

# The Political Economy of Primary Education: Lessons from Rwanda

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**Summary.** — When it comes to the state’s ability to deliver services to the poor, politics matter. This paper applies a political settlements framework to examine primary education quality in Rwanda. Formal education features prominently into the post-genocide government’s social and economic development project. Rwanda’s political elite have staked their claim in the development of the country, one which is relatively free from rent-seeking. But education quality remains surprisingly low. Enrollment has surged, but primary school dropout and repetition are high. Most children have not acquired age-appropriate literacy or numeracy skills. We sought to investigate why the education sector hasn’t done better in terms of improving quality than we might have expected. This paper draws from interviews and literature review to investigate how policy development and implementation shape the provision of quality education. Our study finds that education priorities were as much political as they were developmental. A lack of real opposition or pushback enabled the government to introduce profoundly transformative educational policies, such as switching the language of instruction from French to English. Often these decisions occurred outside the sector’s strategic planning processes. Performance-based incentives tended to focus on aspects of quality that are measurable, such as the construction of classrooms, rather than improving the capacity of the teaching workforce. We did not find evidence of an effective, sustained strategy to improve education quality. It is thus debatable to what extent Rwanda’s approach can be considered as inclusive development when quality for most children remains so low. This study makes an empirical contribution through evaluating how the education sector has been situated within Rwanda’s broader political settlement, what kinds of outcomes it has led to, and why. It also makes a theoretical contribution by understanding the nature of the relationship between the national political settlement and the education sector.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the central aims of development is the ability of the state to deliver services that stand to improve the situation of the poor. When it comes to the effective delivery of those services, a growing body of research has strongly argued that politics matter—that incentives, individuals, and institutions are inextricably linked to the successes and/or failures of development efforts (Hickey, Sen, & Bukenya, 2015). This paper draws from this perspective to examine efforts to improve primary education quality in Rwanda.

The Republic of Rwanda is just two over decades removed from a civil war and genocide that decimated the country. The post-genocide government has since charted an audacious social and economic development project, one which seeks to distance itself from the past by transforming from a subsistence-based agricultural economy to a knowledge-based, market-oriented society (MINECOFIN, 2000). Formal education features prominently into its broader aims.

Thanks in part to a fee-free basic education policy, primary and secondary school enrollment in Rwanda have surged. Children from poor families now have access to more years with the public education system (NISR, 2012b). At the same time, learning outcomes are low. Most children in primary school have not acquired age-appropriate literacy or numeracy skills (EDC, 2017). In recent years, primary school dropout and repetition have risen while completion and transition rates have stagnated or declined (MINEDUC, 2015a).

Expanding access and improving quality are two dimensions to education policymaking and planning that are both contradictory and complementary (Tikly & Barrett, 2013). On one hand, efforts to expand and extend access use resources that might have otherwise been invested in the training of teachers

or the provision of textbooks (Pritchett, 2013). Yet access is also an obvious precondition to quality. As one high-ranking member in Rwanda’s Ministry of Education (MINE-DUC) put it, “There can be no quality without access.” In other words, the opportunity to go to school can be interpreted as a qualitative improvement for those who might have otherwise been unable to attend (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007). From the government’s perspective, getting children into a classroom is the important first step, with improvements to the classroom experience to follow. One way to analyze this tension is by looking at Rwanda’s political settlement.

### (a) *Political settlement framework*

“Political settlement” refers to “the balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes, on which any state is based” (Di John & Putzel, 2009, p. 4). In other words, it is how the elite hold and exercise power. The political settlement literature introduces a conceptual architecture to demonstrate how politics matter when it comes to the reduction or reproduction of poverty (Hickey *et al.*, 2015). Such a perspective is salient in a post-conflict context such as Rwanda. It allows us to consider the social, political, and historical context through which current patterns of

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governance have emerged (Levy & Walton, 2013). A political settlement approach provides the ability to trace processes of decision-making and policy implementation. Doing so permits consideration for how meaningful and equitable change for the poor can be brought about and sustained (Khan, 2010).

A political settlement framework allows us to consider political elite commitment to “inclusive development,” i.e., to support sustainable interventions that benefit the poor. This often requires alliances and commitments of the non-poor, who, as Hickey *et al.* (2015, p. 6) contends, are “often more adept at attracting public goods provision and at maintaining a better quality of service delivery through [public] social accountability mechanisms.” Thus, an analysis of Rwanda’s approach to education cannot divorce a sector’s policies from the nation’s politics.

Levy and Walton (2013) outline different ways for describing the nature of a political settlement. Perhaps no country better exemplifies what they call a ‘dominant developmental’ political settlement than Rwanda. A dominant developmental political settlement is characterized by the political elite being aligned with one principal or leader. In the case of Rwanda, its ruling party is the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and its leader is Paul Kagame. Such dominant party regimes are known for governing through absolute control and top-down discipline. The incentives of the RPF can be best described as developmental (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2012). That is, the RPF’s stated approach to governance and claim to legitimacy focuses on lifting the country out of poverty in a way that attends to the precipitating factors that were thought to have led to conflict—namely ethnic divisionism, resource scarcity, and few opportunities for social mobility. Thus, the government’s claim to power and peaceful rule rests on being perceived as inclusive of all Rwandans (MINECOFIN, 2000). Ideas and ideologies are aligned to a long-term vision engendered by “dominance” and leadership. Dominant developmental political settlements are associated with accountability, technocratic effectiveness, and impersonal forms of service delivery, because national-level goals and incentives are aligned. The potential of growth and development rely on the stability of a regime that can engage in longer term planning (Hickey *et al.*, 2015). On the other hand, it may also be the case that there is little political space for meaningful push-back to occur, allowing for transformative policies to be pushed through (Levy & Walton, 2013).

Knowledge of the national-level political settlement is crucial for understanding the key priorities, institutions, and individuals that have contributed to a country’s development. However, some scholars have also suggested that there is a need to understand how political and economic factors at the level of the sector, i.e., education, lead to sector-specific outcomes such as the acquisition of literacy, examination performance, or primary completion rates (McLoughlin, 2011). The present study was carried out to investigate the underlying political drivers of the education system and its relationship to quality primary education in Rwanda. We aim to make an empirical contribution through evaluating how the education sector has been situated within Rwanda’s broader political settlement, what kinds of outcomes it has led to, and why. We also aim to make a theoretical contribution by understanding the nature of the relationship between the national political settlement and the education sector.

