Rebuilding Trust in post-conflict situation through Civic Engagement: The Experience of Rwanda.

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1. Introduction

I am thankful for the invitation to the 7th Global Forum on reinventing Government on two accounts. Firstly because I earnestly believe that citizens trust in their governments is the hallmark of the existence of any state. For Aristotle rightly said that “The state exists, not merely to make life possible, but to make life good.” States that endeavour to make citizens live good earn their respect and trust. Secondly I believe also that it is possible over a long time only if the citizens themselves have appreciable level of trust among themselves.

I therefore believe that by putting issues of trust between citizens and between citizens and their Governments under discussion in a Forum of such magnitude and diversity, the participants are going to be enriched in knowledge on how to bring about the necessary environments and mechanisms to promote trust within nation states and worldwide.

Human society is sustained and advanced through interactions of efforts of members of the society. One does not have to be very intelligent to realise that situations that promote and manifest collaborative efforts make people feel good and fulfilled, and therefore more productive. The corollary is also true; situations that promote and manifest conflicts tend to make people unhappy and less productive. Unproductive societies do not meet their collective needs and therefore enter into more conflicts. In Kinyarwanda language it is said that; “Abasangira ubusa bitana ibisambo” literally translated, it says “those who have nothing to share call each other gluttons”. 
In this paper I will briefly describe the situation after the conflict, draw out the main challenges that the government of Rwanda undertook to deal with at different periods between 1994 and 2007 with specific leanings on programs that fostered civic engagement. This will be followed by a summary of lessons that I feel can be useful from the Rwanda case and then come to conclusion.

2. Defining civic engagement and public trust

For the purposes of this presentation, over the various definitions of civic engagement, we would like to articulate one that is comprehensive, inclusive and, of course, one that speaks of the Rwanda we want. We understand Civic Engagement to mean active involvement of citizens in resolving issues of public concern, shaping government policy, and ensuring that citizens’ needs are central to program design and service delivery. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

The conceptual framework behind this definition started with a belief in deliberative democracy, which signifies an approach to democracy that puts citizens at the centre of the political process and that is more ‘voice centred’ than ‘vote centred.’ In this conception of democracy, citizens play a more robust role from the local to the global levels, in helping to set the public agenda and to decide about what will be the broad directions for public policy. That way one can promote trust among citizens and between citizens and their Governments.

There is no one universal definition of trust. In one sense trust is about honesty and ‘telling the truth’, but in the context of public services it can also be about wider considerations around service delivery. Scholars place a clear distinction between confidence and trust. If the former is referred to as a passive emotion accorded to the overall system or organization, the later is qualified as more dynamic beliefs and commitments accorded to people or systems (Sztompka, 1999).

Here, trust has a direct relation with, but is not synonymous with, ‘confidence’ and ‘satisfaction’, and based on the outcome of the service and the way it is delivered. In

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1 SZTOMPKA, P. Trust, a sociological theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999

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fact, public service is a public trust. Citizens expect public servants to serve the public interest with fairness and to manage public resources properly on a daily basis. Fair and reliable public services inspire public trust and create a favourable environment for businesses, thus contributing to well-functioning markets and economic growth. Public service ethics are a prerequisite to, and underpin, public trust, and are a keystone of good governance.

Trusts being the process by which government policies are carried out through the cooperation of citizens with public officials; trust building becomes the essence of governance. Governance issues are the major causes of conflicts both latent and open. Hence to reconstruct a Nation and trust building through civic engagement in governance comes at the forefront.

3. Post-conflict situation in brief.

Rwanda passed through a long dark history of conflicts that culminated into the heinous and horrendous crime of genocide. The Tutsi genocide that occurred in Rwanda for 100 days in 1994 showed off the worst side of human beings; unprovoked killings in an attempt to exterminate people; it left behind animosities, chaos, a traumatized population, wrecked property and a failed state. Rwandans had lost trust and faith in humanity, in state machinery, international community and even in religious organisation.

