggle for survival, making it difficult to take advantage of opportunities for empowerment.
- There are studies looking into the experiences of marginalised groups in Rwanda – with a number of studies on the situation of women and girls. These tend to note progress on gender equality policy and legal frameworks, while highlighting how women and girls remain disadvantaged, with persistent, deeply embedded discriminatory social norms.
- There is less analysis on the youth – but what there is highlights they have experienced rapid expansions in education as well as a scarcity of land, with skills shortage, lack of capital and financial services, and gender segmentation key barriers to youth employment (Bundervoet et al, 2015: 105; Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017: 17).
- Other vulnerable groups with heightened, specific experiences of poverty and exclusion includes genocide survivors, vulnerable children, people with disabilities and Historically Marginalised People. There is some, but limited, analysis of their situations.
- There is limited data on the experiences of different cultural and ethnic groups. A highly sensitive issue, these groups are not recognised in the Constitution the aim being to guarantee the unity and reconciliation of the Rwandan population following the 1994 genocide (UN CERD, 2014: 6). McLean Hilker (2014: 366) highlights the importance of understanding the intersections between gender, ethnicity and age in the reconciliation and nation-building process. Dawson (2018: 12) finds that generalisations about the relative power of ethnic groups do not always hold at a local level
- Rwanda’s path to development remains controversial, with a sharp contrast between the impressive economic progress and standstill in ‘voice and accountability’ (McKay and Verpoorten, 2016). The literature is divided on the risk this limited voice and accountability poses to the sustainability of other achievements (McKay and Verpoorten, 2016: 33).

2. Poverty and inequality trends

Overview

Rwanda has widespread and pervasive poverty (Bundervoet et al, 2015: 12). It is the most unequal country in East Africa¹ (according to both the Gini index² and Palma ratio³) (Behuria and Goodfellow, 2016: 3). Nonetheless **sustained economic growth in Rwanda, since the late 1990s onwards, has been accompanied by significant poverty reduction and a small decrease in income inequality** (Verpoorten, 2014: 1). Government national household living conditions surveys (EICV⁴) report a declining consumption poverty rate from 56.7% in 2005/06, to 44.9% in 2010/11, to 39.1% in 2013/14, with a reduction in extreme poverty from 35.8% in 2005/06 to 16.3% in 2013/14 (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), 2015: 2).

Income inequality rose between 1985 and 2006, taking Rwanda from the most equal to the most unequal country in the region. Since 2006, inequality has been trending downwards (using Palma ratio data up to 2011)⁵. The NISR (2015) reports a decrease in the Gini Index from 0.522 in 2005/06 to 0.448 in 2013/14, while the international measure shows a more modest decline from 0.52 in 2005, 0.513 in 2010, and 0.504 in 2013 (World Bank, 2017).

Understanding the poverty and inequality trends for the period post 2011 is complicated by doubts raised in some literature on the latest national poverty statistics, questioning the comparability of 2013/14 EICV results with previous surveys (see Reyntjens, 2015; Ansoms et al, 2017, p.49). Using consistent consumption baskets, Reyntjens, (2015: 2) finds poverty has increased between 2010/11-2013/14 (possibly by 6%). Looking at data on the international poverty line, World Bank World Development Indicators report the poverty headcount ratio at USD 1.90 a day (2011 PPP) (% of the population) at 68% in 2005, 60.25 in 2010 and 60.43 in 2013⁶⁷. The World Bank also notes (using 2010/11 data) that the “national poverty line is frugal, witnessed by the large difference between poverty based on the national poverty line (45 percent) and poverty based on the international \$1.25 a day line (63 percent)” (Bundervoet et al, 2015: 14).