This paper draws from existing literature and policy reports, interviews, and observations. Fieldwork took place between March and June 2015. Interviews were held with 65 members of government, civil society, bilateral partners, local education officers, teachers and head teachers, school-based mentors,

and members of parent–teacher committees.<sup>1</sup> We also attended education stakeholder meetings, such as the Ministry of Education’s biannual Joint Review of the Education Sector (MINEDUC, 2015b).

As we will see, the government’s national vision and strategy is clearly established. This vision informs poverty reduction strategies which, in turn, shape the goals of the education sector. The elite have placed its stake in good governance, accountability, and developmental outcomes. But given this commitment, we must ask ourselves: why hasn’t the education sector done better in terms of providing quality primary education for all? The remainder of this paper will shed light on this question. First, we locate Rwanda’s primary education system in historical context. Second, we explore what governance and schooling has looked like under the RPF since the end of the genocide until 2016. We then turn to explore some of the most influential actors and institutions that have informed the current priorities within the sector. Fourth, we describe the organization and administration of the education sector before then turning to indicators of access and quality. The next section examines education policy that have impacted education quality in three different areas, including (1) post-primary expansion and reform, (2) Rwanda’s switch from French to English as the language of instruction, and (3) the training of primary school teachers. The paper closes with a discussion, where we consider how the political settlement can help us better understand and explain outputs and outcomes to date.

## 2. PRIMARY SCHOOLING IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

### (a) *The colonial and post-colonial eras*

As the Rwandan administrative state grew in power during the colonial occupation (1898–1962), schooling went from being a Church-led activity to one in which the state played a more active role in the establishment of a national education system. Formal education was to become among the attributes necessary to secure business opportunities and employment during the latter half of the colonial era (Des Forges & Newbury, 2011). Toward the end of the colonial era, a system of national examinations was established and the standardization of textbooks was introduced (King, 2014). But unequal opportunities under the colonial authorities contributed to a collective sense of institutionalized oppression on the part of the rural majority (Newbury, 1988). Inequitable access to education was at the core of Hutu discontent and among the factors that fueled the revolutionary movement that preceded independence (Prunier, 1995).

Following independence in 1962, the new Hutu-led government enacted policies that reinforced their own grip on power. Census figures suggested Tutsis comprised about nine percent of the population, but they still occupied a higher proportion of key administrative positions (Prunier, 1995). Discontent on the part of Hutus led to a coup in 1973. President Gregoire Kayibanda was replaced by Juvenal Habyarimana. Habyarimana’s presidency was credited with initially bringing some stability and improvement to the country but at the price of restricting political freedom and deepening social control (Prunier, 1995).

During this time, the state took a prominent role in organizing schooling. Rwanda’s first constitution mandated primary education to be both free and compulsory. Initially, the emphasis was on expanding educational opportunities as a necessary corrective to the social and economic inequalities

of the past (King, 2014). The expansion of the primary education system resulted in an enrollment surge. To accommodate this expansion, double shifting was introduced whereby half of primary students would attend in the morning and the other half in the afternoon (Hoben, 1989). During this time, primary schooling consisted of six years. The first three years of the primary cycle focused on literacy and was taught in Kinyarwanda. The latter three years of primary school emphasized general training and was taught in French (King, 2014).

Under Habyarimana, education reforms focused more on national development. Hoben (1989, p. 15) explained that education during this time had become the “cornerstone of general development of Rwanda.” The allocation of secondary school spots during this time consisted of a complicated and (perhaps purposefully) opaque matrix involving ethnicity, regional identification, and academic performance (Obura, 2003). Scholars have generally concurred that ethnicity and regional identification served as trump cards for admission to secondary school that could override examination performance (King, 2014; Uvin, 1998).

### (b) *Civil war and genocide*

On the eve of the civil war in 1990, primary school gross enrollment had risen from 46% in 1973 to 65% (Obura, 2003). The number of classrooms during this period tripled. But the rate of transition to secondary school, at 9.2%, remained virtually unchanged since independence (Obura, 2003). Secondary school opportunities did not grow at the same pace as the expansion of the primary system. But most critically, the fundamental structure of the political and social system remained unchanged since independence (Golooba-Mutebi, 2013). The reforms that had been brought about were done under the auspices of offering a needed corrective to the policies enacted during colonial occupation. In reality, however, it had merely inverted who was in power (Prunier, 1995). If the education system had favored Tutsi elites during the colonial era, the education system now favored Hutus through the use of identity cards and an ethnic quota system (King, 2014).

Any momentum within Rwanda’s education system came to a halt during the conflicts of the 1990s. The 1994 genocide had devastating impacts on the capacity of the school system in terms of both human resources and infrastructure. Tutsi schoolchildren and teachers were targeted in the genocide because they were thought to represent the educated and elite class (Obura, 2003). By the time the genocide ended in July 1994, two-thirds of school buildings had been severely damaged. Approximately 75% of all public sector employees, including teachers, were either killed, fled the country as refugees, or went missing. An estimated 50–70% of the teachers left were underqualified (MINEDUC, 1997). By the end of 1994, Rwanda was considered to be a failed state (Mazrui, 1995).

### 3. GOVERNANCE AND SCHOOLING UNDER THE RPF (1994–2015)

On the basis of a power sharing arrangement, the Rwandan Patriotic Front established the Government of National Unity in 1994. This interim government placed a strong emphasis on promoting stability while charting a strategy for development and peace. The new government consisted of representation from both groups, including Hutu president Pasteur Biz-

imungu and Tutsi then-vice president Paul Kagame. In the year 2000, Bizimungu resigned and Kagame assumed power. When the government passed a new constitution in 2003, Kagame won 95% of the popular vote to secure the first of what would become two consecutive seven-year terms, despite evidence of irregularities in both elections (HRW, 2001; Reyntjens, 2011). In 2016, the Constitution was changed to allow Kagame to run for a third term in 2017 and then two more five-year terms after that (Reyntjens, 2016), meaning that he could theoretically remain in power until the year 2034.

Since taking power, the RPF-led government has introduced a series of reforms aimed at social and economic transformation. The government’s approach is encapsulated in a strategic planning document called Vision 2020 (MINECOFIN, 2000). The stated goal of Vision 2020 was to create a set of conditions for Rwanda to become a middle-income country by the year 2020. The aims were premised on distancing the country from a legacy marked by ethnic division, conflicts over scarce natural resources, social inequalities, and limited opportunities for social mobility. The importance of children’s education is core to the aim of Vision 2020 to develop a skilled labor force, improve literacy, promote gender equality, and foster social cohesion among all Rwandans (MINEDUC, 2010).

