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Oriented towards action: The political economy of primary education in Rwanda

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Abstract

When it comes to the delivery of services to the poor, politics matter. This paper applies a political settlements framework to approach the study of primary education quality in Rwanda. In recent years, the government of Rwanda has received recognition for its commitment to expand education for all young people. But the drivers for improving quality have been less straightforward. Through process tracing from national to local levels, this study investigates the interests, institutions and incentives for improving the education quality. Findings suggest there was a stated commitment to educational quality on the part of the government across all levels. At the same time, the country's decentralised system of governance has deconcentrated implementation responsibilities to local government and schools. Performance-based incentives at the local level focus on aspects of quality that are measurable -- i.e., through the construction of classrooms and provision of materials -- rather than on improving the capacity of the teaching workforce or tracking learning outcomes. The incentives and ideas that drive the behaviour of key actors in the education sector allow us to consider the degree to which state capacity and elite commitment can be sustained.

Keywords: Rwanda, education, quality, primary school, English, language policy

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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 and Bukenya 2015a). This paper draws from this perspective and examines efforts to improve quality primary education 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. Formal education features prominently in its broader aims.

Thanks in part to a fee-free basic education policy, primary and secondary school enrolment in Rwanda has surged. More children, particularly those from poor families, now have access to more years with the public education system (NISR 2012). At the same time, learning outcomes are low. Recent evidence has suggested that the majority of children in primary school have not acquired age-appropriate literacy or numeracy skills (USAID 2014). 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 and Barrett 2013). On one hand, efforts to expand and extend access use resources that could 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 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 otherwise have been unable to attend (Hanushek and 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 analyse this tension is by looking at Rwanda's political settlement.

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 and Putzel 2009: 4). The political settlement literature introduces a conceptual architecture to demonstrate how politics matter when it comes to the reduction or reproduction of poverty (Hickey, Sen and Bukenya 2015a). 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 governance have emerged (Levy and Walton 2013). A political settlement approach provides the ability to trace processes of decision-making and policy implementation from the national to local levels. Investigating how power is negotiated and distributed can offer insight into the sustainability of the current political settlement. It also permits consideration of how meaningful and equitable change for the poor can be brought about and sustained (Khan 2010).

A political settlement framework allows us to consider elite commitment to 'inclusive development'. To support sustainable interventions that benefit the poor requires alliances and commitments of the non-poor, who, as Hickey et al. (2015a: 6) contend, are "often more adept at attracting public goods provision and at maintaining a better quality of service delivery through social accountability mechanisms". Thus, an analysis of Rwanda's education sector cannot divorce a sector's policies from the nation's politics. A broader-ranging investigation must shed light on the incentives and ideas that drive the behaviour of key actors in the education sector. It allows us to consider the degree to which state capacity and elite commitment can be sustained (Khan 2010).

Political settlements vary according to different historical, political and economic factors. Levy and Walton (2013) outline different ways for describing the nature of a political settlement. Perhaps no country better exemplifies what Levy and Walton call a 'dominant developmental' political settlement than Rwanda.¹ A dominant developmental political settlement is characterised as the political elite being aligned with one principal. 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. Strategies for development under the RPF focus on lifting the country out of poverty and 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. In other words, the government must be seen as being 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, Sen and Bukenya 2015a). On the other hand, it may also be the case that this is because there is little political space for meaningful pushback to occur (Levy and Walton 2013).

¹ A more complete discussion of Rwanda's national political settlement can be found elsewhere: see Booth and Golooba-Mutebi (2012); Golooba-Mutebi (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 and numeracy, examination performance, or primary school completion rates (Hickey 2011; Hickey, Sen and Bukenya 2015b; McLoughlin 2011). The present study was carried out to investigate the political economy of quality education in Rwanda. It aims 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. It also aims to make a theoretical contribution by understanding the nature of the relationship between the national political settlement and the education sector.

Research questions and hypotheses

This project examines the political drivers of the education system and its impact upon quality. It does so within the context of addressing the overarching research questions, including: (1) What capacities enable states to help deliver inclusive development? (2) What shapes elite commitment to delivering inclusive development and state effectiveness? and (3) Under what conditions do developmental forms of state capacity and elite commitment emerge and become sustained?

The hypothesis advanced in this paper is that Rwanda's political settlement has enabled the government to introduce ambitious approaches to the education sector, one in which the incentives of Rwanda's elite are aligned to the longer-term trajectory of the country, as opposed to shorter-term rent-seeking behaviour (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2012). At the same time, the introduction of education policies and reforms align with the country's broader blueprint for development – but they are often not introduced incrementally or in way that reflects that daily realities of most Rwandans (Scott 1998). Understanding these conditions may help to explain some of the challenges facing the education sector. Other states may struggle to agree upon and implement major reforms and thus might eventually negotiate a gradual approach. Rwanda's consensus-building approach may open itself up to the opposite problem. Strong political will of the country's principal and 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 been prioritising quality below access and expansion.

In this paper, we introduce the argument that the political settlement of Rwanda's education sector is oriented towards action. 'Oriented towards action' is a shorthand reference to the understanding that the government's national vision and strategy is clearly set out. This vision informs poverty reduction strategies which, in turn, shape the goals of the education sector. Rather than short-term, rent-seeking behaviour, the elite has 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* education for all? This paper aims to shed light on these issues.

Methods

The design of this study was done with the aim of exploring, revising, substantiating and validating the hypothesis above through an analysis of the key institutions, individuals and interests of Rwanda's education sector. This paper draws from existing literature and policy reports, semi-structured interviews, and observations. Fieldwork took place between March and June 2015. Interviews and group discussions were held with 65 members of government, civil society, development partners, local education officers, teachers and headteachers, school-based mentors, and members of parent-teacher committees.

The conceptual and methodological focus for the project was two-fold, and it mirrors the organisation of the rest of this paper. The focus of Part I is to map the political drivers and power relations of the underlying political settlement of the education sector, in order to consider how the proximate conditions for development are shaped by the underlying political conditions (Hickey 2011). Interviews were held with a wide range of actors, such as government and civil society and development partners. We also attended education stakeholder meetings, including the ministry of education's biannual Joint Review of the Education Sector (JRES) held on 9 June 2015 (MINEDUC 2015b) and the quarterly meeting of the Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform (RECNP), a consortium of over 70 civil society organisations and NGOs active in the education sector, which occurred on 31 March 2015 (Williams 2015b).

In Part II, we seek to understand how the political settlement informed how education policy was implemented at a local level. To narrow our focus, we studied the provision of quality primary education through school management mechanisms in order to investigate "the detailed interactions and outcomes that occur within the more proximate and relational world of formulating and implementing development strategies" (Hickey 2011). Interviews were held with key stakeholders working at the sub-national level, including members of local government, education officers and school officials. Part II consisted of comparative case studies of one rural and one urban district. Within each district, high- and low-performing schools were selected in such a way as to "reveal major system weaknesses that become targets of opportunity for program or system improvement" (Patton 1990). Additional details of this approach will be elaborated upon in Part II.

Part I

2. Primary schooling in historical context

This section examines the emergence of the contemporary Rwandan state up until 1994. It considers the sociopolitical and historical dimensions and effects that accompanied the introduction of formal schooling.

