

Local Governance After War: Some Reflections On Donor Behavior In Burundi

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Abstract

This paper focuses on post-conflict development policies within the context of Burundi. It considers these issues from the local level, in which most state-society interaction takes place and argues that it is at this level that change needs to start for it is here that people interact with the state and where they can begin changing the terms of their interaction. In particular, this paper takes a critical look at the current approach that is being undertaken by the international community towards promoting good governance and concludes with recommendations for improving local governance support by international donors in Burundi and elsewhere.

Introduction

After 12 years of war, there is still hope in Burundi. Hope that the war is finally over, that people can settle back into a normal life and that economic growth will return. A peace treaty was signed, elections have been held, a new government is firmly in power and international aid is on the rise. But beneath this hope, there is also silent despair that the poor will stay poor, that corruption and nepotism will continue and that the crimes of the past will go unpunished. Whatever their political affiliation, most Burundians fear that “the faces will change but the system will remain the same.”²² They hope that the system will change, but they prepare for the worst. Aid agencies should also do like Burundians and prepare for the worst.

This system is at the core of Burundi’s problems. It is an institutionalized system of corruption, social exclusion, impunity, unpredictability, a total lack of accountability and clientelism. It has gorged itself for decades on aid money. Every Burundian knows this system, in which small groups of people use the state to advance their personal interests. It is *the* key problem and the main cause of war, not

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ethnicity or poverty. Some examples: In a recent comprehensive study on ethnic perception in Burundi, people of all ethnicities overwhelmingly identified the causes of ethnic violence as corruption (30%), social exclusion (22%), and the behavior of elites (20%). Poverty was only in fourth place (6%); the 1972 crisis comes in at 4%; and ignorance at 3%!³³ Similarly, the popular consultations that were part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) process often mention “bad governance” as the most important reason of violence; ahead of war, poverty, sickness, land scarcity, and all other factors.

The traditional way in which the international community seeks to change this system has been through the wholesale import of the formal institutions associated with a liberal-democratic Western system. This approach does not work. While a liberal-democratic Western system would undoubtedly be a major improvement over current practice, its wholesale import fails to produce much effect because the mindsets, power relations, and social dynamics associated with the current system

persist. Consequently, the form is more or less there, but the substance is far removed. This is not only the case for the political institutions of Western democracy, but also the institutions of liberal economic policies.⁴⁴

The creation of better institutions in Burundi can only be the result of internal politics, bargaining and social learning; this process will take much time and the main question for donors is how they can promote it without controlling it. This does not mean that there is no place for donor activism, but it must take the form of guaranteeing a process — a space in which people can learn and bargain — instead of just creating the actual final institutions.

This paper focuses on the local level, in which most state-society interaction takes place and constitutes for most people “*Leta*,” the state. It is at this level that change needs to start for it is here that people interact with the state and where they can begin changing the terms of their inter-

action. In addition, given expressed donor and central government commitments to decentralization, there is presumably a real margin of opportunity to begin making a difference at the local level.

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Some general features of local governance in Burundi

There are three important points that must be made regarding the nature of “the system,” which apply at both the national and the local level. First, contrary to what many people think, the system is not created by the war, but it has much deeper historical roots. Second, to make matters more complicated, the system is deeply ingrained in (civil) society: it is not simply an aberration of the state or of some “bad” people. Rather, it is a set of expectations and behaviors *all* Burundians display when

faced with the state. Burundians predict that whether or not benefits come their way is uncertain and will depend on a *quid pro quo*. The most powerful and best connected will be first served and public office is one of the primary ways for an individual to escape poverty. Third, and related, one of the main features of the system is its enormous variability. Outcomes are dependent on personal relations between people. All these factors make strengthening the institutions of democracy or citizenship much harder for donors.

A Historical System

First, the system in Burundi that I am describing is not new, nor does it result from “*la crise*.” Consequently, bringing the war to an end and/or holding elections will not make it disappear. The end of war and elections surely have the potential to contribute to change, but they are insufficient in breaking the power of a system that has been in existence for decades.

