

Reforming Citizenship Education in Post-Genocide Rwanda:

The Case for a Revised *Itorero* Training Scheme for High School Leavers

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Executive Summary

- The Government of Rwanda (GoR) decided during the 12 November 2007 cabinet meeting to revive its traditional citizenship education program – known as '*Itorero*' – to enable Rwandans to re-acquaint themselves with the values and taboos of their culture.
- Although this informal training is meant for all categories of Rwandans, it is compulsory only for all High School Leavers (HSLs). The scheme designed for this category comprises two phases: (i) a theoretical phase called *Gutozwa* involving moral, political and cultural education for three months; and (ii) a practical phase named *Urugerero* in the form of national service or volunteerism for a period of seven months. The present policy brief focuses on the theoretical phase.
- The *Itorero* training for HSLs relies heavily on the civic republican/communitarian concepts of citizenship. While these concepts contain constructive elements, such as fostering courage, self-sacrifice, patriotism, connectedness, and concern for the common good, excessive pursuit of this citizenship model may not be helpful for post-genocide Rwanda. The civic republican/communitarian paradigm as it is practised through the *Itorero* training is likely to produce uncritical and docile citizens. Perhaps paradoxically, it may also encourage fanaticism.
- Given the problems associated with civic republican and communitarian notions, a 'critical-democratic-cosmopolitan' citizenship notion is instead proposed for *Itorero*. The advantages of the proposed paradigm are outlined below.

This policy brief draws from a quantitative-qualitative study which engaged with three categories of participants: (i) HSLs who underwent the *Itorero* training mostly in 2013 and were in level one in 2015 at private and public higher learning institutions in Rwanda; (ii) *Itorero* district trainers; and (iii) National *Itorero* Commission (NIC) officials. A total of 996 HSLs responded to the survey questionnaire while 19 HSLs participated in four focus group discussions. In addition, four interviews with district trainers and three with NIC officials were conducted. The data collection took place in Rwanda from November 2014 to March 2015.

The *Itorero* training can be commended for fostering Rwandanness rather than potentially divisive ethnic affiliations, while promoting courage, integrity, hard work, self-reliance, and upholding one's dignity. The scheme has also been important for sensitising HSLs regarding the values and sensibilities of Rwandan culture, the history of Rwanda, and current national development programs and policies.

According to HSLs, the *Itorero* training teaches them that a 'good citizen' is one who (i) obeys the law; (ii) is loyal to the state; (iii) preserves the community's common good; (iv) is a role model; and (v) respects the community's core values. This is roughly what we call the 'civic republican/communitarian' concept of citizenship. Given that *Itorero* is increasingly being diverted into a forum to teach about and recruit members for the ruling political party – the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) – we argue that the citizenship concept informing *Itorero* is likely to produce blind patriotism, unqualified loyalty and uncritical obedience to the RPF under the veil of 'good citizenship'. Against this backdrop, a different orientation for *Itorero* – centred on a 'critical-democratic-cosmopolitan' citizenship notion – is proposed here.

Summary of key findings

Our study sought to investigate the image of 'a good citizen' informing the *Itorero* training scheme for HSLs. To this end, attributes of a good citizen extracted from five citizenship conceptions were suggested to HSLs. These concepts include civic republicanism, communitarianism, liberalism, radical democracy, and cosmopolitanism. Using a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree) HSLs were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the idea that suggested items coincide with the image of a 'good citizen' fostered by *Itorero* teaching.

According to our results, the civic republican/communitarian scale receives greater recognition than other scales. Its mean is 17.41 (Standard Deviation hereafter SD = 1.99), with scores ranging between 9 and 20. Results indicate that the cosmopolitan notion comes in second place in informing the *Itorero* training with a mean of 17.38 (SD = 2.23), with scores ranging between 7 and 20. In the third place comes the conventional democratic notion, with a mean of 10.45 (SD = 2.58); its minimum and maximum scores are 2 and 16, respectively. The liberal notion of citizenship is ranked last, with a mean of 8.47 (SD = 1.91), the minimum score of 2 and the maximum score of 12. Results also indicate that HSLs describe the image of a 'good citizen' endorsed by *Itorero* training nearly in the same way regardless of their gender, marital status, age, and training period.