The colonial era began in the late 19th century and lasted until 1962. An account of formal education during this time is, to a large extent, Catholic mission history. Germany and Belgium were more concerned with matters of governance and politics than with the education of young people (Newbury 1988). The approach of the Church to formal education rested on the following considerations. First, they aimed to provide a high level of education to establish a small, highly educated cohort to assist the Europeans with administrative tasks. Second, they sought to provide “just enough” education to convert the peasantry to Christianity – but not too much that might lead them to reject their way of life, occupation or their caste-like role within the existing social hierarchy (Hoben 1989: 8).

As formal schooling became more central to Belgium's vision for the colonial project, there was a greater need for the political elite, i.e. the monarchy, to subscribe to the importance of schooling. As the Rwandan administrative state grew in power, 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 – along with being a Tutsi and a Catholic – was to become among the attributes necessary to secure business opportunities and employment during the latter half of the colonial era (Des Forges and Newbury 2011). Towards the end of the colonial era, a system of national examinations was established and the standardisation of textbooks was introduced (King 2014). But for the rural, predominately Hutu, peasantry, unequal opportunities under the colonial authorities contributed to a collective sense of institutionalised oppression (Newbury 1988). Inequitable access to education was at the core of Hutu discontent and among the factors that fuelled the revolutionary movement that preceded independence (Prunier 1995).

Following independence in 1962, the new Hutu-led government enacted policies that reinforced the Hutu elite's grip on power. Census figures suggested Tutsis comprised about 9 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 bloodless coup in 1973. Gregoire Kayibanda was replaced by Juvenal Habyarimana, in what came to be known as the second republic. 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). Gérard Prunier (1995: 77) observed that administrative control during this time was “probably the tightest in the world among non-communist countries.”

The state took a prominent role in organising schooling. Rwanda's constitution, adopted in 1962, mandated primary education to be both free and compulsory (Erny 2001 as cited in King, 2014). Under the first republic, the emphasis was principally on expanding educational opportunities. It was seen by the regime 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 enrolment surge, and the government struggled to keep pace with the level of resources needed. 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 the first republic, primary schooling consisted of six years. The first half of the primary cycle focused on literacy and was taught in Kinyarwanda. The second half of primary school emphasised general training and was taught in French (King 2014).

Education reforms under the second republic focused on advancing national development. Writing during the latter half of the second republic, Susan Hoben (1989: 15) explained that education had become the "cornerstone of general development of Rwanda", while Elisabeth King (2014: 82), in reference to the political importance of schooling, asserted that in the mid-1980s, the minister of education was considered to be the "most important political figure" after the president himself. During this time, Rwanda committed more of its national budget to education (20-25 percent) than almost any other African country (Hoben 1989). About 70 percent of the budget was dedicated to basic learning, including primary education and rural vocational training (*ibid.*). The allocation of secondary school spots during the second republic 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; Obura 2003; Uvin 1998).

On the eve of the civil war in 1990, primary school gross enrolment had risen from 46 percent in 1973 to 65 percent (Obura 2003). By 1994, primary school enrolment had expanded to 1.7 million children, an eightfold increase from independence. The number of classrooms during this period tripled (Erny 2001 as cited in Obura, 2003). While primary education was at its highest levels, the rate of transition to secondary school, at 9.2 percent, remained virtually unchanged since independence (Obura 2003). Secondary school opportunities did not grow at the same pace as the expansion of the primary system. This remained a point of contention throughout the republics. But, most critically, the fundamental structure of the political and social system remained unchanged during this time (Golooba-Mutebi 2013). The reforms brought about during the two republics were carried out 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 favoured Tutsi elites during the colonial era, the education system now favoured Hutus through the use of identity cards and an ethnic quota system (King 2014).

Any momentum or progress 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. Many of those who were not killed fled the country (Obura 2003). When the RPF ended the genocide in July 1994, two-thirds of school buildings were severely damaged. Approximately 75 percent of all public sector employees, including teachers, were either killed, fled the country as refugees, or went missing. An estimated 50 to 70 percent of the remaining primary and secondary teachers were underqualified for their positions (MINEDUC 1997). At the end of 1994, Rwanda was widely considered to be a failed state. It ranked second from last on the UNDP's (1997) Human Development Index. The country's ethnic cleavages were thought by many as to be so "fatal" as to undermine the possibility of future state viability (Mazrui 1995: 31).

3. Governance, development and primary school (1994 to present)

On the basis of a power-sharing arrangement originally signed in 1993, 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 Bizimungu and Tutsi vice-president Paul Kagame. In the year 2000, President Bizimungu resigned and Paul Kagame assumed power. When the government passed a new constitution in 2003, Kagame won 95 percent of the popular vote to secure the first of what would become two consecutive seven-year terms.

There was a shared sentiment by the new leadership that pre-1994 schooling had failed the country – that ethnic and regional restrictions on access, along with a racist school curriculum, had exacerbated existing tensions (MINEDUC 1997). Rebuilding the education system a way that addressed these precipitating factors was of high priority. Primary schools started up again in September 1994 and secondary schools shortly thereafter. The first few years after the genocide were considered the "emergency phase" of the education system (MINEDUC 1997: 4). Education focused on ensuring access for all – a "politically important" gesture in Obura's (2003: 58) estimation, because it signified that "the government was immediately ready to provide" for all children. The emphasis was on rebuilding infrastructure, reestablishing a supply of human capital, and eliminating any reference to what could be construed as 'genocide ideology' from the classroom and the national curriculum. Policies concerning access were intended to reflect the country's commitments to make education accessible and free for all children (MINEDUC 1997).

Between 1998 and 1999, the government led a series of meetings known as *Urugwiro Village*, the purpose of which was to re-envision the social and economic trajectory of the country (RoR 1999). Since taking power, the RPF-led government has introduced a series of reforms aimed at social and economic transformation

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. Under Vision 2020, traditional practices of subsistence-oriented land use are considered unsustainable, and the need for Rwandans to become formally educated has been cast with a sense of urgency. The importance of children's education is core to the aim of Vision 2020 to develop a skilled labour force, improve literacy, promote gender equality, and foster social cohesion among all Rwandans (MINEDUC 2010).

Vision 2020 remains the central organising document of 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. As one former government official interviewed for this study put it, "Here in Rwanda, we really only have one policy," implying the importance Vision 2020 has in guiding government strategy. In the case of education, Vision 2020 informed the 2003 Constitution (RoR 2003) along with the corresponding 2003 Education Policy (MINEDUC 2003). The introduction of subsequent education sector policy developments are more sophisticated elaborations of the 2003 legal instrument and policy plan. Informed by Vision 2020, Rwanda's key development priorities are located in the second iteration of its Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Plan (EDPRS2) (MINECOFIN 2013). The EDPRS2, in turn, has informed sector-specific strategies. In 2015, education sector priorities were guided by the 2013-2018 Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) (MINEDUC 2013).

While the government has introduced a future-oriented vision for the country, a number of scholars have applied a critical lens to its approach, arguing that the government's futuristic development strategy is at odds with the everyday lives of most Rwandans (e.g. Ansoms 2009; Ingelaere 2007; Newbury 2011; Pells, Pontalti and Williams 2014; Sommers 2012; Straus and Waldorf 2011; Williams 2016). Findings from this body of work collectively suggest that the RPF's vision for the country has been implemented more like a blueprint. Many draw parallels between the RPF's approach and the characteristics of what James Scott (1998) described as a 'high-modernist' ideology (e.g., Straus and 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, unsceptical, and thus unscientifically optimistic about the possibilities for the comprehensive planning of human settlement and production" (ibid.: 4).