¹ See the Society for International Development (SID) (2016: 53) with key inequality data for Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

² The Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or, in some cases, consumption expenditure) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. [http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Metadata/MetadataWidget.aspx?Name=GINI%20index%20\(World%20Bank%20estimate\)&Code=SI.POV.GINI&Type=S&ReqType=Metadata&ddlSelectedValue=SAU&ReportID=43276&ReportType=Table](http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Metadata/MetadataWidget.aspx?Name=GINI%20index%20(World%20Bank%20estimate)&Code=SI.POV.GINI&Type=S&ReqType=Metadata&ddlSelectedValue=SAU&ReportID=43276&ReportType=Table)

³ The Palma ratio is the ratio of the income share of the top 10% to that of the bottom 40% <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/palma-vs-gini-measuring-post-2015-inequality>

⁴ Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey or *Enquête Intégrale sur les Conditions de Vie des ménages*.

⁵ <http://soea.sidint.net/data/one-people-one-destiny/economic-dimensions-of-inequalities/>

⁶ Data downloaded 22 June 2018: <http://stats.ukdataservice.ac.uk/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=WDI2#>

⁷ The World Bank's Poverty & Equity Databank and PovcalNet reports this ratio at 60.4% in 2010 and 59.5% in 2013, with the number of poor people increasing from 6.4 million in 2010 to 6.8 million in 2013. Data downloaded 22 June 2018: <http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/country/RWA>

Analysis of the poverty-inequality relationship

An analysis of the EICV data from 2001 to 2006 highlights increasing income inequality. Rural areas experienced the most rapid rise, with studies linking this increase in rural inequality to growing land inequalities (Silva Leander, 2012: 234). The 2015 World Bank poverty assessment finds that in the early 2000s consumption growth was concentrated in Kigali City, with weaker growth in rural areas benefiting wealthier households. The net result was weak poverty reduction (two percentage points) and an increase in inequality. However, in the second half of the decade growth was stronger in rural areas than in Kigali City and benefited the poor more than the non-poor, with the net result of strong poverty reduction (12 percentage points) and a sharp decrease in inequality (Bundervoet et al, 2015: 17-19). Meanwhile, looking at the three Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) rounds of 2005, 2007 and 2010, Verpoorten (2014: 15) reports that converging trends across wealth quintiles resulted in a decline in inequality compared to the pre-war situation.

The 2013 World Bank economic update finds that “the pro-poor nature of growth between 2001 and 2011 can entirely be accounted for by the exceptionally strong growth rates for the extremely poor” while mean growth rates for the poor are lower than those for the non-poor (Hernandez, 2013: 35). Hernandez (2013: 35) suggests this may be the result of policies putting an emphasis on reducing extreme poverty, through investments in agriculture and social protection. This report also highlights the stagnation in the number of people below the poverty line during this period, as, despite the large increase in poverty headcount, coupled with high population growth the absolute number of people in poverty declined by only 1% (Hernandez, 2013: vii).

The NISR (2016b: 35) reports that between 2010/11-2014 the reduction of the poverty gap and poverty severity measures suggests “that poor households were able to reduce their consumption shortfall relative to the poverty line, and that gains were larger amongst the poorest groups”.

Insights from qualitative research

There is polarisation in the literature. The rapid reduction in the proportion of the population falling below poverty indicators is praised as an example of successful development by some. Meanwhile qualitative in-depth field research tends to report more negative findings, including some suggestions that reforms favour wealthier people while increasing the vulnerability of the poorest (Dawson, 2015: 81). Some raise a concern that pressure to reach performance targets combined with limited voice and accountability may result in over-production estimates in surveys (Ansoms et al, 2017: 60). Dawson (2015) find that measures seeking consistency of measurement (such as consumption poverty and the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI)) and alternative qualitative approaches are not necessarily contradictory. Rather each tends to measure different aspects of a person’s well-being, with qualitative research exploring the subjective and relational dimensions often fundamental to people’s wellbeing in a specific context (Dawson, 2015: 81). For example, in Rwanda this means understanding the importance of land and livestock in an analysis of wellbeing, given the critical nature of these resources for many (beyond their material worth) (Dawson, 2015: 81). From an analysis of dynamic and subjective measures of household well-being based on a small-panel dataset, Verpoorten (2014) and McKay and Verpoorten (2016) find that respondents’ happiness levels are very weakly related to income levels and correlated much more strongly with relative income changes and landholdings. Ansoms et al (2017: 47) also find that qualitative fieldwork adds a local-level perspective, providing insights into “how poverty ‘works’ in everyday life”.