The genocide was stopped by the Rwandese Patriotic Front that had to fight the genocidal forces, as at the same time they tried to rescue survivors by carrying out missions behind the enemy lines. On 19th July 1994, a broad-based government of national unity was installed that was composed of all political parties that participated in the ill-fated Arusha Peace Talks, with the exception of those political parties that had actively mobilised their members to carry out the Tutsi genocide. According to Linda Melvern (---) “This was no triumphant victory. The country had been ransacked. There was no penny in the public coffers. There were no offices intact, no chairs, no desks,

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2 In the UN’s paradigm, governance is defined as “the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority to manage a nation’s affairs.
3 Peace negotiations held in Arusha, Tanzania, between the then Government of Rwanda and the Rwanda Patriotic Front, that were concluded on August 4, 1993, in a bid to stop war.
4 MELVERN, Linda, 200...
no telephones, nothing at all….Rwanda was divided, this time into victims, survivors, returnees and perpetrators”.

Such a situation depicts the level of trust within Rwanda society in July 1994. All types of trust be there social, political, economical and even moral in the society were at their lowest. It had to be rebuilt with whatever means available if the nation of Rwanda was to keep in existence at all. One must remember also that there were hundreds of thousands of refugees across all borders of Rwanda; in Congo, the then Zaire, in Tanzania, Burundi and Uganda, not to mention the political leaders and other elites of yesterday that had flown to Western Capitals. Among these were tens of thousands of Interahamwe militias and the former Government of Rwanda army and police that collectively had participated and actively led the population in the Tutsi genocide. These were being armed to attack the new and still fragile administration. To quote Melvern (---) again “the camps were described as an unfettered corridor of arms shipment. Goma settled down into a state within a state, a new “Hutu land” carved out of Zaire”.

4. Post genocide Challenges:

In the aftermath of war and genocide that deeply divided the Rwandan society, the Government of National Unity (GNU) established in July 1994 was, therefore, faced with numerous challenges not only in rebuilding the public administrative system, social and physical infrastructures severely destroyed during the war and genocide, but also to reconcile, empower and build confidence and trust in the local Rwandan population. This had to be done within a deeply traumatized society that had for decades been denied the opportunity to determine their own destiny, and had been ruled with “divide and rule” tactics.

The main challenges faced by the Government of National Unity can be summarised as follows:

1. The country was still under internal and external security threats from the defeated former army elements. There was a climate of fear and anxiety among the population especially the survivors of genocide.
2. The country had to build national institutions of governance and administration from scratch, as over 97% of the top cadres of the state were not available to take up their previous posts.
3. Most of the population was either internally or externally displaced.
4. The social fabric of the society had been destroyed and feelings of mistrust were so high that members of different identity groups could not even travel together in the few public transport vehicles plying the Kigali streets.
5. The genocide had bruised the Rwandan society by creating hundreds of thousands of orphans, widows, women and child-headed households. Cultural, social and religious values had been scorned undermining the credibility of social symbols and institutions.
6. The social and public infrastructure had been destroyed; water was not running, the night in cities were dark as power infrastructure had been destroyed, houses of the survivors of genocide were now rubbles, a large number of bridges were down, the old-case refugees returning were occupying properties of those fleeing into neighbouring countries. Rwanda was in a total mess.
7. The damage on the economy was extensive; banks had been looted, crops rotted in the fields as there were no people to harvest them, Industries were not in operation and there were no service sectors to speak off. Worse the Rwandan Government inherited an enormous debt that was contracted by the previous government part of which was used to prepare and carry out the mayhem.
8. The justice sector in particular was heavily affected and yet this was one area that had to deal with the consequences of genocide.
9. Rwanda had lost confidence and faith in international community in the light of the behaviour of some of its members during genocide.

5. Recovery programs

The Government of National Unity, based on the above challenges, adopted an eight point program soon after its installation. It is the program that guided its policies throughout the interim period of 1994 to 2003 when the national constitution, popularly adopted through a referendum, guided the installation of the state.
democratically elected institutions. Interestingly, this program corresponded to the RPF Political Program, which it fought for, except that it was made more concrete and addressing issues of the day.