The war has influenced these old patterns of local governance in different ways:

- The size of the state and its ability to meet the needs of its people has been reduced. As a result of the war, control of the state is even more important to personal livelihood security for those lucky enough to have jobs with the state. At the same time, the state is also much poorer and almost devoid of resources (very much so at the local level). People have suffered and still suffer tremendously, and their vulnerability is enormous. As a result, the potential for local conflict is enormous as well.
- The shift to humanitarian aid meant that more money bypassed the state, including the municipality. Aid money has been directly delivered to populations, thus weakening the communal administrators. On the other hand, as a result of the humanitarian community’s need for speed and because of the general ignorance and the dependence on local authorities for distribution, abuses became more frequent, more blatant and more dramatic.
- The widespread indifference of elites to the suffering of ordinary people became abundantly clear and led to anger amongst the population. It is possible that Burundians’ longstanding strategies of keeping their head down and making alliances with the more powerful are being weakened.
- Increasingly competent and experienced radio’s and a free written press have come into being. During the war, the state lost its monopoly of information, which had repercussions at the local level.

In short, local governance was enormously weakened by the war. Administrators have vastly fewer resources than before, and much that happens on their territory escapes their control. At the same time, they became increasingly brutal in their quest for resources, and – as always – they have found many innovative ways to enrich themselves and to maintain networks of privilege. The brutal impoverishment of the population and the prevalence of blatant theft by its rulers have created widespread resentment. The survey data mentioned earlier attest to this, as do the hundreds of conversations I had with ordinary Burundians.⁵⁵ Burundians desire change in the system, but they do not know how to make that happen.

It is against this background that the transitional government in spring 2005 enacted the decentralization law and that local and national elections took place in summer and fall of that year. Like its predecessor from the early 1980s, the new Communal Law is subtly set up to appease both the international community's desire to support decentralization and a deeper interest among local elites in removing as many of the empowering elements of local democracy as possible and reconstructing the vertical system of the past. For instance:

- Closed party lists for local elections and no direct election of the communal administrator. It even seems that the administrators, by name, have been centrally designated in negotiations between the parties. As a result, communal administrators are likely to continue to depend on central politics rather than on local politics to ensure their stay in power.
- The members of the Communal Council must have at least a high school education. In addition, one third of them do not have to live in the commune. Given the low literacy rates in the rural communes, almost nobody from those areas of the country fulfills the educational requirement. As a result, it is usually the same small clique of urban, educated intermediaries who are empowered. Historically, there has always been a tremendous social and attitudinal gap in Burundi between the educated and urban on the one hand and the uneducated and rural on the other.

In short, it is very likely that the main concern of communal administrators will be, similar to the past, to satisfy those in the center to whom they owe their appointment to power. Moreover, administrators will continue this trend, while staying on good terms with elite members of the communal council, many of whom are also more connected to Bujumbura than to the commune. Thus, the risk is real that the traditional approach of top-down governance will prevail with the new communal law. The only body with some real potential for offering representation is the *conseil de collines* (CDC), which is close to the people and elected by them in a non-partisan manner. Although it is currently a weak institution, it does have some legal powers. One other important element is that the elections have brought to power a new party with many new and young faces in it, and, at least rhetorically with a commitment to profoundly change the nature of Burundi's state. Donors need to leverage these last two opportunities while being cognizant of the constraints discussed earlier.

Between June and September 2005 a series of elections took place, all decisively won by one of the former rebel groups, the CNDD/FDD.⁶⁶ This rebel movement's victory can be explained by a number of factors. First, it was, de facto, the military winner of the war as it had the largest army, controlled the most territory, and was the strongest force holding the national army in check. Second, it was the movement that most effectively used negotiations to its advantage, mostly through the Pretoria Agreement, which allowed its soldiers to be integrated into the national army. As a result, many people consider that the CNDD/FDD brought peace to Burundi. Third, the CNDD/FDD represented a hope for change, any change, in the old system. All parties associated with the war years—including the other main Hutu party, the Frodebu—were thoroughly punished. As said earlier, Burundians were angry, and they were surely not going to vote for any of the old guards in power.