Vision 2020 remains the central organizing document for the government. It lays out the general strategy that is used to guide all aspects of Rwanda’s development efforts ranging from health to agriculture to education (Abbott, Sapsford, & Binagwaho, 2017). As one former government official interviewed for this study put it, “Here in Rwanda, we really only have one policy,” in reference to the centrality of Vision 2020 in informing government strategy.

Vision 2020 informed Rwanda’s 2003 Constitution (RoR, 2003) along with the corresponding 2003 Education Policy (MINEDUC, 2003). The introduction of subsequent education sector policy developments offer more sophisticated elaborations of the 2003 legal instrument and policy plan. During the time that our study took place, the government’s key development priorities were located in the second iteration of its Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Plan (EDPRS2) (MINECOFIN, 2013). The EDPRS2, in turn, informed sector-specific strategies, including the 2013–18 Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) (MINEDUC, 2013). Policies concerning access were intended to reflect Rwanda’s commitments to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA), and Universal Primary Education (UPE) goals. Table 1 lists seminal moments in basic education policy that have occurred during RPF rule.

Between 2003 until 2012, policies concerning gender equality, the language of instruction, and post-primary access all underwent significant reforms. By 2013, the government had set its sights on achieving universal enrollment in primary and secondary school, improving educational quality, and preparing a workforce equipped with the skills deemed necessary to propel Rwanda toward its aim of becoming a middle-income country by 2020. But as we shall see later in this paper, describing the evolution of the education system in a linear and technocratic fashion obscures the politics, priorities, and incentives that are at the heart of how we might best understand the priorities and considerations of the education sector.

### 4. THE INDIVIDUALS AND INSTITUTIONS THAT SHAPE EDUCATION POLICY

A core feature of the political settlement framework is to identify the individuals and institutions that are influential in

Table 1. *Seminal moments in children's schooling under the RPF (1995–2016).*

1995–2002	Harmonize national policy with Millennium Development Goals, Education For All, and Universal Primary Education
1997	Revised language policy: French, English, and Kinyarwanda
2003	A new constitution is signed Primary education is free and compulsory; limited opportunities for secondary school Double shifting in primary school should be reduced Capitation grant system replaces school fees Trilingual education policy: P1–P3 (Kinyarwanda); P4 onward (French or English) 6 years primary (free and compulsory) and 6 years secondary (not free or compulsory)
2009	Education policy extends basic education to nine years (i.e. 9YBE) Double shifting in primary is expanded Reduction in core courses of instruction in primary and secondary: concentrate on ICT, sciences, and languages English becomes medium of instruction; French is offered as a subject
2012	President Kagame campaigns on extending basic education to twelve years (i.e. 12YBE) English language policy switched to start in P4 rather than P1. First three years taught in Kinyarwanda
2012–14	9YBE starts to be extended to 12YBE
2016	A new primary school curriculum is introduced

the education sector. We explored this idea in our interviews with elite individuals. This was obviously tricky. Our inquiries about decision-making processes with officials often led us to organograms and decision-making trees. Interviewees who were not in government often added more candid responses. Former government officers working in civil society or with international organizations, for example, often illustrated their points by recalling examples from their previous experience with government.

To this end, there was a general agreement about who was in the inner circle of power when it came to decision-making in the education sector. This inner circle consists of the President of the Republic, the Cabinet, the Minister of Education (MINEDUC), Ministry of Finance (MINECOFIN), the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC), and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). In the outer circle is the Rwandan Education Board (REB), Parliament, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UNICEF, and the consortium of NGOs called the Rwandan Education NGO Coordination Platform (RENCP).

The Office of the President plays a critical function in establishing the priorities of the education sector. Ministers report directly to the President. He has the power to replace them without notice. Toward the end of our fieldwork in 2015, for example, the Minister of Education and Permanent Secretary for MINEDUC were both replaced. No explanation was given. The President can also make key decisions that impact the priorities of the education sector, such as the expansion of the basic education system to 12 years (described later). To be sure, this initiative went through the proper channels to become national policy, but the origins of the decision were with the President.

The Cabinet is the entity which makes the decisions for the country. Cabinet members are appointed by the President and are comprised of different ministers. By law, no more than half of Cabinet members can be from the ruling party, i.e., the RPF. Within the Cabinet, the Minister of Education holds overall responsibility for MINEDUC. However, each of MINEDUC's three Ministers of State are also Cabinet members. They report directly to the President.

Similarly, the establishment of national priorities occurs at the annual leadership retreat. Each year, high-level government officials meet to produce a series of resolutions. Resolutions often include items relevant to the education sector. For

example, [Honeyman \(2015, p. 26\)](#) noted the 2014 retreat led to a specific resolution concerning quality. It called for the establishment of “a monitoring and evaluation system for tracking educational quality, and putting into place an education quality strategic plan with a baseline and desired targets.” The introduction of school feeding was another example of a resolution made at the retreat. This resolution meant that schools were expected to start providing food for students. However, school feeding was not part of the budget for the 2014–15 fiscal year. Schools had little choice but to pass on this expense to students. Understanding the significance of decision-making on the part of the President and at the leadership retreat is important for thinking about how the political settlement impacts the education sector. The introduction of policies around language, basic education, or school feeding may each align well with the government's broader vision for the country. But there is a trend for these decisions to occur outside of planning processes, as evidenced by their absence from the sector strategic planning documents. This can present challenges for the implementation and funding of other competing priorities.

The Ministry of Local Government also plays a crucial role through the country's decentralized system of governance. Within the education sector, it is responsible for the implementation of policy and the administration of schools. Local-level education officials are technically members of MINALOC, even though their primary duties are in education.

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning also has a determining role in the implementation of education priorities. MINECOFIN oversees budget implementation. It has the responsibility of making sure the education sector and budget harmonize with the country's broader development aims as outlined in EDPRS2. MINECOFIN does not have a direct role in establishing priorities of the sector, but they hold the purse strings. As such, they have a primary role in funding the line items of the budget within the sector. This takes on added significance in the event of a budgetary shortfall. The final decision on priority targets rests with MINALOC, who can re-prioritize after receiving MINEDUC's ideas.