Good governance and accountability are at the stated core of the government's approach to development (Anastase 2013). Each year, for example, the government hosts a National Dialogue Summit. Central government meets with other country

stakeholders to review performance towards achieving its goals (Senate 2014). Its decentralisation 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, dialogue and consensus building (Senate 2014).

In terms of education, decentralisation occurs in the following way. The Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) develops policies, introduces strategies and maintains overall responsibility for monitoring and evaluation of the system. The Ministry of Finance (MINECOFIN) transfers money through infrastructure, administration, and capitation grants directly to districts and schools. The focus on transparency and good governance 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 is accountable to MINEDUC. REB's various departments handle the coordination and professional development of teachers. It organises national exams and develops new curricula. REB also manages a school-based mentor (SBM) programme, which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper. The decentralised system is organised on paper as follows: REB coordinates directly with officials at the district level. In turn, district education officers (DEOs) are supposed to work in conjunction with the local government officials and sector education officers (SEO). The SEOs then are to coordinate directly with headteachers, community members, and local leaders for the purposes of collecting data and encouraging households to send their children to school.

Although DEOs and SEOs are responsible for education, they do not formally report to MINEDUC or REB. As part of the decentralised system, they are employees of the ministry of local government (MINALOC). Thus, while their performance contracts are education-oriented, they are accountable to and evaluated by local government officials. Some evaluations 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 (Honeyman 2015; Mott MacDonald 2013).² Sector- and district-level officials interviewed for the present study acknowledged that this happens to them on occasion. However, most stated that they felt it did not detract from their education-focused duties.

² For example, during the period in which fieldwork took place, there was a hard push by the government to be sure that families were enrolled in the country's national health insurance scheme. Some of the education officers were called by their immediate supervisors to mobilise their constituents to sign up. Local officials interviewed for this study explained that this did not happen often, but when it did, it was for the purposes of contributing to shared goals of their sector or district. However, there could also be implications for education quality.

What was indicated as more of 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. As described above, DEOs are the designated point people for numerous government entities, and everything related to education is channelled through them and their office. During one interview, an exasperated DEO took out a piece of paper and drew a small, circular organogram of all of the stakeholders that he must answer to. He wrote “DEO” in the centre and explained:

“Here we have so many tasks. And I am here! [pointing with a pencil to the centre 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...”

The DEO explained that because so much of his job is administration, it is not possible to effectively oversee schools in the 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 headteachers. We have office work as well. So going to the field for supervision is a big problem.”

As part of the decentralised 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 labour to construct 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, or other materials (Official Gazette 001/2007). Many of these financial contributions are called PTA contributions. There is some evidence to suggest that failure to pay can result in temporary or permanent forms of exclusion (Paxton and Mutesi 2012; Williams, Abbott and Mupenzi 2014; Williams 2013).

Accountability, transparency, and good governance are key dimensions of the implementation of Vision 2020. This is enforced by performance contracts called *imihigo*. National and local officials, including local education officers, sign performance contracts. The stated aim of decentralisation 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 characterised as “simultaneously bottom-up and top-down” (Honeyman 2015: 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; Upper Quartile 2013). Thus, it may be more accurate to characterise the government’s decentralisation 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 include 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: 27). Performance on national examinations is also a high priority of schools and sectors. However, according to the education officials we interviewed, national examination scores are not included on performance contracts, out of concern of encouraging perverse incentives for schools, i.e. barring underperforming students from sitting examinations.

This section has outlined the structure for governance and development for primary education in Rwanda’s education sector. In Section 4, we turn to look at some of the key outcomes from these efforts.

4. Outcomes, access and quality

Children are legally entitled to six years of fee-free primary education. By 2012, primary school access had increased dramatically. The government’s decentralised, fee-free and community-based policies and approaches described above removed many of the structural barriers that were once prohibitive for many. Rwanda was on pace to be one of the few developing countries to achieve near-universal access to primary education, along with its efforts to expand to secondary school. In 2012, the ministry of education beat 122 other entries worldwide to win the Commonwealth Award for its efforts to expand access to schooling as quickly and efficiently as it did.³ Genocide ideology and explicit discrimination on the basis of ethnicity in schools was strictly forbidden. A 2014 profile of primary education is as follows:

³ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/media_65676.html

Table 1. Primary school statistics (MINEDUC 2015a)

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Total students | 2,399,439 |
| School staff | 41,192 |
| Pupils: teacher ratio | 58:1 |
| Classrooms | 30,011 |
| Pupils: classroom ratio | 80 |

During the period of time in which our study was carried out, an alternative and more critical interpretation also emerged about the quality of the education system. 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 National Institute of Statistics is considered to offer the most reliable data about primary school enrolment, because it aims to collect data from every household in the country. Census figures indicate that net primary enrolment stands at just over 88 percent (NISR 2012). This figure is about 10 percentage points lower than the more recent figure reported by MINEDUC (2015a), which indicates near universal (97 percent) enrolment based upon school-level reports. The net enrolment disparity was discussed at the 2015 biannual Joint Review of the Education Sector meeting held in June of that year. The minister of state in charge of primary and secondary education suggested 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 and Glassman 2015), but it is sobering nonetheless and indicative that more work remains. 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 untoward effects of distracting attention and diverting resources away from some of the more immediate and unresolved problems facing the education sector.

Over the last several years, concern and discussion among government and development partners has gradually shifted more to improving quality (MINEDUC 2013). A higher proportion of young people are now in school, but to what extent and how were they learning or benefiting from their education? 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: 22)

To be sure, quality can be conceptualised in different ways. But Rwanda’s Quality Implementation Working Group (QIWG), comprised of members of MINEDUC and development partners, offers a helpful starting point. The QIWG defines education quality as: “... all [emphasis in original] children leaving school equipped with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values needed for Rwanda’s economic and social development and for their own further educational and social development” (World Bank 2011: 90).

Aside from learning outcomes, two other ways that a quality education system can be understood is through repetition rates and on-time completion rates. These figures are indicative of the degree to which children are benefiting from the education system as it was intended (Abbott, Sapsford and Rwirahira 2015). Statistics 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 percent in 2010 to 61.3 percent in 2014. The transition rate from primary to secondary school decreased from 93.8 percent in 2010 to 73.4 percent in 2013. The repetition rate stood at 18.3 percent in 2013 and the dropout rate was 14.3 percent in primary school. Of particular concern to MINEDUC, REB, and development partners at the JRESE meeting was that nearly one-third (28.3 percent) 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. The concern on the part of MINEDUC and its development partners is that it presents 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 things 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.⁴

Our field research and review of existing documents offered 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 of primary and secondary education at the JRES meeting. 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 their learning is not progressing well (MINEDUC 2015b). A third explanation, and one put forth by the director of planning for the ministry of education at the JRES meeting,

⁴ We are grateful to one anonymous reviewer for this observation.

was that headteachers may hold back or push out poor performing students in order to achieve better examination results (MINEDUC 2015b). It is probably reasonable to assume that each explanation holds a degree of validity. Taken together, they suggest that the primary education system is not performing as it was stated in policy.