3. Other development outcomes and inequalities

There has been **substantial progress – accelerating since 2005 – in non-monetary indicators of well-being and consumption poverty**, with mortality rates falling consistently, much improved access to health care, increased education levels, and improved asset holdings and housing conditions (McKay and Verpoorten, 2016). The 2016 MPI⁸ briefing highlighted Rwanda as the “star performer” of the 35 poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with the fastest MPI-measured poverty reduction between 2005-2010, with significant reductions in every indicator, a reduction in the MPI in every sub-national region, and a reduction in the number of poor people (Alkire et al, 2016: 4). Verpoorten (2014: 15) finds that the trends in health and education across the five different DHS rounds across the period 1992-2010 indicate progress beyond mere post-war catch-up, with “robust evidence for real improvements in quality of life measures”. Moreover “these improvements have happened for the poor as much as for the non-poor” (McKay and Verpoorten, 2016). Rwanda met most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the end of 2015, except the ones on poverty, stunting and share of women in non-agricultural waged employment (NISR, 2015: xv; World Bank country overview⁹). There has been a significant decline in maternal mortality, a two-thirds drop in child mortality and near-universal primary school enrolment (NISR, 2015: xv; World Bank country overview).

However, the situation with chronic malnutrition or stunting (signalling that children are growing too slowly) provides an **example of how inequalities continue to shape the distribution of deprivations and outcomes**, and limit overall progress. While stunting has declined from about 50% (2005) to 38% (2014/2015) of children under 5, it is still “a major outlier” in Rwanda’s achievement of the MDGs (World Bank, 2018: iv). World Bank (2018: 17-18) reports that the poor are affected disproportionately and rates are much higher in rural than in urban areas. Moreover stunting highlights the inter-generational transmission of deprivation and inequalities: children of mothers with no education or only primary schooling have double the rates (40%) of children whose mothers have secondary or higher education (19%).

4. Key drivers: location, education and occupation

While the depth of poverty (the average distance by which poor households fall below the poverty line) has decreased since 2001, Abbott et al (2015: 926) report that it remained substantial, with **many poor Rwandans living far below the line** in 2015. Bundervoet et al (2015: 15) highlight that “the bottom 80 percent of the population are remarkably similar” – engaging in the same activities to generate income and living in households headed by people with little education.

There is a **deep divide between rural-urban wellbeing**. In the World Bank’s 2015 poverty assessment of Rwanda, Bundervoet et al (2015: 12) characterises this rural-urban distribution of poverty as closely corresponding to a capital city vs. the rest of the country divide¹⁰. EICV

⁸ The MPI examines the incidence (the percentage of people, or the headcount ratio) and intensity (the average share of dimensions in which poor people are deprived) of poverty in three dimensions – health, education and living standards (Alkire et al, 2016: 3; <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi>)

⁹ Viewed 22 June 2018. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/rwanda/overview>

¹⁰ There has been a regional divide with poverty concentrated in the south-west in particular (Bundervoet et al, 2015: 12) but EICV 2013/14 reports a convergence, with the Southern and Northern provinces, the poorest

statistics show the overwhelmingly rural nature of Rwandan poverty, with 92% of the poor living in rural areas (an increase of 4.6% from 2010 to 2014) (Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR), 2017: 20). Those dependent on agricultural waged labour or smaller/less productive farms are at the most risk of poverty (Abbott et al, 2015: 928). “When households are engaged in farm activities, they are much more likely to be in poverty. More precisely, when they have their own farm, households are more than three times more likely to be in poverty” (IPAR, 2017: 25). Meanwhile, there is evidence that urbanisation is positively associated with jobs and poverty reduction, primarily in high density areas with good connectivity¹¹ (World Bank, 2017: v). At the same time, inequality is substantially higher in urban (Gini of 58) than in rural areas (Gini of 40) (Bundervoet et al, 2015: 16).