Hence, the CNDD/FDD is dominating many positions at both the local and the national level (although at the local level, about one-third of the communes are led by mayors from other political parties). The big question, though, for Burundi's future remains: Did we just see a change in the system or simply a change in personnel? And what can the international community do about it?

Deeply Ingrained Norms and Practices

Second, the way I have written about the system until now is partly misleading, suggesting that as a matter of actual fact, Burundi is divided into neatly distinct groups, with poor, good people in society, who all uniformly and passively suffer from the bad behavior of mean and corrupt government officials. This simplifies the deeply inter-linked nature of civil society and state and transforms what are structural issues into matters of personal characteristics. Public institutions in Burundi do not function “badly”⁷⁷ because, coincidentally, only “bad” Burundians happen to get these jobs. For all I know, I, and most of us reading this article, would behave the exact same way if we were to be state officials in Burundi. The nature of the state and of state-society interactions in Burundi truly *is* a deeply institutionalized system, i.e., a set of repeated practices and norms around which expectations converge. What makes the situation more difficult is that people may complain about the system, but often their true gripe is that they are not part of it and that they do not benefit from it. Given the chance to be included in the system, many take on its behavior. Consequently, some of the most condescending, authoritarian and corrupt behavior is found at the lowest rungs of the state, perpetrated by petty officials who are just slightly above the ordinary people from whom they emerged just the day before. This is also why so many NGOs internal functions are not democratic, and their leaders are in charge seemingly forever. What characterizes an institutionalized system is precisely that it is normal, it is everything most people have known and it is the field within which people think and work. We all live with inefficient systems that are normal to us: The development aid system, for example, is a perfect case in point.⁸⁸

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Complex Web of Variability

Third and last, it is important to realize the extent to which the functioning of Burundian state institutions, especially at the lower levels, is determined by the individual characteristics and alliances of the people who occupy them. The real functioning of Burundi's political economy is based on relations of power, combined with relations of region, family, ethnicity, ideology, party affiliation, and personality. A communal administrator's behavior and ability to pursue certain agendas are tributary to a complex and ever-changing web of relations with the local elites within the commune—with the Governor and the Ministry of the Interior, his independent access to

military men, businessmen, and aid agency employees. They also depend on his sense of alternatives, his political prospects, and his personal values, ethics, and empathy. Finally they depend on how efficient the Governor is, how ruthless, how capable of delivering on promises he is to those higher up in the hierarchy, of controlling the territory, of co-opting and threatening those who pose a threat, of allying himself with sources of money, etc. The specifics of these relations and dynamics differ for all people and may change over time for any given person. In the absence of meaningful predictability stemming from the exercise of the law (courts, police, etc.), it is hard to control or predict the behavior of state agents, especially for citizens who are much poorer or more powerless and less informed than the government agent.

Many outsiders do not grasp this nature of the state. At first glance Burundi (and its neighbor, Rwanda, even more so) seems like a strong central state—a small country, with roads and administrative structures down to the lowest levels, a culture of top-down and authoritarian state power, mirrored by political and military structures that cover all of the country, and sometimes highly competent people at the top. Yet authoritarian and vertical as the state may be (and elections may slowly begin changing this aspect), the same state is also very weak, susceptible to local dynamics, different in different places, and unpredictable.