DFID is also an influential actor within the education sector. DFID, along with UNICEF, are the co-chairs of the education sector working group. DFID funds a large proportion of the education sector budget. During 2011–15, for example, it disbursed over £100 million with the aim of “increased equitable access to quality education and improved

learning outcomes” (British Council, 2015, p. 6). Most of these funds are disbursed through direct education sector budget support.

## 5. THE ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF CHILDREN’S EDUCATION

Rwanda’s decentralization policy aims to empower local government to carry out the national development goals (MINALOC, 2001). Rwanda’s 30 district mayors act as overseers of their respective districts. They work to establish priorities for their districts that reflect national goals while also working through local mechanisms that promote social inclusion, dialog, and consensus building (Senate, 2014). Decentralization in the education sector occurs in the following way. MINEDUC develops policies, introduces strategies, and maintains overall responsibility for monitoring and evaluation of the system. MINECOFIN transfers money through infrastructure, administration, and capitation grants directly to districts and schools. The focus on transparency appears to be effective. Recent evaluations have pointed out that funds reach schools with little evidence of rent-seeking (Transparency International, 2012).

While MINEDUC provides strategy and oversight, the day-to-day administrative duties and management of education rest with a branch of MINEDUC called the Rwanda Education Board (REB). REB’s various departments handle the coordination and professional development of teachers. It organizes national exams and develops new curricula. REB also manages a school-based mentor (SBM) program, which we will discuss later. The decentralized system is officially organized as follows: REB coordinates directly with officials at the district level. In turn, district education officers are supposed to work in conjunction with the local government officials and sector education officers. The sector education officers coordinate directly with head teachers, community members, and local leaders for the purposes of collecting data and encouraging households to send their children to school.

Although district and sector education officers are responsible for education, they do not formally report to MINEDUC or REB. As part of the decentralized system, they are employees of MINALOC. Thus, while their performance contracts are education-oriented, they are accountable to and evaluated by local government officials. Some studies have pointed to concerns that education officers are often pulled into performing non-education related tasks that are perceived by local officials as more urgent than education (Mott MacDonald, 2013), such as mobilizing constituents to enroll in the government’s health insurance scheme. Local officials interviewed in our study acknowledged that this happens on occasion. However, they said it did not detract from their education-focused duties.

What was a pressing concern in our study, however, was that education officials felt pulled in multiple directions to such a degree that it made it impossible for them to do their jobs well. District education officers are the designated point people for numerous government entities. Everything related to education is channeled through them and their office. During an interview, an exasperated district education officer took out a piece of paper and drew a small, circular organogram of the stakeholders that he must answer to. He wrote “DEO” in the center and explained:

*“Here we have so many tasks. And I am here! [pointing to the center of the organogram]. MINEDUC asks me. The Province asks me. Schools ask me. Sectors ask me. The Vice Mayor and Mayor of the District ask things of me. Even the police. All of them. I’m the channel for all of these.*

*I must respond to the different departments of REB. They also need statistics. Then the Department of Social Welfare asks me about teachers. Others ask me about school feeding.”*

He explained that because so much of his job is administration and data gathering, it is not possible for him to oversee schools in his district:

*“We have to submit many, many reports to REB. We have to go to the sectors to see how they’re working. We have to go to the schools to see how they’re doing and the head teachers. We have office work as well. So going to the field for supervision is a big problem.”*

As part of the decentralized education system, parents and communities provide an important economic and managerial function. All parents are de facto members of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at their children’s school. A subset of parents are members of the Parent Teacher Committee (PTC), which has the responsibility for providing oversight of school management. The economic contributions of parents has also been crucial, particularly for the expansion of post-primary basic education schools (World Bank, 2011). The government provides building materials, but parents and community members are obliged to donate their labor to build classrooms (Upper Quartile, 2013). While schools are legally prevented from excluding children for financial reasons, families are often expected to cover certain costs, such as a teacher bonus, tutoring, school feeding, and other materials. There is evidence to suggest that failure to pay can result in temporary or permanent forms of exclusion (Williams, Abbott, & Mupenzi, 2014; Williams 2013).

Accountability, transparency, and good governance are key dimensions of the implementation of Vision 2020. This is enforced through performance contracts. National and local officials, including local education officers, sign performance contracts. The stated aim of decentralization and performance contracts is to empower local communities to have a more active voice in decision-making processes. At the level of the district and sector, performance contracts set out action plans and priorities for local government. It sets the primary policy objectives through a process that has been characterized as “simultaneously bottom-up and top-down” (Honeyman, 2015, p. 27). Communities and local government officials establish their own goals and priorities through identifying district- and sector-level priorities which are then enforced through performance contracts. However, these priorities are always done in a way that is in line with national-level policy and priorities. Some observers contend that performance contracts have the effect of enabling the state to exert further control over local life and that accountability primarily continues to flow upwards (Chemouni, 2014). Thus, it may be more accurate to characterize the government’s decentralization efforts as ‘de-concentration.’ Local government may exercise some autonomy in establishing priorities for its constituency, but ultimately, all local priorities must feed into national priorities.

District and sector performance contracts have indicators concerning education quality; however, they focus on indicators that are measurable and comparable, such as the construction of classrooms or the building of latrines, “reflecting the current priority placed on access, and a general propensity to emphasize easily-countable tangible objectives” (Honeyman, 2015, p. 27). While examination performance is a high priority of schools and sectors, education officials said examination scores are not part of performance contracts due to a concern that it would encourage perverse incentives for schools, i.e., barring underperforming students to sit for examinations.

## 6. OUTCOMES, ACCESS, AND QUALITY

By 2012, the government's decentralized, fee-free, and community-based policies and approaches to delivering education removed many of the barriers that were once prohibitive. Rwanda was on pace to be one of the few developing countries to achieve near-universal access to primary education. In 2012, the Ministry of Education beat out 122 other entries worldwide to win the Commonwealth Award for its efforts to expand access to schooling as quickly and efficiently as it did.