Bundervoet et al (2015: 20-21) find that **agriculture has been the main driver of consumption growth and poverty reduction**, with improvements in agricultural productivity and households **diversifying into non-farm activities**. This was boosted a drop in fertility and an increase in transfers and remittances. More research is needed to what kinds of people or households have successfully transitioned to non-farm activities and what are activities they are engaging in (Bundervoet et al, 2015: 25).

An older analysis, studying EICV1 2000 and EICV2 2005, found a decline in the proportion of inequality explained by education level and a rise in inequality due to location, land ownership and savings (Finnoff, 2015: 226). Looking at EICV data 2006-2011, Bundervoet et al (2015: 22-23) find the reduction in inequality can largely be explained by an increase in the share of households headed by persons with some secondary education, and a shift from farm to non-farm occupations that increased the share of higher-earning non-farm households.

5. Experiences of marginalisation

Difficulties in escaping poverty

With growth widely shared during 2001-2011, Bundervoet et al (2015: 20) report that living conditions of households in extreme poverty “though still miserable, improved markedly”, with extremely poor households living in better quality housing with better access to clean water, and with their children more likely to attend school and be fully immunized. At the same time, other studies highlight how rapid social transformation leads to winners and losers (in absolute or relative terms), and explores the **difficulties faced by the many Rwandans in attempting to escape from poverty** (Verpoorten, 2014: 4; Abbott et al, 2015). Abbott et al (2015 - 932) find that about a third of the population living below the poverty line are dependent on subsistence agriculture or waged agricultural employment, and even if they own land, it cannot produce sufficient food to feed the household¹². For these people, life is “a daily struggle for survival”, making it difficult to take advantage of opportunities for empowerment. McKay and Verpoorten

provinces in the country, experiencing a high drop in the poverty level (-13.5 and -14.2 percentage points, respectively), to catch up with the Western and Eastern provinces (from EICV 2013/14 data) (IPAR, 2017: 22).

¹¹ The World Bank calculates that between 2002 and 2015 Rwanda’s urban population increased from 1.49 million to 3.46 million.

¹² Abbott et al (2015: 929) report that “The rural economy is mainly dependent on rain-fed agricultural production based on small, semi-subsistence and fragmented farms. The average area cultivated by a rural household is 0.6 ha, 46% of households cultivate less than 0.3 ha and 83% less than 0.9 ha, yet the FAO estimates that on average a Rwandan household requires at least 0.9 ha to conduct sustainable agriculture”.

(2016: 32) have found that, with rapid and profound economic and social transformations, peasants in particular “have often had great difficulty in responding to many of the policies introduced—for example, in relation to land consolidation and monocropping—and the speed of the implementation makes this more difficult. Shepherd et al (2018: 5) find that “Rwanda’s panel data covers only two waves (release of the third is awaited in 2018), but the qualitative research suggests that sustained escapes may be towards the 10-12% level, though impoverishment is significant, and that few escapes are sustained to the level of resilience”.

Women and girls

There is a sizeable literature exploring the status of women and girls in Rwanda. **With the government committed to gender equality, the empowerment of women and promoting the rights of women**, analyses find that Rwanda’s legal and policy framework provides a strong basis for promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women (Abbott and Malunda, 2015: 3; Abbott et al, 2015b: 81). The 2003 Constitution mandates gender equality, gender is mainstreamed in all government policies, gender quotas ensure the representation of women at a national level in government and gender-responsive budgeting is practiced (Abbott et al, 2018). It is the first country in the world to achieve the target of 50 per cent of parliamentarians being women. IMF (2017: 36) concludes that “the gains in institutional and policy reforms for gender equality have placed the country among the global leaders in advancing gender equality”.