This has a number of interesting implications. First, the poor usually lose out—period. In line with World Bank (2000) research about poverty as voicelessness and powerlessness, the poor in Burundi are often kept poor, made poorer by the deliberate actions of those who are supposed to serve them.⁹⁹ These include

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public sector agents and authorities foremost, but also businessmen, church officials, soldiers, and project employees on the payroll of aid agencies. Anyone who reads the very well researched CARE (2004) study on land issues in Ngozi will be surprised by the depth and variety of land appropriation by chefs de zone, administrators, businessmen, priests, prefects, project employees, politicians, and ordinary people who happened to be in the right place at the right time and made the right friends.¹⁰¹⁰

Second, the almost complete ignorance of corruption on the part of the foreigners who work for the international community means that they can be easily manipulated if they remain content with only appearances and formalities, but it also means that they can have more power as they are understood to be largely outside of these networks. It is widely understood that foreigners do not know the way Burundian politics work and with their ignorant brains and deep pockets, can inflict some considerable damage on carefully crafted systems of enrichment. Yet, to the greater relief of those who benefit from the status quo, most foreigners do not use their power, preferring to hide behind

vague notions of ownership, respect for local culture, public sector capacity building, and all kinds of good words.

I believe foreigners should use their power, but in a careful way—not to create particular outcomes, but rather to keep open processes that allow the broadest range of Burundians to debate and bargain about outcomes. This should start within the projects managed by aid agencies and needs to be implemented in a number of areas. This includes but is not limited to how employees are recruited and what standards of professional behavior are set for them, the quality of the workplace and whether there is an atmosphere of respect and discussion, and the transparency agencies display towards Burundians about their aims, budgets, methods, etc. Foreigners have less power than they think in one aspect, for they can not import wholesale effective institutions or policies, even into countries as aid-dependent as Burundi. At the same time, they have more power than they are willing to admit—they can refuse to go along with all the excesses of the clientelistic state and can ensure that a multitude of mechanisms and processes that could allow Burundians to change their state remain open.

The above discussion about the variability of the local state in Burundi also relates to a number of other points, namely the issue of lack of capacity and absence of the rule of law. Thus far, this paper has stressed the political nature of the weak local governance in Burundi—the way it serves the interests of the powerful and well-connected and is maintained and used by them to protect the status quo. But it is true that there are structural and contextual variables that have created this situation or allowed this situation to continue, most notably the lack of capacity and resources of the state and the state of lawlessness and impunity that characterizes Burundi.¹¹¹¹ The latter is somewhat related to the political imperatives discussed earlier: weak, arbitrary, or no justice at all is not necessarily or exclusively a god-given state of nature, but something that serves the interests of the powerful and the well-connected, and it is in many ways maintained by them to their own advantage. Even lack of capacity and resources are not simply a direct product of the simple fact of being a poor country, but are also, at least in part, a politically created situation. Still, there is no denying that Burundi *is* indeed a stunningly poor country, and that the levels of human and financial resources available at the commune, for example, *are* woefully inadequate.

This problem involving the lack of human and financial resources and capacity is one that the development enterprise loves to encounter, for it just so happens that it possesses exactly the solution to that: an abundance of money and a great willingness to provide training. The default switch for most development practitioners is to see local governance problems as precisely technical matters, requiring injections of knowledge and money, and maybe some technical advice. The fact that, at the end of a war, more than ever, capacity seems objectively to be a crucial constraint reinforces this default position.

A critique of past approaches for governance

Here I want to briefly discuss three basic approaches, or even instinctive reflexes donors have towards governance questions: capacity building, bypassing public institutions, and supporting NGOs. While I am applying this to the case of Burundi, my experience suggests that these are valid elsewhere in the developing world, at least in sub-Saharan Africa, which I know best.

Building Capacity

The first one, *capacity building*, is the oldest approach for governance: it dominated Burundi for decades, and is coming back strongly now in the post-emergency context. It consists essentially of channeling financial resources and training through the state system down to the local (commune) level. This approach stems from a vision of the problem as one of weakness of capacity, lack of knowledge, inadequate structures and regulations, etc. It may be accompanied by some rhetoric about participation, empowerment and accountability—no document would be complete without that—but it is assumed that this will all pretty much follow from “getting the state right”, and that the latter is done through training and money.