Empirical findings were complemented by qualitative data for triangulation purposes. In this regard, HSLs were asked to tell briefly how they would describe a 'good citizen' based on the teaching they received in the *Itorero* training. The following is an exemplary opinion:

According to the *Itorero* teaching, a 'good citizen' is one who loves the country. Loving the country at all times, this was constantly emphasized. A 'good citizen' loves the country

and is ready to fight and defend it in case its security is at stake. I remember at one time they [the trainers] put to us a saying that ‘you refuse your blood to the country, and dogs eat it up without pay’. The idea is that you may refuse to fight for your country and later you die shamefully in a foreign land. Your blood which you refused for your country is still lost. We were also told that ‘good citizens’ help each other... [P11]

Itorero district trainers were also requested to describe in a few words the image of a ‘good citizen’ they communicate to HSLs. Here is one of the answers:

Before I go any further, there is a slogan which we use most frequently and which could help you understand the image of a ‘good citizen’ we communicate. This slogan reads as follows: ‘I am an authentic Rwandan who loves her country and countrymen, strives for self-reliance, and upholds her dignity’. Do you understand who an authentic Rwandan is? The teaching we provide to HSLs is primarily meant to allow them to have the value of loving the country. When you love your country, by implication you love its inhabitants; the country is nothing rather than its people... [P51]

Regarding the question whether, according to NIC officials, the civic republican and communitarian notions of citizenship would inform the *Itorero* training for HSLs, the answer is very positive, as is apparent in the following view:

We teach that a ‘good Rwandan citizen’ is one who has values and taboos of the Rwandan culture and lives up to them. This allows her to love the country and its people. Second, it is someone who is happy about the way she is treated by the country. In response, she is ready to sacrifice herself for the country, and if the situation demands that, she is ready to fight and die for it. [P62]

Upon close scrutiny of some of the views of HSLs, trainers, and NIC officials, one is led to conclude that they depict ‘good citizenship’ according to civic republican and communitarian concepts, given the relative emphasis placed on patriotism, self-sacrifice, respect for community’s core values, and dedication

to the common good.

We argue that while civic republican and communitarian concepts contain constructive elements, such as fostering courage, self-sacrifice, patriotism, connectedness, and concern for the common, excessive pursuit of this citizenship model might not be helpful for post-genocide Rwanda. The civic republican/communitarian paradigm as it is practised in *Itorero* training is likely to produce uncritical and docile citizens. Perhaps paradoxically, it might also be seen to encourage fanaticism given the use of *Itorero* training as a forum to teach about and recruiting members for the RPF.

That the *Itorero* training for HSLs is partly an instrument for the ruling party to teach its driving ideology and recruit members was affirmed by a vast majority of *Itorero* trainers. Two examples follow:

Yes, on our site, trainees [HSLs] were given a talk about how the RPF delivered the country from the hands of killers. At the same occasion, RPF principles were explained; and HSLs were shown the progress so far made thanks to RPF leadership. At the end of the talk, interested trainees were asked to become members of the RPF and take the oath of allegiance. A good number of HSLs joined and took the oath of allegiance to the RPF, but nobody was forced to do so. [P54]

During the *Itorero* training for HSLs, because we have got powers to do so – by the way, I do not see any reason as to why we [trainers] should not do it – we provided HSLs with direct instructions about the RPF. At the end, a huge number of them became members. This activity was facilitated by the officials of the sector [*Umurenge*]. It was done in the evening recreation. [P53]

Given the problems associated with civic republican and communitarian notions, we propose a ‘critical-democratic-cosmopolitan’ citizenship notion for *Itorero*. In what follows, we characterize the proposed paradigm and outline its advantages.

Why should the Rwandan citizen be critical?

This policy brief argues that the attributes of a critical citizen are greatly needed in post-genocide Rwanda but largely neglected by the *Itorero* program. The features of a critical citizen – which we are advocating for – have immense potential to counteract the risks of indoctrination and fanaticism. This policy brief argues that being critical or, rather, engaging in political criticism should not be regarded as a threat or an indicator of crisis. Against this background, the present brief suggests that in educating HSLs for citizenship, *Itorero* should consider teaching them to be attentive and to critically monitor government institutions, policies and practices. This implies that *Itorero* should encourage HSLs to develop values opposing injustice, oppression, inequalities and discrimination – wherever these may occur. Such values do not currently feature on the list of core values that *Itorero* upholds. In addition to critical skills, HSLs should acquire democratic virtues and practices.

Towards a democratic citizenship notion in post-genocide Rwanda

Three features of a democratic citizen – which are advocated here – are lacking in *Itorero* and yet greatly needed in post-genocide Rwanda. These include political participation; public deliberation as free and equal citizens; and the enjoyment of civil, political and social rights. We argue that with regard to political participation, the democratic citizen avoids the danger of “civic privatism” in which people withdraw into their private life and refuse to engage in the public life. Political participation entails the capacity to reasonably engage with political events and to have a stake in them. The *Itorero* program does not currently emphasise political participation. For this study, HSLs were asked the following question: “Based on the teaching you received in *Itorero* training, how best would you describe a good citizen?” ‘Participating in politics’ was one of the options suggested to students. Surprisingly, this item received only the mean of 2.6

(SD = 0.88), which is only slightly above the average of 2.5, i.e. an indicative measure of accepting the attribute. The implication of this finding is that active participation in politics is not currently a core feature of the *Itorero* training.

Although *Itorero* is completed by community service [*Urugerero*] where HSLs perform various activities of public interest, these young people are ill-equipped with the necessary tools to meaningfully translate their political commitments into concrete actions. As a result, this study finds that the vast majority of HSLs who undergo *Itorero* training do not participate in community service.