Around this time, an alternative and more critical interpretation about the quality of the education system also emerged. To be sure, the government's effort to ensure all children have access to primary education cannot be underestimated. Yet, it appears that the near-universal primary attendance rates previously reported may have been *overestimated*. The 2012 Census carried out by the country's National Institute of Statistics (NISR) is considered to offer the most reliable data about primary school enrollment, because it aims to collect data from every household in the country. Census figures indicate that net primary enrollment stands at just over 88% (NISR, 2012b). This figure is about 10 percentage points lower than a more recent figure reported by MINEDUC (2015a), which indicates near universal (97%) enrollment based upon school-level reports. The enrollment disparity was discussed at the 2015 Joint Review of the Education Sector meeting held in June of that year. The Minister of State at the time, in charge of Primary and Secondary Education, suggested at the meeting that teachers were over-reporting the number of students as a way to receive higher capitation grant allowances. "[A]t the end of year, they report dropout of the students who have never been to their schools," the Minister was quoted as saying in a national newspaper (Mugabo, 2015). The discrepancy in the quality of statistical reporting is, of course, not unique to Rwanda (Sandefur & Glassman, 2015), but it is sobering nonetheless and indicative that more work remains to be done to ensure all children have the opportunity to study (Glewwe, Maïga, & Zheng, 2014).

One high-ranking member of MINEDUC mentioned that one of the most challenging dimensions of working in the education sector has been what he called the "doing well narrative." The dominant developmental political settlement would suggest that the viability of Rwanda's political elite depends on performance-based legitimacy (Menocal, 2015). It has received international recognition for the progress it has made. However, the preoccupation with indicators may be a double-edged sword, as it may have had the effect of diverting attention and resources away from problems that have not yet been solved.

A higher proportion of young people are now in school, but to what extent and how were they learning or benefitting from their education? Over the last several years, the focus of many government and development partners in the education sector has shifted to quality (MINEDUC, 2013), a shift that is also in line with globally defined commitments to improving education quality, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals. A 2012 independent review of DFID's education-related work in Rwanda was highly critical of the apparent lack of focus on education quality. The report authors noted that education quality in Rwanda:

*"is so low that it seriously detracts from the development impact of DFID's educational assistance. To achieve near-universal primary enrolment but with a large majority of pupils failing to attain basic levels of literacy or numeracy is not, in our view, a successful development result."*  
[ICAI (2012, p. 22)]

Aside from learning outcomes, two other ways that a quality education system can be understood is through repetition rates and on-time completion rates. In 2012, the average promotion rate for primary school children was about 70% each year. In other words, 3 out of 10 students fall behind each year. It means that of 100 children who begin Primary 1, 70 are left on-track to complete by Primary 2, 49 by Primary 3, and by Primary 6 only 17 students are left to complete their studies on time (NISR, 2012a). These figures suggest that children are not benefitting from the education system as it was intended. Figures from the Ministry of Education (2015a) indicate that the year 2014 was the first year in which a number of key quantitative indicators of quality plateaued or declined from previous years. The primary school completion rate, for example, measured as the proportion of Primary 6 students sitting for their end-of-year national exams, dipped from 75.6% in 2010 to 61.3% in 2014. The transition rate from primary to secondary school decreased from 93.8% in 2010 to 73.4% in 2013. The repetition rate stood at 18.3% in 2013 and the dropout rate was 14.3% in primary school. Of particular concern to members of MINEDUC, REB, and development partners at the JRES meeting was that nearly one third (28.3%) of all primary school students drop out in Primary 5 (MINEDUC, 2015a). In other words, a large proportion of children complete all but their final year of primary school before dropping out, presenting a huge inefficiency of the system. There is also a public perception in Rwanda that Primary 5 is the most difficult year of primary school, apparently because many new concepts are introduced. It can also be considered the 'last push' before the final year of primary school (Primary 6), which is largely focused on reviewing for the examination.

Our field research and review of existing documents offers several different possible ways to explain dropout and repetition. First, the dropout and repetition rates may be lower if head teachers were inflating figures to receive a higher capitation grant, as was suggested by the Minister at the JRES meeting above. Second, parents may pull their children out of school once they feel they have achieved a basic skillset or if they are needed to contribute directly to the viability of the household. Alternatively, parents may remove their children if they feel they are not learning anything (MINEDUC, 2015b). A third explanation, and one put forth by the Director of Planning for the Ministry of Education at the JRES meeting, was that head teachers may hold back or push out poor performing students in order to achieve better results on the Primary 6 national examination. It is reasonable to assume that each explanation holds a degree of validity. Taken together, they suggest that the primary education system is not functioning as well as intended.

Learning outcomes are another way to gauge school quality. A study carried out by Stanford University researchers found that, on average, students could only identify 36.7% of the letters in their alphabet after one year of primary school (Friedlander, Gasana, & Goldenberg, 2014). A USAID (2014) study found that about 60% of Primary 1 students, 33% of Primary 2 students, and 21% of Primary 3 students could not read any word of the grade-appropriate passage they were tested on in the local language (Kinyarwanda). In mathematics, 59% of Primary 1 students could not solve any subtraction problems and 41% could not solve any addition problems. In Primary 3, about one in ten scored zero on addition tests. The study authors noted that deficits in reading likely contributed to the challenges students encountered when they attempted to solve more complicated mathematical problems.

Interestingly, when comparing the highest and lowest performing schools, the researchers found no significant differences in terms of home environment, socioeconomic status of the family, or even student-to-teacher ratio. The only statistically significant variable was one of location: higher performing schools were located in or near Rwanda's capital city of Kigali. This might be explained by the literate environment. Kigali is a more literacy-rich environment compared with most rural areas of the country. This could play a role in reinforcing students' learning beyond the factors listed above. It may also be the case that it is easier for the government to distribute materials and services closer to urban centers. A more recent study found that a school's distance from the district office was positively correlated with improved literacy rates (EDC, 2017).

The introduction of English, Rwanda's new language of instruction (described in detail later), has also presented immense challenges to learning and teaching. A study of over 600 primary and secondary school teachers found that most teachers had a competency of English considered to be at "elementary" (41.8%) or "intermediate" (43.4%) stages (British Council, 2015). These figures demonstrate an improvement over the baseline study carried out two years prior (Simpson, 2013). However, the proportion of teachers using English at such a basic level presents challenges for the effective delivery of the curriculum. Given these challenges, Abbott, Sapsford, and Rwirahira (2015, p. 123) worry that it may "take a generation before the schools are staffed by people who were themselves taught in English at school and university, albeit often badly, and probably two generations before the English that is used and therefore learned at school becomes a language fully worth learning." But how might we locate these outcomes within Rwanda's political settlement? In the section that follows, we turn to explore a set of policies and policy reforms that have given rise to some of these outcomes.