This approach often goes hand in hand with a literal and optimistic belief in political declarations and a voluntary (as opposed to historical or structural) vision of

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social change. Governments say they want to improve governance—it is their number one priority, mentioned at the very beginning of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)—and we take this literally, happily supporting the government to achieve this great aim. We tend to ignore that the government is a political player, divided on the matter; that many power-holders in the government are the beneficiaries and creators of ill governance; that they must relate to other power centers in society who do not want to lose their privileges; that ill governance has evolved over decades and is hardly likely to be solved by some technical assistance. Under a voluntary approach, we forget all of these obstacles within the government and credulously assume that good will and some technical and financial support is all that is needed to prevail. The source of this is partly situated in the “organized hypocrisy” of sovereignty

of the international relations system in which development aid (mostly a state-to-state or a UN-agency-to-member-state matter) is embedded.

People who use this public capacity building approach typically have another strong argument, apart from “there objectively is a major lack of capacity,” namely: eventually public structures need to be at the heart of Burundi’s development, so weakening them through systematic neglect is simply not the best strategy. A related argument is that it is *de facto* impossible to bypass these structures. At the least, their capacity to disrupt progress is enormous and therefore, warrants working with them. These points are both correct, but they do not automatically mean that the “strengthen the state by throwing resources at it” approach is the best one. The question is: how does one strengthen the accountability and quality of public institutions? Is it by directly supporting them (and if so, in what form)? Is it by supporting the creation of an organized “demand” for their services (as opposed to investment in the “supply”)? Is it by working on more systemic conditions that create incentives for each side to interact? These questions are under-discussed.

Bypassing Public Institutions

The second approach consists of working directly with the population. This position is often, explicitly or implicitly, based on a deep distrust of the state: too many resources were squandered on the state, the argument goes; it is an institution of exclusion and inefficiency, and we shall go around it as much as possible in order to help the population. Typically, as it is hard to work directly with “the population,” (millions of people, after all...) this approach consists of the creation of committees and other intermediary organizations that should be representative and committed to development (within the budgetary and programmatic parameters of the aid agency).

This is a very popular option these days, applied in many different forms by many different actors throughout Burundi. Humanitarian agencies love to work this way, as do many development NGOs. They all create local committees, which play a role in managing or overseeing their programs. The most famous such institution, the CDC, has even received an unclear legal status in the new local institutional landscape. Yet, frank analysis shows that the track record of these committees is significantly worse than is often assumed—or presented—by the agencies that use them. Problems include:

- There are too many of these structures, and they are un-coordinated and often duplicative.
- These structures tend to be created by and for projects or outside actors, i.e. ad-hoc, dominated by the external needs of projects and the desire to capture short-term benefits, with very little capacity for autonomy or sustainability. This holds both for many farmers’ groups and the like, and for the more deliberative institutions.
- These committees tend to be much less representative than their promoters desire or realize (and typically this worsens over time). They are filled with many of the same people over and over; often, their members are hardly representative of the weak or poorest, and even those who do belong to these groups (precisely because of their weakness and poverty) are under enormous pressure.
- These parallel structures of decision-making and resource allocation are perceived as threatening by the local (and national) government: uncontrolled by them, in charge of major resources, duplicative of public structures, they are typically resented, sabotaged, undermined, co-opted, captured, marginalized, etc.
- For those associative structures that *are* successful (and they *do* exist),¹²¹² usually due to great leadership and intense support, the question of impact and size often remains difficult. What difference do they really make beyond their immediate members? What does it take to scale up their impact, in terms of level, size, durability?

But there is a much more devastating critique: this approach may unintentionally reinforce unaccountable, clientelistic states and patterns of behavior, as it (i) leaves the levers of political change untouched; (ii) creates clientelistic relations between foreign aid actors and the parts of the populations that can get the presents

supplied by aid; (iii) reinforces the role of intermediaries and political entrepreneurs who understand the aid system and can play by its rules; (iv) ignores local politics and the way elites manipulate processes, often reinforcing the power of the latter; and (v) produces major and unjustified inequalities between people by its scattered and ad-hoc approach.