Learning outcomes is another way to gauge school quality. Recent research carried out by USAID (2014) has suggested that “a very substantial proportion of students” are unable to read or comprehend material that they will be examined upon. The study found that about 60 percent of Primary 1 students, 33 percent of Primary 2 students, and 21 percent of Primary 3 students could not read any word of the grade-appropriate Kinyarwanda passage they were tested on. In mathematics, 59 percent of Primary 1 students could not solve any subtraction problems and 41 percent could not solve any addition problems. In Primary 3, about one in 10 scored zero on addition tests. The study noted that deficits in reading probably 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 much more literacy-rich environment than most rural areas of the country, and this plays a role in reinforcing students’ learning, beyond the other factors listed.

English, Rwanda’s recently introduced medium of instruction (described in more detail in Section 5), has also presented sizeable challenges to primary school 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 percent) or “intermediate” (43.4 percent) 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 (Abbott, Sapsford and Rwirahira 2015). Given these challenges, Abbott and colleagues (2015: 123) worried 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.”

How might we understand and explain these outcomes in the context of the political settlement? In the section that follows, we turn to explore the set of policies and policy reforms that have given rise to some of these outcomes.

5. The politics of policies: implications for quality under the RPF

As we learned above, Rwanda's political settlement can best be described as dominant developmentalist. Rather than rely on short-term rent-seeking behaviour as a way to maintain power, good governance and equitable development are strongly emphasised in policy and planning documents. Government officials interviewed for our study ranged from current and former ministers to senators and district mayors to sector- and school-level officials. Nearly all explained that their personal commitments are guided by national development plans, rather than the prospect of individual gain. Officials operated with a sense of 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 and Golooba-Mutebi 2012). As the reforms below suggest, the government was oriented towards action. But it was oriented towards some things more than others. Tangible and visible and logistical outputs were prioritised above things that were more difficult to measure, such as learning outcomes. The need to bring about change and development quickly can be evidently seen within the education sector. Below we focus on four key reforms that have stood to affect primary education in terms of access and quality.

Reform 1: 9YBE policy

The 2003 Education Policy established the basic trajectory of the primary education system. As mentioned above, many of the changes that have occurred since that time have been extensions of that 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). (We will also examine the effects of the subsequent Twelve Year Basic Education policy later in this paper.)

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 MINEDUC recalled ongoing debates with development partners during that time. 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. Members of government interviewed for this study characterised the decision to expand differently: that the move was indicative that the government was oriented towards action. They argued that improvements in primary school access and quality could still be pursued concurrently with expanding the basic education system. 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 increasingly accessible to more young people.

Second, in order for 9YBE to utilise 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 that in some ways presented a contradiction to the stated trajectory of the system up until that point. 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: 9). As recently as 2007, policy documents still pointed to this goal of double shifting reduction from 59 percent in 2007 to 10 percent by 2015 (MINEDUC 2007: 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: 29). However, these reforms to the structure of primary school also reduced the number of contact hours that students had with teachers and doubled teachers’ workloads, which probably impacted upon quality (Abbott, Sapsford and Rwirahira 2015). During this period, 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 towards increased specialisation. 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 on one or two topics, such as science and mathematics, and rotating classrooms. The shift was aimed at improving quality by promoting teacher specialisation, but it also has had the effect of distancing teachers from their students, as they became less familiar with students’ individual performance (Honeyman 2015).

Reform 2: The switch to English: causes and effects

In 2008, the medium of instruction was switched 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: 14). Some of the challenges concerning language and literacy have been alluded to in Section 4. For this study, we drew from interview data and the existing literature to explore the possible motivations and incentives for 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 benefited those with anglophone background (Samuelson and Freedman 2010). As one might expect, government officials interviewed in our study did not account for the language shift in this way. “It was not [a] political [decision], despite what everyone has said,” a senator explained 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 neighbours. 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 argument could be also made from within the operations of the education sector. As the Ministry of Education (2010: 14) noted in the 2010-15 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.

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 often offered political explanations. But what we can do in this study is to try to analyse its effects: both in terms of the way it has been implemented and how it has contributed to some of the outcomes reported in Section 4.

It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the language change presented a shock to primary education, in the sense that the system was completely unprepared to respond. This can be better understood by reviewing education planning documents developed around that period. The language shift was announced in 2008. Yet, the 2008-12 Education Sector Strategic Plan – the document used to guide the priorities 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 of the policy. "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 percent of primary teachers and 10 percent of lower secondary teachers demonstrated adequate proficiency in English. 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 Programme (REAP), which 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 one-off trainings to be insufficient for supporting such a large overhaul. In 2012, the Rwanda Education Board introduced a school-based mentorship (SBM) programme. The idea was to hire up to 1,000 English-speaking teachers from neighbouring anglophone countries to come to help Rwanda's teachers improve their ability to carry out their own lessons using English. The SBM programme also includes a pedagogy component, but in practice the SBMs and government education officers we interviewed said the programme concentrates on improving English, the rationale being that in order to improve pedagogy, teachers must first be able to speak the language of instruction. District-level senior mentors were later hired to help with the training and supervision of SBMs. The programme has 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: 3).

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 (Williams 2015a). Later in this section, we will examine how teacher training has been affected by this language change.

Reform 3: 12YBE policy

The expansion of the education system as an entitlement from six to nine years, compounded with the English language policy, stretched the ability of the country to assure quality primary education. 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. This was part of the President's new initiative, called the 7-Year Government Programme.

Resources and priorities in the education sector have shifted to accommodate for this expansion. A greater emphasis was placed on technical and vocational educational training (TVET) for upper secondary school. A new minister of state for TVET was introduced, demonstrating the seriousness of this commitment. By 2017, the government's goal is to have 60 percent of all upper secondary students attending

TVET streams of secondary school, rather than traditional academic tracks (MINEDUC 2013).

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, like the introduction of English language, took many education stakeholders by surprise. The 2010-15 ESSP did not mention English or the three additional years of schooling. One of the first policy reports released during this period conveys a sense of uncertainty for how the 12YBE policy would be implemented:

“12YBE was announced first in 2010. It will provide all Rwandans who reach the end of 9YBE with an entitlement to a further three years of education. [...] At the time of writing [two years later] there is no public strategy document or delivery plan, but implementation has started. [...] [S]uccessful implementation of 12YBE will be challenging. The potential cost implications of having created an entitlement to post 9YBE education are large and without considerable additional funds there will be implications for other areas of the education budget.” (Paxton 2012: 25)

Reform 4: The 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 characterised as being caught 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 the following:

“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

“Lack of proper institutional arrangements to address teacher training and management bottlenecks.” (MINEDUC 2007: 11)

The key challenge to this teacher training policy was its timing. It was published in 2007, and so it predated the reforms described above. In other words, the policy failed to reflect the educational context almost as soon as it was introduced. The policy was unable to attend to the expansion of basic education, the renewed

emphasis on double shifting, or the switch to the English language as the medium of instruction. During this time, as part of the decentralisation strategy, the structure of the Ministry of Education also changed. The TSC was disbanded, its mandate folded into the Teacher Development and Management (TDM) department within the newly-formed implementation arm of MINEDUC, called REB. In 2015, the policy was still officially on the books, but most officials we interviewed suggested the policy was not actively used to guide current education strategy or priorities because it was outdated. By late 2015, a new teacher development and management policy was being finalised by MINEDUC, but had not yet been approved.