## 7. THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION POLICY UNDER THE RPF

The government officials we interviewed ranged from current and former ministers to senators and district mayors to local education officials and teachers. As one may predict, all explained that their personal commitments are guided by national development plans rather than the prospect of individual gain. Officials suggested that they operated with a sense of collective urgency: that if the government moves "fast enough," it can bring about the changes needed to distance itself from the past while charting a sustainable and peaceful future for all Rwandans (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2012, p. 391). But as we saw above, tangible, visible, and logistical outputs were prioritized over things that were more difficult to deliver, such as raising learning outcomes. Below we draw attention to three key reforms to children's education policy and to consider their effect on quality, including the introduction of post-primary basic education, the change in language of instruction, and the training of primary school teachers.

### (a) *Post-primary access as an entitlement (9YBE and 12YBE policies)*

As we saw above, many of the changes that have occurred since that time have been extensions of the 2003 education policy. In 2008, a Nine Year Basic Education (9YBE) policy was introduced. The policy aimed to extend fee-free education to young people into lower secondary school (i.e., Senior 1 through Senior 3).

This extension stood to impact the quality of primary education in two key ways. First, expanding access to the education system arguably meant reducing the concentrated focus of improving primary education. A former member of MINE-DUC recalled ongoing debates with development partners during that time. He said that development partners were concerned about the cost of extending access an additional three years when universal access to primary education had not yet been achieved and when quality was still low. But current members of government interviewed for this study characterized the decision to expand differently: that the move was indicative that the government aimed to deliver development, arguing that improvements in primary school access and quality must be pursued concurrently. Basic education was an entitlement, but there was also an element of social cohesion to its introduction. Post-primary government schooling, once exclusive and prohibitively expensive, was now accessible to more young people, and that, in itself, respondents said, was an important aspect of social development—and one that was politically popular.

Second, in order for the 9YBE policy to utilize existing human resources and infrastructure, the structure of the primary education system was overhauled. Some of the post-2003 policies have offered further guidance or clarification to the initial 2003 policy. But 9YBE presented the case of a restructure, one which presented a contradiction to the stated trajectory of the system up until that point (Table 1). For instance, the 2003 education policy called for a reduction of double shifting in primary schools, the rationale being that double shifting "cannot be good for quality" (MINEDUC, 2003, p. 9). As recently as 2007, policy documents still pointed to the goal of double shifting reduction from 59% in 2007 to 10% by 2015 (MINEDUC, 2007, p. 5). But with the introduction of the 9YBE policy, the way double shifting was talked about reversed course. Policy documents began to highlight the "many benefits" of double shifting, because it would allow the country to expand access in an efficient manner, reducing the student-teacher ratio while making teachers, infrastructure, and resources available for more children (MINEDUC, 2008, p. 29). However, these reforms to the structure of primary school also reduced the number of contact hours that students had with teachers and doubled their workloads, which likely impacted upon quality (Abbott *et al.*, 2015). During this time, the curriculum in classes was also streamlined. In part because there was less time in the classrooms, the number of core courses taught was reduced. Primary teachers also shifted toward increased specialization. Teachers had previously been responsible for teaching all subjects to their students in one classroom. However, the reforms meant that teachers shifted to becoming subject-teachers, focusing in on one or two topics such as science and mathematics, and rotating classrooms. The shift was aimed to improve quality by promoting teacher specialization, but it also has had the effect of distancing teachers from their students, as they became less familiar with students' individual performance (Honeyman, 2015).

Then, during his 2010 reelection campaign, President Kagame ran on the promise of extending 9YBE by three additional years through the introduction of a 12 Years Basic Education (12YBE) policy. The expansion of the basic education system has been an aim for the government for over a decade, as indicated in the original 2003 Education Policy. Even so, the introduction of 12YBE took many education stakeholders by surprise. The 2010–15 ESSP, the document designed to guide the sector during this time period, made no mention of the three additional years of schooling.

(b) *The switch from French to English: causes and effects*

In 2008, the government switched the medium of instruction from French to English. Rwanda's Constitution delineates a trilingual approach for primary education. However, the new approach to language in the classroom is officially understood as follows: "Kinyarwanda as the bedrock of initial literacy and learning [Primary 1 through Primary 3]; English as the new medium of instruction; and French as an additional language" (MINEDUC, 2010, p. 14). We have already described some of the challenges concerning language and literacy above. We now draw from interview data and the existing literature to explore the possible motivations and incentives for how and why the language change occurred and what the effects have been.

The first explanation can be traced back to the social and political demographic of the ruling party as well as the legacy of the genocide. A predominately Anglophone Tutsi political elite sought to distance itself and the country from its Francophone roots. It also sought to sever ties to France, owing to its complicit role in the genocide. Many of the core members of the RPF grew up in Uganda and studied English (Prunier, 1995). Thus, the switch to English benefitted those with an Anglophone background. As one might expect, officials interviewed in our study vehemently rejected this explanation for the language shift. "It was not [a] political [decision] despite what everyone has said," a senator said in an interview. Yet one would also be hard-pressed to imagine the language policy being introduced in this way if it did not stand to benefit those in key positions of power and influence.

The second explanation is economic. The shift to English was a strategy to facilitate regional integration and a point of entry into the global market economy. Rwanda recently joined the East African community, which is predominately Anglophone. Thus, the language switch helped to foster strategic alliances and promote trade with its neighbors and global partners. As one policy expert interviewed for this study put it, the country's "cultural alliances" and economic ambitions are aligned with the Anglophone world. "You don't go to China and speak French. Or Germany or Pakistan," the interviewee said. The switch to English also coincided with the country's entry into the British Commonwealth.

Third, an economic explanation could also be made from within the operations of the education sector. As the Ministry of Education (2010, p. 14) noted in the 2010–2015 ESSP: "It has [...] been expensive to maintain three languages of instruction in terms of learning materials and teacher education." While the switch would be expensive in the shorter term, in the longer term, textbook procurement processes were thought to be more cost effective. Better and cheaper textbooks in subjects such as the sciences are more readily available in English compared with other languages (Abbott *et al.*, 2015).

It is, of course, difficult to offer a definitive account of the political motivations behind the language change. Politicians offered developmental explanations for the shift, while development officials and non-state actors often offered political explanations. But what we can do in this study is to try to analyze its effects: both in terms of the way it has been implemented and how it has contributed to some of the low education outcomes reported above.