While there is room for improvement in the legal provision (for example, better protecting the rights of women in consensual unions), Abbott et al (2015b: 4, 81) find that implementation is the critical challenge. **Rwandan women continue to be disadvantaged, especially poor women and those living in rural areas** (Abbott et al, 2015: 932). Women are significantly less likely than men to be in decent paid employment, operating mainly as dependent family workers, working significantly longer hours than men when domestic work is taken into account, especially in rural areas (Abbott et al, 2015: 932).

Female-headed households are more likely to be poor than male-headed households (and more likely to be extremely poor (EICV4) and to be food insecure (IMF, 2017: 35; WFP, 2015: 3). Female heads of household are often widows and tend to be less educated than their male counterparts (WFP, 2015: 3). From 51 interviews with women in western Rwanda in 2013 and 2014, the study found that **a range of household types can be problematic for women and children’s food security**, including female headed households but also polygamous households, households with many children, and households with male breadwinners who fail to take responsibility for their families (Nzayisenga et al, 2016: 293-294).

Deep-rooted **exclusionary and harmful social norms and practice perpetuate gender inequality, especially in rural areas** (Abbott et al, 2015: 932; Abbott and Malunda, 2015: 41). There are a number of qualitative studies exploring different dimensions of these norms and practices. For example, a qualitative study (that undertook six focus group discussions in three district hospitals and three mental health units in Rwanda) found positive initiatives have been introduced to protect abused women. However these women find it hard to seek help due to poverty (e.g. unable to afford medical treatment) combined with prevailing strong norms of male superiority and keeping abuse as a private family matter (Umubyeyi et al, 2016). Meanwhile another study finds that gender norms around certain types of work combined with women’s lack of time to find paid work opportunities due to their involvement in care work, means that women’s paid work opportunities are more limited than men’s (Rohwerder et al, 2017: 3). Looking at land reform the IMF (2017: 29) reports women are now more likely to own property and provide loan

collateral than women in neighbouring countries, with the 2013/14 household survey showing minimal differences in land ownership between male-headed and female-headed households. At the same time, a nationally representative survey (with a sample of 480 households) in 2015 highlights how gender inequality and women's structural position – the 'normal' demands on their time and energy, together with traditional social rules and societal decision-making practices – reduces land reform impact (Abbott et al, 2018).

Rwanda has shown some change in gender norms. A literature review by Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer (2017) finds that a rapid and significant shift in social norms – along with increased investment in infrastructure, financial and human resources and curriculum change – has meant parents are sending their daughters to school, resulted in **remarkable progress in increasing access to education for girls**. Significant challenges remain, including the persistence of some discriminatory norms and expectations alongside poverty, gender-based violence in school, early pregnancy, child labour and domestic work (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017: iii).

Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer (2017: 1) also synthesise evidence on particularly marginalised groups of girls, such as girls affected by HIV and AIDS, child workers, girls with disabilities, and returnee and refugee girls. On the latter, they note “**refugee girls** face serious challenges including poverty, low education levels, increased vulnerability to gender-based violence, transactional sex and early pregnancy” (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017: 44).

Youth

Currently, Rwanda is characterized by a youth bulge (14–35 year olds make up 39% of Rwanda's total population) and a relatively small labour force (NISR, 2016a: viii; Bundervoet et al, 2015: 85). Youth in Rwanda today have experienced **rapid expansions in education as well as a scarcity of land** (in contrast to their parents' experiences). The share of young men with a job in agriculture sharply dropped from 89% in 2001 to 55% in 2011 (Ishihara et al, 2016: 5). Youth focus groups for the World Bank poverty assessment reported **lack of capital and financial services** as critical obstacles to better living standards (Bundervoet et al, 2015: 105).