In 2015, government-led teacher training occurred in two ways: pre-service training and in-service training. Pre-service is the form of training for teachers who are in the process of learning to become teachers themselves. For primary school teachers, pre-service occurs through Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs). Students in upper secondary school (Senior 4 through Senior 6) attend TTCs as an alternative to traditional academic courses. Organisation and management of pre-service training through TTCs falls under the purview of the Higher Education Council within MINEDUC. The Higher Education Council, in turn, allocates the training through the University of Rwanda (UR) College of Education (formerly called Kigali Institute of Education or KIE). This organisation of training is new. Up until 2010, training of primary teachers was handled directly by MINEDUC and the Teacher Service Commission (Habineza 2012). However, with the introduction of REB, this responsibility shifted to UR (KIE), which is now responsible for the pre-service training of all government primary and secondary school teachers in the country.

The system of training is still in transition. UR handles the pre-service training of teachers. REB handles the in-service training of teachers. Individuals we spoke with at the College of Education and REB both drew attention to this gap; however, as of July 2015, no formal links exist to harmonise training approaches between the two institutions to ensure continuity (Honeyman 2015).

The training of future teachers through pre-service training is certainly crucial to producing a quality teaching workforce. However, in our study, we focused more intensively on in-service teacher training. In-service training refers to ongoing professional development. It is considered to be crucial for improving quality education through increasing the professionalisation of current teachers (Walter and Briggs 2012).

During the fieldwork, government-led in-service teacher training was in a state of transition. The 2007 policy was not being applied, and the new teacher development and management policy was yet to be finalised. During this time, training was still happening. International and community-based NGOs contributed significantly in this area. For example, between April 2014 and March 2015, a USAID-funded project called L3 provided training to 14,000 primary school teachers in how to use audio equipment designed to improve primary school literacy. Other organisations such as the British Council and VSO also held trainings for teachers. On the whole, however,

the trainings provided by NGOs were one-off, rather than part of an integrated system of continuous professional development.

But what of Rwanda's decentralisation policy and the ability of parents and teachers to have control of resources to improve their school, presumably through training teachers? Our investigation into the provision of in-service training brings us to an important finding of this study: the education system is officially decentralised, but teacher trainings were not – or more accurately, teacher trainings have been *recentralised*.

Rwanda's national and sector-level decentralisation policy meant that decision-making and administration shifted from the central government to the local level. Under this approach, school administrators and parent teacher committees (PTCs) 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 percent was designated for school administrators to send their teachers for training. However, in 2012, this allocated 10 percent was withheld. Put another way, the amount of money schools are given is about 10 percent lower than it used to be. According to officials interviewed for this study, REB recentralised these funds to help finance the school-based mentorship training programme. Schools technically have the discretion to use their 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.

Local government officials, education officers, and school officials noted that their teachers receive training, but it appears to occur almost exclusively through the school-based mentor programme. At the same time, in discussions with those with direct experience with the school-based mentoring programme, the programme mostly focuses on improving English. In a group discussion with six SBMs, for example, the group estimated that about 70 percent of their individual efforts went towards improving English proficiency, with the remaining 30 percent on teaching methods, though this was perhaps a socially influenced expectation, as other respondents suggested that nearly all of SBM time is focused on English. There was a shared sentiment that better English was necessary before learner-centred pedagogy could be improved. Most teachers rely on prepared notes in English, which they can only copy and repeat, not discuss extemporaneously, given their limited knowledge of the language.

In short, it was clear that the government concentrated its efforts towards improving education. MINEDUC and REB, along with officials at the district, sector and school levels pointed out that teachers required additional training to be effective. The challenges to improve in this area were twofold. First, it was difficult to implement in-service training when major structural changes to primary education (e.g. basic education and English language) were under way. Second, the introduction of English seemed to channel NGO and government attention to this area. Most

notably, teacher training was recentralised and reallocated to focus on the school-based mentor programme, which, in turn, focused on improving English proficiency. Other forms of systematic, government-led in-service training were not identified in policy reports or in discussions with education officials. One survey on teacher training carried out by Transparency International (2013: 13) found that “most” teachers had received no training in the past five years – with the exception of English.

In short, the basic education system has helped improve access to post-primary forms of schooling. However, the government has introduced a number of profound education reforms within a short time period that needed to be addressed simultaneously, but probably competed for attention. How have these reforms been achieved? What are the key actors in the education sector that have allowed it to move so swiftly to enact major reforms? The section that follows discusses some of the key actors in the education sector.

6. Individuals and institutions in the education sector

A core feature of the political settlement framework is to identify the individuals and institutions that make the decisions in the education sector. We explored this idea in our interviews with elite individuals. To be sure, this was a tricky. Our inquiries about decision-making processes with a number of officials led to boilerplate responses that mostly resembled organograms and decision-making trees. Other interviewees who were not currently working in government often added more candid responses. Former government officers who now work in civil society or with international organisations, for example, recalled their experiences working in education policy, often illustrating their points with examples from their own experience.

To this end, there was a general agreement that the inner circle of power in the education sector consists of the president of the republic, the cabinet, the minister of education, the Ministry of Finance, MINALOC, and DFID. In the outer circle is the Rwandan Education Board, Parliament, USAID and a consortium of NGOs called 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. Towards the end of our fieldwork, for example, the minister of education and the permanent secretary for MINEDUC were both replaced. No explanation was given. As described in the section above, 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. To be sure, the 12YBE 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.

The Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) plays a crucial role through the country's decentralised system of governance. Within the education sector, it is responsible for the implementation of policy and the administration of schools. As we learned in Section 3, district- and sector-level education officials are technically members of MINALOC, even though their primary duties are in education.

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN) 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 harmonise 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-prioritise after receiving MINEDUC's ideas.

Similarly, the establishment of priorities occurs at the annual leadership retreat. Each year, high-level government officials hold a retreat, which produced a series of resolutions. Resolutions often include items relevant to the education sector. For example, Honeyman (2015: 26) notes that 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 resolution produced at the retreat. Schools were expected to start providing food for students; however, school feeding was not part of the budget for the 2014-15 fiscal year. It meant that schools passed on the expenses 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 on the education sector. The introduction of the English language, 12YBE, or school feeding are potentially beneficial interventions that align well with the government's broader vision for the country. At the same time, there appears to be a tendency for some of these decisions to occur outside of the strategic planning processes, as evidenced by their absence from the sector strategic planning documents. This can present challenges for the implementation of other competing priorities.

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) is also a very influential actor within the education sector. DFID, along with UNICEF, are the co-chairs of the education sector working group. Most interviewees characterised Rwanda's political settlement in a way that is consistent with the dominant developmentalist framework. But DFID also plays a key role. It funds a large proportion of the education sector

budget. Between 2011 and 2015, it disbursed over £100 million, with the aim of “increased equitable access to quality education and improved learning outcomes” (British Council 2015: 6). Most of these funds are disbursed through direct education sector budget support. In 2015, DFID contributed £65 million, including £44m to sector budget support, £9 million for a Results Based Aid programme linked to learning outcomes and primary school completion, and in addition, £12 million was reserved for a project called Innovations for Education, which funded 26 pilot projects developed by NGOs, universities and civil society organisations aimed at improving education quality and learning.

Finally, one will note the absence of the Church as an influential actor in the education circles. This might come as a surprise, for there are more (1,767) primary schools in Rwanda that are technically owned by religious institutions like the Catholic and or Anglican churches than there are public (694) primary schools or private (250) schools. In addition, the Catholic Church has its own teachers’ union. But while membership of the union is impressive (30,000 teachers), their influence in the education sector was characterised by a key representative of the union as “not big”, something he attributed to strength of the government, which, as he put it, “has all the power”. However, while the Church may be less influential on a national level, they may hold more sway at the local level.