The program centred on stabilising the security situation, repatriating all Rwandan refugees that wanted to return, instituting the economic recovery program, working to bring about national unity, fighting corruption, developing a social assistance program for the many vulnerable in Rwandan society, establishing diplomatic relations in the region and internationally on the basis of mutual respect and equal benefit and finally to prepare the country for establishment of democratically accountable institutions. The interim program was supposed to end in 1998 but because of the many border incursions from Congo, it was extended and it ended in 2003.

On looking back in time, one can see sets of two year periods with specific programs standing out. 1994-1995 were mainly years of situation stabilisation that included security stabilisation, national institutions installation and consolidation, 1996-1997 were mainly characterised with repatriation and resettlement and grassroots consultations on the Governance systems that would best help the country to recover from the effects of the long periods of misrule, war and genocide and also create institutional frameworks that would promote good governance programs for national wellbeing.

During the consultation sessions the subject of the consultation was “What are the causes of disunity among us?” The question would be given to a target group comprised of two members from each of the five identity groups from each Cell. They would be elected by members of each identity group at cell level. This could have been the first election in Rwanda after genocidal. The identity groups as was apparent throughout Rwanda at that time, fresh after the massive repatriation excise from mainly Congo and Tanzanian, were: the Tutsi survivors of genocide, the Tutsi old case refugees recently repatriated, The Hutu that had just been repatriated, the Hutu that had stayed within the borders of Rwanda after the genocide and the Hutu elites (former government workers and business class).
These were brought together for a period of a week at the level of a Sector (there were at that time 1545 Sectors throughout Rwanda). Of the causes enumerated, the most frequently pronounced was of bad governance, followed by ignorance, poverty and the consequences of the genocide. The consultation process required the groups to give remedies they thought appropriate to each cause. These initial grass-root consultations indicated that people wanted to have a say on issues that affected them. They recognized that blind obedience exposed them to manipulation and injustices. Analytically, the answer to the collective demand for effective participation was ‘democratic decentralization.

The next two year period of 1998 -1999 was characterised by deep consultations at National level. It was carried out in the Presidential offices, commonly known as Urugwiro Village every Saturday from early May 1998 to late March 1999. It is during these discussions which were very open and soul searching that most of the programs that have guided Rwanda in its political and social economic development up to date were suggested, debated and agreed upon. Because of the broad representation from the public, private and civil society and adequate coverage by the national radio and television, a broad consensus was reached on a number of programs of great national importance.

The major programs agreed upon were: The program on National Unity and Reconciliation, the National Democratic Decentralisation Program, the Gacaca program, Vision 2020 framework and a program on National Security. The thread across all these programs is that they were all people-centred. Every person speaking would recognise the primordial importance of involving the citizens in all Government programs. In agreeing to the use traditional practice of conflict resolution, the elite mould was broken.

It was a shared recognition that within our culturally accumulated wisdom, we could find solutions that modern institutional practices could not provide. Moreover since these were traditional, the population was very comfortable with them, understanding them emotionally and thus fully participating with full knowledge of where they are coming from, where they are and where they are heading to. This was the start of painful process of re-establishing social trust and community spirit. More and more programs,
drawing on the cultural practices have since been adopted. I will talk about them later. Let me first talk about the interim governance program that Rwanda developed with assistance of UNDP while the Urugwiro Village debate were still raging on.

In April 1998 a conference Governance was held in the town of Gisenyi, an Interim governance programme (1998-2000) was developed, which was extended through 2001. During this transition period, the Government of Rwanda highlighted the following governance areas to be revisited:

- Improving public management and civil service reform;
- Promoting decentralisation to ensure participatory decision making practices;
- Strengthening the parliamentary institutions to ensure adequate capacity for legislative and oversight functions;
- Improving economic and financial management practices;
- Supporting broadly civic education programs and reinforcing civil society organisations;
- Strengthening the judiciary to promote the rule of law and restore people’s trust in the judicial system;
- Promoting understanding of and protection of human rights;
- Demobilisation, conflict prevention and peace building through Unity and Reconciliation Commission and other mechanisms;
- Advancement of women and promotion of gender issues;
- HIV/AIDS prevention and control.