The literature review by Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer (2017: 17) identifies **skills shortage and gender segmentation** as key barriers to youth employment in the country. Poor children are more disadvantaged: an estimated 10% of youths (aged 14-35) in the lowest quintile have never been to school and 67% did not complete their primary education (according to NISR, 2016a) (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017: 4). Drawing on existing literature and policy reports, with interviews and group discussions¹³ in 2015, Williams (2016: 6) found a gap between the government's developmental aims and the persistently low educational quality for children from the poorest families, which will result in a large cohort of primary and secondary school leavers “unable to possess a basic set of skills” (Williams, 2016: 37). Meanwhile young women are concentrated in low-productivity and poorly remunerated jobs, disadvantaged by a combination of “discriminatory norms, self-selection into agriculture or lack of non-farm self-employment, limited vocational and business opportunities, low access to credit, and poor information” (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017: 14).

A critical study of Rwandan youth is Sommers' 2012 book “*Stuck: Rwandan youth and the struggle for adulthood*”, based on interviews held between 2006-7 with almost 400 youth and

¹³ With 65 members of government, civil society, development partners, local education officers, teachers and head teachers, school-based mentors, and members of parent-teacher committees. (Williams, 2016: 6)

adults. Sommers highlights how a **housing crisis is affecting rural youth** (when building a house is a prerequisite for marriage and an indispensable step in transitions to manhood), while the escape route of migrating to Kigali for most results in a daily struggle for survival (Ansoms, 2013: 685).

Youth-headed households are small in number, but this group is considered to be particularly vulnerable (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017: 46). Recent data (EICV4) show that almost 1% of all households — slightly more in urban areas – are headed by a person under 21 years (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017: 46). Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer (2017: 44) highlight that “the majority of youth-headed households are led by orphaned girls whose gender leads them to be additionally vulnerable to dispossession of their land, forced labour, exploitation, transactional sex, sexual violence and abuse”.

Other marginalised groups

The Constitution identifies the following vulnerable groups: **the survivors of genocide, the disabled, the indigent, the elderly, historically marginalised groups as well as orphans and other vulnerable children** (UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), 2014: 9).

Around 4% of the Rwandan population have a disability, slightly more in rural than in urban areas, with very little difference by sex or across income quintiles (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017: 48). The Constitution prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, the Rwanda Disability Law protects and promotes their rights, and the National Council of Persons with Disabilities and the Ministry of Local Governance promote the rights of people with disabilities and their inclusion in national development efforts (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017: 48-49). However, **many people with disabilities continue to face discrimination** on a daily basis; have often been excluded from development projects; are more vulnerable to sexual abuse; feel discouraged from seeking such services as HIV prevention; and are less likely to participate in the labour force, particularly women with disabilities (Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer, 2017: 49).

Rieder and Elbert (2013) looked at the level of trauma exposure, psychopathology, and risk factors for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in **survivors and former prisoners and their children**¹⁴. They found an effect on the mental health of the next generation – with descendants of genocide survivors presenting with more symptoms than descendants of former prisoners with regard to all assessed mental disorders. A study of orphaned heads of household (OHH) fourteen years after the genocide, found that almost all of the OHH in the study¹⁵ reported low social support, high levels of poverty, and high rates of PTSD and distress symptoms (Ng et al, 2014). Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer (2017: 36) highlight that most research on mental health in Rwanda is linked to the genocide and the trauma of survivors. Nevertheless the particular relationship between exposure to genocide violence and family violence and their effect on the mental health of the Rwandan population remains poorly understood.

¹⁴ They conducted a community-based survey in four sectors of the Muhanga district in the Southern Province of Rwanda from May to July 2010.

¹⁵ Participants in the study were 61 OHH members of a Rwandan association of orphaned heads of household who participated in both time points of a longitudinal study conducted in 2002 and 2008.

There are few studies of the **Historically Marginalised People (HMP)** in Rwanda (part of a broader group who lived in the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa and numbering approximately 35,000 in 2012) (Abbott et al, 2012). Included in the 2011 Social Protection Policy, Abbott et al (2012) find some evidence HMP are beginning to benefit from government programmes. However, they remain extremely disadvantaged, with very high poverty levels, low land ownership, limited access to productive employment and poor health status. The unique challenge faced by HMP is societal stigma to HMP as a community, and the resulting social exclusion.

Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer (2017: 45) find that there is a long list of **vulnerable children** including orphans, children of single mothers, those in child-headed households, children with disabilities, street children, sexually abused children, working children, children infected with or affected by HIV and AIDS, children in the poorest households as well as children born out of wedlock and those issuing from polygamous unions. See Stavropoulou and Gupta-Archer (2017) for a summary of the literature on these vulnerable children.

Sabates-Wheeler and Wylde (2018: 1) highlight the poverty of **households with older people**, and note that the projected growth in the number of older people over the next 30 years will present significant challenges (Sabates-Wheeler and Wylde, 2018: 1). Many of the factors driving old-age poverty and vulnerability – such as the low level of formal pension savings, the increasing division of household land plots, urbanisation, and informality of work – will continue over the next 50 years (Sabates-Wheeler and Wylde, 2018: 2).

According to the Rwandan constitution, minorities and indigenous people are not recognized as separate ethnic entities, in order to guarantee the unity and reconciliation of the Rwandan population following the 1994 genocide (UN CERD, 2014: 6). A highly sensitive issue, there is **limited data on the trajectories of different cultural and ethnic groups and interactions between them** (Dawson, 2018: 2). There is a more substantial literature on transitional justice in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide, with conflicting interpretations about the nature of the process and its consequences. Due to time constraints this rapid review has not been able to explore this literature in full.

Drawing on ethnographic research with young Rwandans in Kigali from 2004 to 2011, and building on other studies (such as Sommers, 2012), McLean Hilker (2014: 366) finds that the “nation-building process in contemporary Rwanda continues to be experienced in ways that are **gendered, ethnicised and shaped by age** and that the intersections of these relations shape individual experience and processes of social change”. She highlights the marginalisation and difficulties faced by significant numbers of (mainly Hutu) young men (McLean Hilker, 2014: 365).

Dawson (2018) applies a multidimensional wellbeing approach through mixed-method research involving 115 rural households in two locations in western Rwanda, in 2011–12. Key findings of this study are “that the household-level impact was **heavily influenced by socio-economic power and socio-ethnic grouping**. Negative impacts, including restricted freedom and loss of material and cultural resources are disproportionately felt by the poorest. The indigenous Batwa suffer particularly detrimental impacts”. Dawson (2018: 12) also highlights that **generalizations about the relative power of ethnic groups do not always hold at a local level**, going on to note that “levels of power are influenced by long-term socio-economic, political, cultural factors and psychological factors, at individual and local as well as national scales”.

6. Limited voice and accountability

There is a polarisation of opinion in the literature about Rwanda's developmental path. Rwanda is seen as successful at reducing poverty by having constituted consensual national development coalitions, ruled by dominant parties seeking coalitions within contexts of guided democracy (Shepherd, 2018: 9). There have also been reform endeavours that explicitly address issues of equity, inclusion and human rights (for example in education policies and programmes) (World Bank, 2013). However, Rwanda's growth success and poverty reduction has been accompanied by criticisms regarding restrictions placed on freedom of speech and human rights (see for example Reyntjens 2011) (Behuria and Goodfellow, 2016: 3). McKay and Verpoorten (2016) find that Rwanda's path to development remains controversial, because of the sharp contrast between the impressive economic progress and the standstill in voice and accountability. At present political opposition is suppressed, policymaking is highly centralised with limited participation and the role of civil society is severely limited (Dawson, 2015: 66). **The literature is divided on whether and how the lack of progress on voice and accountability poses a risk to the sustainability of other achievements** (McKay and Verpoorten, 2016: 33; Hasselskog, 2018). Verpoorten (2014: 4) notes that "even when many development indicators are on the rise, and inequality declines, one may still feel more poor because of the presence of coercion, the lack of voice and accountability, and rapid social transformation."

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