In Part I of this paper, we have applied the wide-angle lens of political settlements to examine the key institutions, individuals and incentives that have shaped Rwanda’s education sector. In Part II, we zoom in to explore frontline performance across an urban and rural district. These different areas were confronted with different opportunities and challenges that affected the quality of primary education.

Part II

7. Frontline school management and performance

For this study, we examined frontline performance in two districts: one urban district and one rural district.⁵ These two districts were chosen because their geographical and economic diversity represented different dimensions of the Rwandan educational experience. Of Rwanda’s 30 districts, the urban district was among the wealthiest in the country, while the rural district, located in Rwanda’s Southern Province, was among the poorest (NISR 2011).

When comparing children’s education in rural versus urban areas, some challenges can be readily anticipated. In rural setting, students (and teachers) often have long walks to school. Their classrooms lack electricity and other basic infrastructure. Urban areas can be characterised as providing shorter commutes to school, greater access to amenities and having a stronger tax base; however, the cost of living is higher, and the local education system must also contend with the pressures that

⁵ For the protection of study participants, descriptions of locations have been slightly modified.

accompany a market-driven system, such as the pull of qualified teachers from the public sector to better-paid private schools or different employment altogether. It is these types of differences that make this study design enlightening. This cross-district comparison permits for the analysis of different experiences of primary education within the political settlement.

Differential outcomes occurred across districts, but also within them. In each study site, we worked with local officials to identify the highest and lowest performing sectors within each district, as determined by 2014 Primary 6 national examination results. Operating under the principle of “extreme case logic” (Kelsall and Heng 2014: 24), within the highest performing sector, the highest performing government school was selected. Our goal was to test what matters from a governance perspective in terms of improving education quality. Within the lowest performing sector, the lowest performing government school was selected.⁶ To be sure, selecting sectors and schools based upon examination results is far from the only metric through which to assess quality or gauge learning outcomes. However, in consultation with several education officials at REB, the College of Education, and within NGOs, examination scores were the most acceptable metric through which to make these comparisons.

How might we understand and explain differences in examination performance by district, sector and school? How can this be understood from a political settlement perspective? The remainder of this section attempts to account for this variation.

Urban district

In general, schools located in Rwanda’s urban areas tend to perform better than rural ones on different learning metrics (USAID 2014). Households are wealthier and can make financial contributions to the running of the schools. The allure of urban areas enables schools to more easily attract qualified teachers, in part because of a higher top-up in salary provided to teachers, along with the fact that economic opportunities are more available for teachers (Paxton and Mutesi 2012). The urban student experience is different as well. It is characterised by shorter commutes and fewer daily responsibilities than children in rural areas often encounter (DHS 2010). At the same time, the cost of living is more expensive in a place like Kigali. It was under these conditions that we investigated how schooling was experienced in the urban district.

At the district office, the officers of the mayor and vice mayor for social affairs have display cabinets of trophies, signifying their national successes at topping countrywide comparisons of performance contracts. When asked how his district has been so successful over the years, the mayor attributed the gains made to hard work and innovation. At the same time, the area was also a wealthy centre of commerce compared to other areas. Unlike its rural counterparts, it did not need to rely

⁶ To better ensure geographical homogeneity, and in consultation with ESID staff, we slightly modified this approach for Kicukiro district when we discovered that the lowest performing sector more closely resembled characteristics of a rural area.

exclusively on the central government funds to pay its expenses. It was, in fact, expected to tap into sources of revenue through its tax base. As the mayor explained: “Revenues come through taxes. We manage those taxes and revenues to pay our staff. This district has pressure to tax businesses so that it can get funds to pay its staff from the district to the cell level.” With the extra revenue, the district has been able to fill its places for the district education unit, including district-level staff members who respectively provide oversight of primary schools, secondary schools and TVET, pre-primary and adult literacy, and an engineer responsible for classroom construction.

According to local officials, school attendance in the urban district is a non-issue. “I can say we have achieved education for all,” said one education officer. The priority now, officials explained, was to improve quality, primarily through mobilising PTA members to participate in school development, increasing classrooms, and decreasing the classroom student-to-teacher ratio. These commitments mirror national-level education priorities.

District officials and education officers reported that they have few issues attracting qualified teachers. Urban locations were a desirable location for teachers. Their base salary was low, but they could get additional work on weekends and holidays or continue their own professional development and training at nearby universities if they wished.

There were other financial incentives for teachers working in urban primary government schools compared with their rural counterparts. In particular, families were expected to make PTA contributions to their children’s school. A PTA contribution is an amount of money agreed upon by the parent teacher committee that parents are expected to pay for each of their children. Technically, the PTA contribution is not a fee and thus should not be the basis for exclusion from school. On the other hand, urban areas are wealthier, and PTA contributions were higher and teachers depended on the contribution (Paxton and Mutesi 2012). It is also given to teachers as a “prime” (in French) or motivation. PTA contributions for primary school in the urban district hovered around 3,000 rwf (\$5 USD) per child per term.

Another element of the district-level success in education is that there are many private schools in the district. It presents something of a paradox. The urban district was one of the highest performing districts in the country, but the top 19 performing primary schools within its jurisdiction are private. Across most of the key informants we spoke with, government primary schools across the country, even in the urban district, hold the reputation of being poor in quality. However, government secondary schools hold the opposite distinction. Many have a legacy that dates back to the colonial era. Government secondary schools are considered to be even more prestigious than most private secondary schools. The trend, then, was for families with means to send their children to a private primary school where they can receive better training, particularly in English. Private school primary students who do well in their national examinations can then have the opportunity to re-enter government

education to attend a well-regarded government boarding school for their post-primary studies.

When asked about teacher training, the DEO suggested it was less of an urgent issue than their rural counterparts. There was little mention of in-service training that happened. According to local officials, the training that was happening was organised directly through REB, and mostly through the SBM programme.

We now shift the investigation to look at high- and low-performing sectors and government primary schools in Kicukiro district.

High-performing school in the urban district

Like the majority of primary schools in Rwanda, the high-performing primary school we investigated is technically a government-aided school. The Catholic Church owns the property and built some of the original infrastructure. However, the school is otherwise government run. Administration and oversight is handled by the district. The school is funded through government capitation grants and household contributions.

The long legacy of the school also extends to its teaching workforce. The head teacher has been at the school for a decade. Most teachers have told us that they have taught there for at least 10 years, with some having been there for as long as 40 years.

As a densely populated urban area, most students have short walking commutes to school, which frees up additional time for studying. Rwanda's double shifting policy means that primary students attend either in the morning or the afternoon. However, according to school officials, they keep Primary 6 students there for both shifts. The idea was that they could make the final push to improve national examination outcomes. This was not a national directive; nor was it officially endorsed by local government officials. The head teacher, in fact, expressed reluctance to admit that his school engaged in this practice. It was a local solution.

In independent discussions, the head teacher and PTC reported a productive collaboration with one another. The PTC includes representatives who themselves have been formally educated. Parents said this allows them to draw from their experience to speak knowledgeably about school operations and offer their contributions to the decision-making and administration of the school. It permits accountability to occur both ways. When an issue or concern arises, the PTC sits together and resolves the issue. The PTC and head teacher work together to manage the finances of the school. In addition to the capitation grant, they also receive a PTA contribution from families. This figure was 3,000 rwf per term. Though school is officially free and children were reportedly not excluded for an inability to pay, the PTA contribution was considered by head teachers as an essential top-up to teachers' salaries. According to members of the PTC we spoke with, PTA contributions were not a means for exclusion, but payment was still expected.