It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the language change presented a shock to primary education in the sense that its systems and actors were completely unprepared to respond. This can be better understood by reviewing education plan-

ning documents developed around that time. The language shift was announced in 2008. Yet, the 2008–12 Education Sector Strategic Plan—the document used to guide the priorities (and funding) of the sector—offers no indication of the language change. The shift was done so quickly that it has left the quality of the education system in a perpetual state of catchup. Stakeholders ranging from teachers to senior members of MINEDUC reported the struggle it was to maintain quality alongside the language shift. "It was a matter of choice," a member of MINEDUC said about the language policy amidst the other changes happening in the sector. "You go for access and you will compromise quality. When you then add English as a challenge, the problem of quality became a lot worse."

Shortly after the shift was announced, a study by the Ministry of Education (2009) reported that just 15% of primary teachers and 10% of lower secondary teachers demonstrated adequate proficiency in English. Equipping teachers, many of whom were trained in French, to instruct their students in mathematics or history using a new language was as difficult as it sounds. The response to the training of teachers has included a range of different approaches. The Teachers Service Commission, working in conjunction with the British Council, launched the Rwanda English in Action Program (REAP), that provided English language training to teachers during school holidays. Between 2008 and 2011, approximately 88,000 teachers received training (Upper Quartile, 2013). However, MINEDUC found these one-off trainings to be insufficient. In 2012, the Rwanda Education Board introduced a school-based mentorship (SBM) program. The idea was to hire up to 1,000 English-speaking teachers from Rwanda's Anglophone neighbors such as Kenya and Uganda to come help Rwanda's teachers improve their ability to carry out their lessons using English. The SBM program also includes a pedagogy component. But in practice, nearly everyone we interviewed on this topic, including government education officers and SBMs themselves, said the program concentrates almost entirely on improving English. Their rationale was that to improve pedagogy, teachers must first be able to speak the language of instruction. The program has been met with mixed results. One evaluation pointed to the following challenges, which were also reflected in our interviews, including: "Difficulty in recruiting SBMs in sufficient numbers; Lack of understanding of purpose of mentors by Head Teacher and DEOs; Limited training and materials for mentors (one week); and Absence of monitoring and evaluation systems to measure results" (Wilson, 2013, p. 3). In 2016, the SBM program was discontinued.

On one hand, the country's switch to English is understandable given the country's broader economic ambitions. On the other hand, the implementation of the policy seems to have placed the education sector in a perpetual state of operating on its heels. Teachers are often instructing their students in a language that they have limited knowledge of themselves, while students struggle to do well in subjects due to an unfamiliarity with the medium of instruction (EDC, 2017).

(c) *The quality and training of primary school teachers*

Expanded access, more students, and a change in the language of instruction necessitated the hiring of more teachers and the provision of training. During the period in which the fieldwork took place, teacher training could be best characterized as being in a period of transition. In 2007, the Ministry of Education introduced the Teacher Development and

Management Policy (MINEDUC, 2007). The policy outlined the core priorities for how teacher training was to be done. The Teacher Service Commission (TSC), an entity within MINEDUC at the time, was responsible for overseeing the implementation of the teacher training policy. Among the key challenges and priorities identified within this policy were as follows:

*“The limited capacity of the teacher education system to meet the expanded system proposed in the [2003] Education Sector Strategic Plan [...] The heavy workload of teachers especially in primary schools arising from the increased enrolment in primary schools [...] A shortage of qualified science and language [French and English] teachers, [and] Lack of proper institutional arrangements to address teacher training and management bottlenecks.”*

[MINEDUC (2007, p. 11)]

The key challenge to this teacher training policy was its timing. Published in 2007, the policy predated all the language change and basic education policy reforms described above. In other words, the policy did not reflect the educational context almost as soon as it was introduced. The policy was unable to account for the expansion of basic education, the renewed emphasis on double shifting, or the switch to English. During this time, as part of the decentralization strategy, the structure of the Ministry of Education also changed. The TSC was disbanded, and its mandate folded into the Teacher Development and Management (TDM) department within the newly formed REB. In 2015, the policy was still officially on the books, but most officials we interviewed suggested the policy was not used to guide current education strategy or priorities because it was outdated. By early 2017, a new teacher development and management policy was being finalized by MINEDUC but had yet to be approved.

But what of Rwanda’s decentralization policy and the ability of schools to have control of resources to improve their school, presumably through training teachers? Our investigation into the provision of in-service training suggested that while the education system is officially decentralized, teacher trainings were not—or more accurately, teacher trainings were *recentralized*.

Rwanda’s national and sector-level decentralization policy meant that decision-making and administration shifted from the central government to the local level. Under this approach, PTCs at each school identify and respond to the needs facing their school and allocate resources accordingly (Transparency International, 2013). But the in-service training of teachers is an exception. Schools are given a capitation grant. Up until 2012, about 10 to 15% of this amount was earmarked for schools to send their teachers for training. However, starting in 2012, this allocation was withheld by REB. Put another way, the amount of money schools are given is about 10% lower than it used to be. According to government education officials interviewed for this study, REB recentralized these funds to help finance the school based mentorship training program. Schools technically have the discretion to use their other funds to finance the training of teachers. However, in interviews with head teachers and PTC members, the provision of urgently needed material supplies such as paper, chalk, or desks, took priority over teacher training. In interviews, local government officials, education officers, and school officials said their teachers receive training. But when probed, it appears this training occurs almost exclusively through the school based mentor program, which, as we noted earlier, focused almost exclusively on English.

The training of teachers is crucial to producing a quality teaching workforce (Walter & Briggs, 2012). Education offi-

cial at all levels that we interviewed said that teachers needed more training to be effective. But the challenges to training were twofold. First, it was difficult to implement training when major structural changes to primary education (e.g., basic education and English language) were constantly underway. Second, the language change channeled government and NGO attention to this urgent issue. For example, a survey of teachers carried out by Transparency International (2013, p. 13) found that “most” teachers in Rwanda had received no training in the past five years—with the exception of English.

Local officials noted that teachers receive training, but that most of it occurred through the school-based mentor program, which as we’ve already noted, focused on English. To date, most teachers continue to rely on prepared notes in English which they can only copy and repeat, not discuss extemporaneously, given their limited knowledge of the language. Abbott *et al.* (2015, p. 123) note that primary school teachers are required to have a secondary school diploma but that “this does not by any means guarantee that they will be comfortable and capable in using the English language even for conversation, let alone teaching.”