This is very similar to the critique made by Anuradha Jodhi and Mick Moore (2000) about two of the most popular instruments in the development policy-maker's toolbox today, namely NGOs and Social Funds¹³¹³. Indeed, they argue that the use of these two institutions creates a disabling institutional environment.

Especially NGOs that are a) not strongly rooted in the populations they serve; b) are oriented mainly to obtaining external financial resources; and c) are engaged more in service delivery rather than advocacy (...) provide pure benefits, not rights in either the moral or legal sense of the term. (...) NGO programs typically are diverse, fragmented and unstable (they lack program predictability). (...) They are not even potentially formally enforceable in the way that programs run directly by governments may be. (...) Social Funds are supposed to provide demand-driven, locally adapted development services, (...) and contribute to the mobilization of beneficiaries. But the reality is very different. While they are characterized by tolerance, they are deficient of predictability, credibility and rights. Communities are presented with their Social Fund opportunity out of the blue; they face what appears to be a once in a lifetime opportunity. The Social Funds case is very similar to that of the NGOs: a new set of institutional arrangements for delivering public services to the poor are justified through the rhetoric of "community", "client demand", localism" and "decentralization," while little real attention is paid to creating an organizational context that will enable the poor actually to organize to help ensure that programs work in their favor. Both cases illustrated the main point of our argument: mobilizing the poor effectively might better be done by paying less attention to sending emissaries, organizers and propagandists down to the grassroots, and putting more effort into providing the poor with an enabling external bureaucratic and program environment –one characterized by more tolerance, credibility, predictability and rights than one is used to encountering.¹⁴¹⁴

In short, the limitation of the second approach is that it builds often unrepresentative mechanisms that, while they may provide some much appreciated services to the poor, typically circumvent issues of state-society relations and long term socio-political change—the true conditions for change in Burundi.

Supporting NGOs

A third, more recent, approach to improved communal (or national) governance is similar to the former, but goes a step further. It explicitly understands governance change as a socio-political process and it puts its faith in NGOs and media (if they are free, as is the case in Burundi) to act as advocates, sources of ideas, pressure for change, etc. This approach is better than the previous two, for it recognizes the need for institutional change at the political level and for the emergence of new forms of citizenship.

Yet, it suffers from a whole slew of practical problems as well, and these have been well-known for many years. To start, the representation provided by pro-democracy/ justice/human rights NGOs is often very limited, and their anchorage outside the capital may be weak. The rhetoric is great, and often so are the intentions and the real human investments, but the issue of being disconnected from groups outside of the capital is not easily solved. Some donors try to remedy it by implementing rather expensive outreach programs—the creation of provincial offices, funds for travel, etc.—and this does help those organizations lucky enough to get this sort of support. However, the overall picture remains much the same because these are merely drops in the ocean. Given their dependence on donor funds, the lines of accountability of these local NGOs are also far more oriented towards donors than towards the marginalized communities they seek to serve in their own societies.

To compound matters, civil society support is overwhelmingly administered using the oldest and weakest tool in the development toolbox: project aid. The litany of deficiencies of project aid has been repeated for two decades now and yet still remains painfully relevant: projects tend to be small, last for ridiculously short periods of time, are devoid of any serious long-term vision, are non-transparent in their criteria for support, and are micromanaged by remote headquarters in the West. They are administratively heavy and costly, with large delays between identification and actual implementation, offer little flexibility, and contain weak monitoring and evaluation systems. While such aid may keep many NGOs alive—indeed, in the poorest countries like Burundi, foreign aid underwrites almost the entire NGO sector—it does so while keeping them in a dependent, weak, and outward-oriented position.