According to the head teacher, Kinunga did not have a mentor through the SBM programme; however, it was unclear why. Perhaps because they were a top-performing school, a mentor was a less urgent need compared to other schools. In any case, the head teacher did not indicate the absence of a mentor as an issue of concern to the quality of the school. School officials reported receiving some trainings on an ad hoc basis – for example, how to use a new pilot-based telephone technology for training in English, Kinyarwanda and mathematics. The head teacher emphasised that it is not in the mandate or capacity of the school to organise teacher trainings because trainings are organised by REB.

As strong as this particular primary school performed, as noted above, 19 private schools in the district ranked higher in the year-end national examinations results. “People say that we performed well on the examination exams,” said the head teacher. “But we do not perform well like private schools.”

Low-performing school in the urban district

We worked with one of the lowest-performing government primary schools in the urban district. According to the PTC, the head teacher was uncommitted; according to the head teacher, there was a poorly-functioning PTC, and the catchment area for the school has struggled to cope with the socio-economic and demographic changes that have occurred in recent years.

Officials characterised the school as an urban school located in a fairly well-off area, but whose student population is comprised mostly of poor families. In recent years, as Kigali has expanded in size, the surrounding area went from suburban and poor to urban and well-off. Its proximity to Kigali made the area more desirable for wealthier families. Land prices increased. Teachers and school administrators suggested that less well-off families living in the area sold their land to wealthier ones moving in. Better-off families opted to send their children to private schools, rather than the government primary school. Lower enrolment rates meant the school received a lower total capitation grant through which to operate the school. The concern expressed by the head teacher and PTC was that the flight of better-off families also removed well educated parents, who could have positively impacted school operations through participation on the PTC.

There was discord between the local school management through the PTC and the head teacher. The head teacher blamed the parents for failing to be committed to their children’s education. Members of the PTC, in turn, said they cooperated with the head teacher, but that there was not a sense of shared decision-making when it came to administration of the school. In the PTC group discussion for this project, five parents and two teachers agreed to participate in a group discussion; yet only one parent and two teachers ended up attending the discussion. It was a small but perhaps symptomatic indication of a broader disharmony at the school – or low interest in comparison to other activities.

Individuals also noted that, while children at the school come from poor families, the booming local construction meant that temporary forms of employment were available. Richer families needed manual labour. School administrators expressed concern that the availability of work may motivate students to work rather than study – or to discontinue their studies altogether. This could help to explain low examination performance.

Rural district

The rural district we worked with was among the poorest in the country (NISR 2011). Like all districts in the country, and per interview with district-level staff, its district-level goals are aligned with broader development strategies of the country, including the EDPRS2 and Vision 2020. As the DEO put it, “The priority of this district is national priorities.” According to local officials, district-specific needs were also established through consultation with stakeholders at the local levels.

District officials linked priorities of education to improvement of access and provision of infrastructure as their primary targets. About one-third of schools in the area are connected to electricity (MINEDUC 2015a). District and sector officials pointed to the importance of improving educational quality, which is operationalised through performance contracts. Like most performance contracts we reviewed, the key focus is on achieving objective targets that can be measured.

District-, sector-, and school-level officials understood the training of teachers as a centralised affair, one whose responsibilities lie with REB or the handful of NGOs operating in the area. The consensus was that teacher training happens through the school-based mentor programme, which primarily focuses on improving English.

Households in the district principally rely on agricultural production for their livelihoods. Most are poor. Whereas PTA contributions in the urban district were expected, in the rural district, PTA contributions cannot be enforced in the rural district. As the DEO of the rural district said, “When you talk about money everything [i.e. priorities and goals] can unravel ... [expectation of PTA contributions] only happens in urban areas.” In effect, this means there are fewer financial constraints for children from poor families. But the lack of an enforced PTA contribution – sometimes referred to as a ‘teacher motivation’ – may also detract from the ability of schools to recruit and retain qualified teachers.

Indeed, district officials pointed out that recruitment and retention of qualified teachers remains an ongoing challenge. Teachers from outside the district are reluctant to migrate to a remote area for a lowly-paid teaching position. Our interviewees said that teachers in urban areas can supplement their salary through additional work, along with PTA contributions that they can count on. For teachers in Nyaruguru, economic opportunities are limited. “That is why we have that problem of recruiting qualified teachers,” said the DEO. “After a few days, they just leave.” Other district officials also noted this problem and said they have worked to address it. In

2011, a teacher training college (TTC) was built in the area, and its first cohort of primary school teachers graduated in 2014. According to the district mayor, the rationale for building a local TTC was to improve the ability to train and hire teachers from the area, with the hopes of improving retention rates.

Another challenge is the recent introduction of “district education units,” a team of staff members to be in charge of primary education, secondary education, pre-primary, TVET, and school construction, respectively. However, funding for the units is intended to come out of district budgets and local revenue. While the urban district had the funds to fully staff all five posts of their education unit, the rural district has had the capacity to fill just one post (in addition to the DEO) thus far. As the DEO explained in a meeting at the district office:

“We are supposed to be four education staff in this office but we are only two staff – me and my colleague [who works on primary education, pre-primary, and literacy]. There is someone else who is supposed to be in charge of secondary schools and TVET. There is someone who is supposed to be an engineer in charge of classroom construction. The district was told ‘here is that new organogram. Employ them from the financial capacity that you have.’ [...] [But] if the district doesn’t have salaries for those staff, it cannot employ them.”

In effect, we may interpret this strategy as meaning that poorer districts receive poorer education supervision than wealthier, urban districts. While this appears to be the case at the moment, both local and national education officials we met with noted that the establishment of district education units is a new project, one which will take some time to fully fund and institutionalise.

High-performing school in the rural district

The top-performing school in the rural district presents something of a surprising paradox. The school is located in an extremely remote part of the district. The quickest way to reach the sector office and primary school is by motorcycle. The journey can take upwards of two hours from the district office – itself a 90-minute drive from the nearest paved road – at a prohibitively expensive round-trip cost of about 10,000 rwf (\$15 USD), i.e. roughly one-quarter of a primary teacher’s monthly salary. The executive secretary of the sector remarked that the forest, along with the bad road, serve as an unfortunate barrier. Few NGOs have operations in the area, he said. Sector officials said that the area was too rural and too isolated to reach. By why then did the primary school outperform some of the other schools located in closer proximity to key infrastructure, such as decent roads, marketplaces and the district office – amenities that could presumably attract more qualified teachers?

In effect, the school is located in an area that is islanded. Its catchment area is poor families. Teachers cannot rely upon PTA contributions. This isolation seems to have left primary school teachers with few other non-farm options to make money aside

from teaching. Transport is too time-intensive and expensive to travel elsewhere on weekends for further study. Instead, teachers focused on teaching. To supplement their own income, teachers offered extra tutorials on weekends and during holidays for children from households that could afford it.

Another key to the school's success was the reportedly strong collaboration that occurred between the PTC and the head teacher. They worked together to decide how capitation funds should be used to improve the school. When students do well in examinations, the PTC members organise an event to recognise the achievements of teachers and students. The head teacher spends a lot of time supervising teachers at school, in part because the sector and district offices are too far to travel to, though he occasionally is away for week-long trainings.