Drawing on the findings of this study, this policy brief argues that the capacity to deliberate as free and equal citizens should constitute the second dimension of democratic citizenship needed for *Itorero*. We maintain that HSLs in post-genocide Rwanda absolutely need these democratic qualities. It is currently unclear, though, how *Itorero* training equips HSLs with deliberative skills such as persuasion, consensus, reasonableness, and ‘fair minded’ judgment. Against this backdrop, HSLs must learn to argue persuasively, while listening carefully to others, including those with whom they disagree.

We argue that an additional advantage of the democratic citizenship concept is that it includes educating people about their civil, political and social rights. A citizen is not only a bearer of responsibilities and duties but also entitled to rights and privileges. This policy brief argues that during *Itorero* training, HSLs should be instructed about their civil rights (e.g. their constitutional right to liberty and property, freedom of conscience and religion), political rights (e.g. the right to self-determination, hold and run for office, to enjoy freedom of speech and opinion), and social rights (e.g. the right to health care, employment, housing, education and old-age pension).

Arguments for cosmopolitan citizenship in post-genocide Rwanda

The cosmopolitan notion of citizenship, which is advocated here and which is largely lacking in *Itorero*, entails openness to the world. Cosmopolitan citizenship education does not mean rejecting one's national citizenship or according it a lower status. Instead, it enables the youth to make connections between their immediate (local and national) contexts and global realities. It is thus oriented towards the future and prepares young citizens to play an active role in shaping the world, at all levels, from the local to the global. Furthermore, cosmopolitan citizenship implies recognition of our common humanity and a sense of solidarity with others. In addition, cosmopolitan citizenship is committed to the view that, although people are often categorised according to race, nationality, class, or other divisions, there is only one humankind and global problems require global solutions. It is thus an invitation to consider humankind as one and to consider all human beings as our fellow city dwellers.

Openness to the world is a vital notion in post-genocide Rwanda. The proposal here for the adoption of cosmopolitanism throughout the *Itorero* program does not imply the rejection of the Rwandan identity. It is rather suggested that, given today's context of globalisation, there is a need to open HSLs' hearts and minds to larger identities and communities. This is particularly important in post-genocide Rwanda where people engaged in conflict and killed each other partly because of the failure to see and act beyond ethnic stereotypes. In fact, several studies have shown that opening the youth's hearts and minds to larger identities and communities is an efficient mechanism to transcend ethnocentric divisions and cleavages. For this reason, educating HSLs towards larger identities has the potential to allow them to transcend ethnic divisions and tensions.

The recognition and protection of humanity is another cosmopolitan idea that has the potential to

greatly benefit post-genocide Rwanda but is currently missing from the *Itorero* approach. Cosmopolitan citizenship places great emphasis on those features that unite human beings (their humanity) rather than those that divide them (e.g. ethnic affiliations in the context of Rwanda). Understood in this way, cosmopolitanism would allow HSLs to go beyond differences and focus on the common humanity inherent in all people.

In view of the above, the cosmopolitan citizenship notion that we advocate here seeks to ensure that HSLs consider all people (including all fellow Rwandans) not only as citizens but also as equals. We find the ideas of equality, solidarity, recognition of our common humanity, and focusing on what unites rather than what divides tremendously important in the Rwandan context. In our view, the notion of cosmopolitanism understood as recognition and protection of all humanity holds an enormous potential to free Rwandans from their ethnocentric thinking so as to allow them to appreciate 'others' who might be different.

Cosmopolitanism is therefore crucial because it would enable HSLs to recognise the right of all people to live a good life. Furthermore, present-day Rwanda is a home to people who returned from various corners of the world because of a long-standing history of marginalization and exclusion. In this context, where old and new returnees are negotiating their identities and loyalties as Rwandans, it is crucial for young people, particularly HSLs, to cultivate skills and dispositions of openness and trust towards groups from different backgrounds.

Conclusion

The transition from the civic republican/communitarian notions currently embedded within *Itorero* to the 'critical-democratic-cosmopolitan' citizenship notion in post-genocide Rwanda should be envisaged as a process; it is not something to be

achieved overnight. This transition calls for stages in both theory and practice. Regarding theory within the *Itorero* approach, we argue that it is important to start by introducing the critical aspect, then the democratic element and finally the cosmopolitan component. This would allow a progressive phasing out of old citizenship notions (civic republican/communitarian). In practical terms, the shift to a new citizenship notion entails some logistical adaptations. These include the time for *Itorero* policy makers to absorb the need for change, the amendment of the law establishing the NIC, particularly the article stipulating the mission of *Itorero*; the revision of *Itorero* training manuals; organizing the training for trainers; and the acquisition of didactic materials aligned to the new citizenship notion. We argue that failure to effect this transition, the *Itorero* training runs the risk of producing docile and uncritical citizens.