Lastly, there is an even deeper problem with this approach. Indeed, this strategy of supporting existing NGOs deals with the symptoms, but not the causes, the underlying dynamics, of a civil society. Building a genuine civil society is not the same as funding a set of popular or “good” NGOs (even if these NGOs could somehow be objectively proven to be the “best” around). The kind of civil society that eventually can create rights and democracy grows out of the engagement of people at all levels of society, as they interact in ways that affect and make up the public good. This requires people to engage in collective action, to build trust and confidence in their own capacities and the actions of others, to develop the ability to oppose and negotiate and ally themselves with other groups within civil society and with government as need requires. What I am describing here amounts to a transition from a set of highly personalized relationships, in which individuals and organizations seek access to ad hoc benefits as clients (of the state, of local elites, and of the development

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aid system), to much more institutionalized relationships governed by predictable, transparent rules, in which individuals and groups are able to demand access to rights as citizens.¹⁵¹⁵

Some conclusions

What does all this mean for a strategy of local governance support in Burundi (and elsewhere)? There are good parts in each of the three strategies presented so far. Lack of capacity—money, knowledge—is indeed a widespread problem that needs to be addressed. Similarly, promoting self-help groups and other associations of people with joint interests (HIV/AIDS, schooling, credit, etc.) can be a great way to tap into local energies and knowledge. A vibrant and diverse NGO sector, finally, is truly a beautiful thing to behold. None of these are inherently bad to invest in, however, the way they are supported, and the lack of political and historical context within which this takes place, ensures that the impact of these programs will likely be disappointingly low and unsustainable.

A priori, it seems that any effective local governance support strategy should take this eightfold path:

1. *Create opportunities for people to lead, to bargain, to organize, to learn:* such opportunities are matters of program design, of attention to process; they can be mainstreamed in all sectors—not just in what we call civil society building or governance programs. What this means for governance, in other words, is that we should be preoccupied less with products—the right laws, well-trained managers, and office equipment—and more with processes. It is important that development aid help create spaces, adapted to the local situation, in which people can learn to bargain for their own institutions.¹⁶¹⁶
2. *Anchor projects in citizens' representative institutions:* it would be a waste *not* to grasp the opportunities provided by Burundi's ongoing democratization. The CDCs, the representative institutions that are closest to the citizens, are important here. To the extent possible, outsiders should use the institutions of citizenship rather than those of clientelism, created by foreigners. And yet, all donors currently in Burundi neglect these new institutions. They focus either on the communal council and the communal administrator, already far removed from the people, or on the central ministries involved.
3. *Reflect critically on the way much development aid directly contributes to weak governance:* its clientelistic relation with the people, its own total lack of transparency, its biases in hiring practices and its blindness to the political behavior of its own employees, the way it substitutes for state-society negotiations, its uncoordinated and essentially unpredictable nature which amounts to institutional destruction. The number one thing aid agencies control is their own behavior, so it is time to start critically looking at that and creatively improving on it.
4. *Work in a two-pronged way, from above and from below:* a local governance program should both strengthen the state's capacities and strengthen society's capacities. These are not the same, and ought not to be mixed. Too many now do the former alone.

5. *Promote bottom-up planning*: This approach runs counter to the long-standing top-down and clientelistic nature of Burundi's governance processes. This does not mean there is no place for macro-level planning and coordination—far from it—but rather that too much of what is called “participation and input” here hardly deserves these appellations.
6. *Improve on the ground co-ordination dramatically*, in function of people's expressed needs and initiatives, and in close collaboration with the communal and provincial structures in charge. Indeed, lack of co-ordination—both on the ground and at the national level—remains one of the prime ways in which aid agencies weaken both state and citizenship institutions. Ideally, this ought to be done through the national or local government, once it is accountable to the population. When this is not yet the case, however, donors may wish to create local coordination platforms in which they involve both the local administration and representatives of the population.
7. *Act with utmost transparency towards all players* (public and private) in order to empower them. This can be achieved by ameliorating the behavior of aid agencies themselves and by building on Burundi's free press. Lack of transparency by development actors – about overall aims, budgetary availabilities, procedures, criteria for engagement, cost structures, contractual conditions, etc — is another major way in which aid actors continue to disempower Burundians.
8. *Mainstream personal transformation and conflict resolution approaches*: We must focus not only on ethnicity but also on power differentials, the rural-urban gap, a restoration of community, etc. When institutions are weak, working on personal transformations is important. This must be mainstreamed into projects through creative and low-cost mechanisms. This is not about missionary zeal – we do not know what is good for people — but rather about allowing people to discover other ways of relating to each other.