In March 2002, the Government of Rwanda Developed a National Strategy Framework Paper and a corresponding Programme document for strengthening Good Governance for Poverty Reduction in Rwanda. These were based on the recommendations of a national conference held from 2nd to 5th November 2001, to assess the achievements of the Interim Governance program, flesh out the remaining challenges and propose strategic actions for strengthening good governance in Rwanda.

Five areas of priority focus agreed upon were as follows:

- Institutional strengthening and coordination;
- Unity and reconciliation, peace and security;
• Social welfare of the population;
• Civil society and Private sector;
• Economic planning and management.

This allowed avoiding scattering efforts into a wide range of programs that were not addressing particular problems of the moment. Such focused vision was mainly led by the citizens preoccupations of the moment and aimed at regaining their ownership and trust.

6. Civic engagement programs

Since decades, Rwanda had been characterized by divisive and exclusive political leadership, manifested through exclusive civil service and administration, nepotism and regional privileges to part of the Rwandan society. Ethnic polarization around purposely conceived social bias marked the community. For all these reasons and others stated above, there followed the upheaval that tore apart the Rwandan society, seriously shaking the existing rather unstable trust in governing mechanisms and the very questionable civic engagement.

In the aftermath of genocide, in order to reverse the gear, the Government of Rwanda undertook to rebuild a new society around a state governed by the rule of law, equality and equity, promoting national unity, banning all forms of ethnic, regional and other divisions and endeavoring a constant quest for solutions through dialogue and consensus. It is around these core principles that a number of programs were initiated to restore trust among citizens and thus enhance civic engagement. Those programs include, but are not limited to, the following:

• **The generalised use of kinyarwanda**, the sole national language used in the country and even beyond, as an administrative language at all levels. This indeed reinforces unity and the sentiment of national ownership and pride.

• **Participation**: stirring people’s participation to empower them toward confidence building; this involves administration through constant consultations and people involvement. An implementation tool was effective decentralization and democratic governance at all administrative layers.

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• **Reconciliation programs**: a long process that involved the integration of social values promotion for enhanced understanding and ownership by the people:
  
  o **Gacaca** or reconciliatory justice for genocide suspects, introduced five years after genocide (1999) and involving community level councils adjudicating cases and allowing the guilty to serve most of their sentence on community service.
  
  o **Abunzi**: community arbitrators who handle civil cases to relieve courts from the congestion of unavoidable minor cases in a post-conflict situation. National attention is accorded to the vulnerable as we fight against impunity through restorative justice.
  
  o **Ingando**: solidarity camps, seeking to demystify and break down barriers between people by freeing free expression; at first used to help reintegrate refugees and former combatants returning to Rwanda, later extended to include government officials and students candidates to higher education, aiming at better internalizing ideas of unity and reconciliation. Plans are underway to institutionalise leadership development centres (Itorero) at National, District, Sector, Cell and village levels.
  
  o **Umuganda**, community works bringing citizens together to accomplish a task in common and giving them an opportunity to share views, plan public utility activities and socialize. Now institutionalized, this program is meant to supplement the national budget in infrastructure building.
  
  o New coming **Itorero**: leadership school aiming at strengthening ties among citizens around the broad theme of civic engagement.

• **Non-segregative service delivery** and that is bound to results, through a merit based realistic management by objectives system. The new service delivery orientation is responsiveness to the quests of citizens and client-centred performance.

• **Civil society** that acts as a watchdog for public affairs management and even as a service provider under the principle of subsidiarity.