The focus by education officials on improving English through teacher training is understandable given the backdrop of the immense challenges associated with the language change. But it has also meant that other aspects of improving teacher quality and pedagogy have become less of a focus. A study on textbook usage in Rwandan schools found that even when books were available to teachers, they were rarely used, in part, because teachers didn’t know how to use them as an effective pedagogical tool (Milligan, Tikly, Williams, Vianney, & Uworwabayeho, 2017). The authors argued that while decentralized book distribution has been successful across the country, the presence of books in schools must not be taken as a proxy for their use. Put another way, it is emblematic of the challenge facing the education sector more broadly: successful tangible outputs have not been accompanied by desirable outcomes.

## 8. DISCUSSION

Rwanda’s political elite have staked their claim in a longer term investment in the development of the country, one which is relatively free from the problems of rent-seeking common to other types of political settlements. Rwanda’s developmental and dominant leader framework plays a central role in establishing its focus on governance and accountability. Yet our investigation into education quality has also identified some potential downsides to top-down, executive-led policy-making. Education priorities were often as much political as they were technical or developmental, with decisions less grounded in the realities of the local context or even strategic planning processes, resulting in a policy-implementation gap. That education quality was so low may come as a surprise. After all, a dominant developmentalist framework suggests a harmonization of priorities to achieve inclusive development and desire to maintain power. Given this commitment, why, then, was education quality at the primary level not as the dominant developmental model might have predicted?

This study adds to a growing body of literature which suggests that the government’s future-oriented development strategy is at odds with the everyday lives of most Rwandans (e.g., Ansoms, 2009; Pells, Pontalti, & Williams, 2014; Sommers, 2012; Straus & Waldorf, 2011). Collectively, this work suggests that the RPF’s vision for the country has been imple-

mented more like a blueprint. Many draw parallels between the RPF's approach and the characteristics of what Scott (1998) described as a 'high-modernist' ideology (e.g., Straus & Waldorf, 2011). High modernism is premised on a belief that government officials know better than local people about the ways in which they should arrange their individual lives. High modernism is not to be confused with scientific practice, for a high-modernist ideology is just that: an ideology, one that is "uncritical, unseptical, and thus unscientifically optimistic about the possibilities for the comprehensive planning of human settlement and production" (Straus & Waldorf, 2011, p. 4). Whereas other states may struggle to agree upon and implement major reforms and thus, might eventually negotiate a gradual approach, Rwanda's consensus-building approach opens itself up to the opposite challenge. Strong political will of the President and political elite, coupled with a lack of real opposition or pushback, has enabled it to introduce transformative educational policies—but in a way that has evidently prioritized access and expansion over quality.

Rwanda's development must also be located in historical context. By all accounts, primary education was in shambles after the genocide. The post-genocide government's rebuilding efforts aimed to first get children back into school and to quickly expand infrastructure, while making incremental improvements to quality. In other words, the low quality of education in Rwanda can be explained by its extremely low starting point as it emerged from conflict. Yet, this way of explaining the trajectory of the primary education system is incomplete, for it assumes that the development of an education system follows an apolitical template for how a post-conflict state should go about developing primary education. Politics and priorities were at the heart of the Rwanda's development project. The political settlement must therefore be central when we attempt to account for how to understand incentives for expanding access of making improvements in quality.

An analysis of Rwanda's political settlement gives us a way to analyze policymaking decisions. The country's elite has staked its viability in its attempt to deliver development as quickly as possible. Accountability to the elite was high and tolerance for corruption and underperformance were low. Individuals failing to fulfill their duties as outlined on their performance contracts were likely to be replaced. From the perspective of the elite, there was little patience or tolerance for underperformance. That the bar was set so high held leaders to account for their performance. But it also led to discontinuities that did not enable the education system to mature and improve over time. The introduction of basic education and English language policies, for example, happened in the absence of a strategic architecture that could have enabled key stakeholders to better plan for and respond to the myriad challenges these policies would bring about. As such, they left stakeholders in the education sector scrambling. That is, if the education sector is oriented toward action, stakeholders in the education sector—e.g., students, teachers, education officers, and senior-level education planners—have often had to operate in a perpetual state of *reaction*.

There may also be something about the nature of formal education that may make improvements to quality particularly challenging. In Rwanda, as elsewhere, many elites tend to be committed to expansionary education programs. Infrastructure is fairly easy to build, and it is popular (Hossain & Moore, 2002). Improving quality is less visible and perhaps carries less political cache than new classrooms and schools. The concluding section of a statistical report released by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC, 2015a, p. 67–68) identifies "some key points which should be taken into consideration for the improvement of the education system in Rwanda and quality of education in particular." But what was understood by 'quality' needed to fit within the government's development architecture and the incentives therein. 'Quality' needed to be measurable, comparable across sectors and districts, and visible to Rwandans and the development community that the government was fulfilling its promises to deliver development to all. But Abbott *et al.* (2015, p. 124) note the inherent challenge of being overly indicator-driven: "The trap of seeking to fulfil targets specified in terms of outputs is that the process can become blind and targets may become substituted for the outcomes that were desired."

We hypothesized that Rwanda's model of decentralization may have given rise to greater autonomy and decision-making of local government and schools to improve teacher capacity. However, the government's approach to teacher training could be best characterized as a recentralized affair amidst a deconcentrated education sector. Administrators of schools, sectors, and districts stated that their teachers were being trained through the school-based mentoring program—a program that focuses almost exclusively on English. It relieved local education officers for having to plan and organize trainings. On the other hand, it was unclear to what extent the recentralization of teacher training also meant a recentralization of a sense of duty to be sure teachers were being effective in the setting of the classroom.

New classrooms and schools presented some of the most visible and popular commitments of the elite to deliver development to all. The introduction of the English language in classrooms aligned well with the government's forward-looking developmental aims. But the gap between the government's aims and the realities facing most Rwandans was apparent. If Rwanda was committed to delivering education to the poor, it was also, unfortunately, delivering poor education. Given this set of conditions, it is debatable to what extent Rwanda's approach can be considered as inclusive development when quality for children from the poorest remains so low. This study builds on recent scholarship that suggests that the low quality education is likely to produce a large cohort of primary and secondary school leavers unable to possess a basic set of skills, including the ability to speak English (Abbott *et al.*, 2015). Thus in Rwanda today, many children and families find themselves in an unenviable position: included in the country's development project vis-à-vis the education system while simultaneously excluded from meaningful opportunity given the poor quality of that system.

## NOTES

1. A more complete description of methods for this project is located elsewhere (Williams 2016a,b).

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