The sort of recommendations presented here share three features: they are all based on an understanding that decentralization—and more generally, the required changes in the system of governance that has prevailed for so long in Burundi—are political and not technical. Second, they start with the behavior of the development agents themselves—the factor which they most easily control. This is a tad heavy-handed, indeed, but it is not the same as either the conditionality or the total a-technical capacity-building that characterize so much aid. Rather, and this is the third feature, they all seek to create opportunities for local people to learn to bargain, access information, use the institutions of citizenship, and collaborate in the pursuit of common goals. This will be a long-term process, but whatever action the development community undertakes ought to be designed in such a way as to promote these dynamics. This is far too rarely the case now.

Endnotes

- 1 This paper was initially written as a discussion paper in July 2005. It was distributed widely in Burundi at the time, and was designed to influence ongoing debates about post-conflict development policies, and specifically the decentralization programs discussed at that time. I decided to slightly re-work this informal paper to share it with other people here.

- 2 Personal Interviews conducted by the author
- 3 Nimubona, Julien, *La perception de l'identité ethnique dans le processus électoral burundais*. Bujumbura: Ligue des droits de la personne dans la région des grands lacs (LDGL), June 2005.
- 4 Uvin, Peter. *Development and Human Rights*. Kumarian Press, West Hartford, 2004, and Carothers, Thomas. *Aiding Democracy Abroad: the Learning Curve*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999
- 5 Uvin, Peter. *Life after Violence. A People's History of Burundi*. London, Zed books, 2008
- 6 National Council for the Defense of Democracy-Forces for the Defense of Democracy
- 7 i.e., corrupt, unaccountable, exclusionary – note that it may well be that not all of this is judged ethically “bad” by all Burundians: it may be perceived by them as the way things have always been, as a divine order, as the normal laws of politics, whatever
- 8 Martens, Bertin et.al., *The Institutional Economics of Foreign Aid*. Cambridge, Cambridge UP 2002
- 9 World Bank. 2000. *Voices of the Poor –Can Anyone Hear Us?* Washington DC: World Bank.
- 10 CARE et al. *Enquête Qualitative Sur La Situation Des Conflits Fonciers Dans La Province De Ngozi, Burundi*. Bujumbura, Care/APDH/Global Rights, March 2004.
- 11 There are also historical factors dating to the colonial period, but these are hard to change without the prior invention of time travel.
- 12 Some successful structures can be found in the areas of agricultural production and conflict resolution.
- 13 Social Funds were central mechanisms, created, often with World Bank support, to provide social services to the poor in order to mitigate the cost of adjustment. They were managed separately from the state.
- 14 Anuradha Joshi & Mick Moore, *The Mobilizing Potential of Anti-Poverty Programmes*. Sussex, IDS 2000
- 15 Uvin, Peter. *Development and Human Rights*. Kumarian Press, West Hartford, 2004, and Unsworth, Sue. *Understanding Pro-Poor Change*. London, UK Department for International Development, 2002.
- 16 Uvin, Peter. *Development and Human Rights*. Kumarian Press, West Hartford, 2004, and IDS. *Signposts to More Effective States. Responding to Governance Challenges in Developing Countries*. Sussex, Institute for Development Studies, 2005.