The school also organises events aimed at making their education relevant to the local context. Students are trained in cultivation, noted the head teacher. What the school is able to grow generates a new source of revenue for the school. The school also owns several cows. The milk is given as provisions to those students arriving at school but lacking in nourishment. This is an example of the school exercising its freedom to establish creative measures to improve the welfare of students.

While the school does comparatively well, a number of challenges were reported. For example, the PTC is comprised of committed members, but many are uneducated themselves. According to school officials, parents are often unable to give helpful ideas in meetings with teachers, so they sit in silence, while the head teacher and teachers make decisions at meetings.

Another challenge concerned the transfer of funds from MINECOFIN via capitation grants. The head teacher indicated the transfers often come late. According to the local officials, to pay for essential teaching supplies, such as desks and chalk, the school takes out loans or buys the materials on credit. The timing and structure of the capitation grant disbursement is a challenge. The government fiscal year runs from 1 July until 30 June, but the academic calendar is based upon the calendar year. This means that the school receives its capitation grant based on the number of students they had in the first term (January). According to the head teacher, it means that the money they are given for the first terms is based upon the number of students from the previous academic year. The head teacher suggested it would be helpful to harmonise academic and fiscal calendars to ensure that the figures are accurate.

Low-performing school in the district

We met with the lowest-performing school in the lowest-performing sector within the rural district. The school was rural, but unlike the high-performing school, it was located in proximity to some main roads and markets.

The commitment of the head teacher at the school appeared to be different from that of the high-performing school. The head teacher seemed rushed during our

interview. He seemed eager to leave, because he had a private matter to attend to in another town. The SEO and executive secretary of the sector also live in Kigali and Butare, respectively. They travel there often on the weekend.

One of the key obstacles to effectiveness in the school was the interactions between the PTC and the head teacher. PTC members indicated that they are not involved in the decision-making process through which the capitation grant money is spent. According to PTC members, the head teacher does not want to involve them in the decision-making. The way finances are being used was not clear. They said they did not know how much money the school was receiving. Members did not seem to imply that misuse of funds was occurring, but suggested that the head teacher does not communicate with the PTC because he is not clear about how to best use the allocated resources. They suggested that if the school hired an accountant, it might help the school to operate more effectively.

Members of the PTC and the head teacher also pointed to what they felt was a lack of commitment on the part of parents to their children's education. They stated that parents allow their children to come to school without notebooks. Some parents do not follow up if their child misses classes. But related to this seems to be the issue of teacher commitment. According to the PTC, teachers do not always show up for their in-service training. Instead, PTC members noted that it is common for teachers to be seen walking down the road or at a bar when they should be at school or in a training. The PTC stated that this lack of commitment by teachers may influence the commitment of families and their children: if teachers are not committed to their school, why should parents be?

8. Discussion

Rwanda's political elite have staked their claim on 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 (Levy and Walton 2013). 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 local realities than in a high-modernist ideology. That education quality was so low may come as a surprise. After all, a dominant developmentalist framework suggests a harmonisation of priorities to achieve inclusive development and maintain power. Given this commitment, why, then, was education quality at the primary level not as the dominant developmentalist model might have predicted?

One explanation is that a study of Rwanda's development must be located in the historical context. By all accounts, primary education was in a 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, as 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 Rwanda's development project. An analysis of the political settlement must therefore be central when seeking to understand incentives for expanding access or making improvements in quality.

An analysis of Rwanda's political settlement gives us a way to analyse how individuals, institutions and incentives are at the core of policymaking decisions. The dominant developmentalist framework suggests that the country's elite has staked its viability on 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 perform at a high level were likely to be replaced. It was not necessarily that these individuals were failing to work hard, *per se*. Rather, 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. These policies tended to happen at such a pace and in such a way that stakeholders in the education sector were left operating on the back of their heels. That is, if the education sector is oriented towards 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*.

In terms of hierarchical forms of accountability and oversight, Levy and Walton (2013) suggest that multi-stakeholder reforms may only provide limited additional value where principal-agent issues are largely solved. However, district and school local-level work showed that centralised, top-down aspects of education quality were not working well, whereas some more bottom-up aspects were doing better (e.g. PTCs), especially where undertaken in concert with head teachers. Again, this may reflect the lack of political priority given to the quality of schooling by the principal. Indeed, school-level governance matters, but so too did matters of poverty and geography. This is particularly the case with head teachers and also PTCs. The quality of the latter appeared to be strongly shaped by the socio-economic background of households involved. Remoteness can provide unexpected benefits in terms of reducing the opportunities for teaching staff to be distracted by other opportunities.

Levy and Walton also suggest that there may 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

programmes. Infrastructure is fairly easy to build, and it is popular (Hossain and Moore 2002). Improving quality is less visible and less straightforward. It is difficult to define or evaluate. The concluding section of MINEDUC's (2015a: 67-68) most recent *Education Statistics* report 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 also it needed to be visible to Rwandans and the development community that the government was fulfilling its promises to deliver development to all Rwandans. In many ways, this approach makes sense. Construction of classrooms was material proof of the government's commitment to development.

We hypothesised that Rwanda's model of decentralisation 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 characterised as a (re)centralised affair amidst a deconcentrated education sector. Administrators of schools, sectors and districts stated that their teachers were being trained through the school-based mentoring programme – a programme that focuses almost exclusively on English. It relieved local education officers for having to plan and organise trainings. On the other hand, it was unclear to what extent the recentralisation of teacher training also meant a recentralisation of a sense of duty to be sure teachers were being effective in the setting of the classroom. It is worth considering how Rwanda's deconcentrated system impacted quality in ways other than teacher training. Throughout our work we learned of some creative ways in which education quality was being promoted. Within the rural high-performing primary school, teachers taught students to cultivate, so that the funds generated could be used to supplement the operations of the school.

The present study also builds on the existing studies of the education system in Rwanda, such as the untoward effects of PTA contributions (Paxton and Mutesi 2012). PTCs agree upon an amount that all parents are expected to pay for their children to attend the school. In the urban district, students paid 3000 rwf per term to supplement teacher salaries. In poorer areas, however, schools did not ask for PTA allowances because families could not afford it. It is reasonable to assume that PTA contributions (along with other facts, such as school location, gender or teachers, etc.) could be one way to attract better qualified teachers to wealthier areas. This may offer one explanation as to why urban government schools to have better learning outcomes than anywhere else in the country, even when controlling for other socio-economic factors (USAID 2014). PTA contributions can operate more like a fee, and can be a means for temporary exclusion (Williams, Abbott and Mupenzi 2014). Related to the perpetuation of economic inequalities, further research should also seek to examine the ways in which private schools are shaping the landscape of the education sector, particularly in urban areas. In Kicukiro, for example, primary school performance for the district is presented in an aggregate form. The district bears responsibility for the performance of the school, but they are not obliged to

provide other forms of assistance or materials. Given that the 19 top-performing primary schools in the urban district we worked with are private and cater to better-off families, it is important to consider how this may impact upon the incentives to improve quality in government-run schools.

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 what became apparent in this study was the gap between the government's developmental aims and the realities facing most Rwandans. If Rwanda was committed to delivering education to the poor, it was also, unfortunately, delivering poor education. It was evident that an effective, sustained strategy to improve education quality has yet to be seen. 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 families 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, Sapsford and Rwirahira 2015). Thus, many children may find themselves in an unenviable position: included in the country's development project vis-à-vis the education system, while simultaneously excluded from meaningful participation, given the poor quality of that system.

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