• **JADF** where all development actors in the Districts and Sectors plan with the leadership what should be done in those entities and closely monitor implementation.
7. Challenges

Reconstructing trust in a post-conflict situation takes time and definitely has to do with all sorts of hindrances, either internal or external. Major challenges encountered today include the long built and held ideologies of division and hatred, entertained by the so-called experts on the African Great Lakes Region, masters of “theories of origin” of peoples inhabiting the area, and other writers on Rwanda history who advocated differences and exacerbated divisions among Rwandans. While Rwanda is striving to uproot the evil on its territory, such ideologies are still flourishing in neighbouring countries and constantly fuelled to destabilize Rwanda.

Further, there is a dialogic reality of balancing the fight against impunity and the reconciliation process. Indeed, seeking justice for the deprived survivors of genocide through classical juridical system was inconceivable as it involved a fastidious task of handling more than 825,000 cases in tribunals. A new system based on traditional values was devised to respond to that task and address swiftly issues that otherwise would have taken more than two hundred years to be settled. On the other hand, survivors are to be rendered justice and compensation, culprits have to be punished to eradicate the culture of impunity that had long prevailed, yet the community must be reconciled and live together again in harmony. This is the huge task Gacaca courts are faced with.

Public administration has long been characterized by over-centralization, segregation, corrupt practices and rampant bureaucracy. New approaches often met with resistance and reluctance to release “power” and to refrain from such ill practices. Public administrative attitude has been slow moving towards embracing new management concepts of effective decentralization and citizens’ empowerment. Even today, it could not be surprising to meet some remnants of such behaviours, which rises in minds the spectre of the past era and contributes to check civic engagement and subsequent trust in a public-citizen shared responsibility governance model.
8. Lessons to be learnt

Building trust in a post-conflict situation involves a number of tasks to be performed, behaviours and attitudes to be adopted, that will make the citizen feel secure and confident toward public administration, and consequently accord their trust to the governing system. This in turn will make them civically engaged. In this process, among lessons we learnt in Rwanda are the following:

- Grass-roots consultations are necessary to identify the “missing link” by the people themselves. In Rwanda this allowed to recognize that blind obedience exposed people to manipulation and injustices and corrective measures were devised.

- Appropriate analysis of the situation. Decentralization in Rwanda was not initiated as a response to the new global wave of governance, but rather as an answer to the people’s demand for effective participation through “democratic decentralization”, after identifying the root cause of their tribulations;

- The major programs adopted to respond to the needs of the citizens were appropriately designed through a large consultation basis of national actors.

- For better appropriation of well understood initiatives, a large call was made on traditional long-held and accepted values based on accumulated wisdom, and that had for long proved to bring lasting solutions to community problems.

- External models of governance have inspired hybrid forms that were aligned to Rwanda particular context and citizens have always been allowed a say before adoption of any initiative. Never has it been question of importing a particular model to impose it to citizens, provoking unnecessary increased resistance.

- In seeking to engage Rwandans through accepted programs, an inclusive approach involves all layers of the population for empowerment (women, youth, disabled, widows, orphans,…). Well understood and shared programs have been initiated and instituted to bring reliable solutions to problems people were encountering.

- A strong National Vision and unwavering commitment on the part of leadership to involve people in the journey the vision sets.
9. Conclusion.

Owing to bad leadership and poor governance systems through its history, Rwanda experienced a series of tribulations, the last and by far the worst of them being the Tutsi genocide of 1994. It has been generally identified by the population that the mayhem occurred due to blind obedience that subjected citizens to manipulation. Bringing together a torn-apart society in the aftermath of genocide was a tremendous task to the new broad-based government that includes all sensitivities of the population. Citizens had lost trust in governing systems and civic engagement was at its lowest.

Through consultations and dialogue, programs to enhance citizen engagement, offer and demand driven, were launched and have proved their pertinence and are beneficial to a citizenry that is recovering gradually its trust in the Government. Challenges are still persistent, both internal and external, and today’s government is striving to increasing inclusive citizens empowerment, not only citizens demanding their rights but also exerting their duties and responsibilities in an engaged way, thus building trust in government. It is not a fashionable governance system; it is a way of life!

Thank you for your attention!