



## Re-weaving the Social Fabric: Home-Grown Solutions in Reconstructing Post-Genocide Rwanda

Mohamed Buheji <sup>1\*</sup>, Liberata Muhorakeye <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Founder, International Institute of Inspiration Economy, Bahrain

<sup>2</sup> Collaborative Researcher, International Institute of Inspiration Economy, Rwanda

\* Corresponding Author: **Ganesh Pal**

---

### Article Info

**ISSN (online):** 2583-8261

**Impact Factor (RSIF):** 8.41

**Volume:** 05

**Issue:** 01

**Received:** 22-11-2025

**Accepted:** 24-12-2025

**Published:** 26-01-2026

**Page No:** 145-161

### Abstract

This paper investigates the pivotal role of Rwanda's Home-Grown Solutions (HGS) in driving post-genocide socioeconomic development and fostering a resilient national identity. Following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda embarked on a unique path of reconstruction by deliberately reviving and institutionalising indigenous socio-political practices.

Initiatives such as Umuganda (community service), Gacaca (transitional justice courts), Imihigo (performance contracts), Umushyikirano (national dialogue), Girinka (One Cow per Family), and Abunzi (mediation committees) were strategically adapted to address contemporary challenges of justice, reconciliation, governance, and economic empowerment.

The study argues that these HGS function as an integrated, multi-layered mechanism for systemic cultural change. By embedding development within a framework of shared cultural values and collective responsibility, they simultaneously achieve tangible socioeconomic outcomes and reconstruct the nation's social fabric. The analysis demonstrates how HGS facilitate grassroots participation, promotes social cohesion, enhances accountability, and instils a unifying civic identity centred on "Rwandanness" rather than ethnic division.

Drawing on policy documents, impact assessments, and case studies, the paper highlights the substantial contributions of HGS, from the economic value of community labour and accelerated justice delivery to inclusive policymaking and poverty reduction. It concludes that the synergy between cultural preservation and modern governance in Rwanda's HGS model offers a transformative framework for nation-building, presenting valuable insights for post-conflict societies seeking sustainable and culturally resonant development pathways.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJSSER.2026.5.1.145-161>

**Keywords:** Home-Grown Solutions (HGS), Post-Genocide Reconstruction, Rwanda, Socioeconomic Development, National Identity, Social Cohesion, Ubudehe, Umuganda, Gacaca Courts, Participatory Governance, Cultural Resilience, African Development Models.

---

### Introduction

Rwanda's post-genocide reconstruction has been marked by an intentional and multifaceted approach to socioeconomic development and nation-building, where Home-Grown Solutions (HGS) converge to build a stable socioeconomic culture and to strengthen the country's national unity and identity. This integrated approach is not only central to cultural preservation but also to sustainable socioeconomic development.

Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2023) Home-Grown Solutions, such as Umuganda (community service), Ubudehe (community-based socioeconomic development), and Imihigo (performance contracts), are indigenous practices that enhance community engagement, governance, and social cohesion (Munyaneza & Uwimbabazi, 2016) <sup>[19]</sup>. These solutions integrate cultural goodwill values with modern development, reinforcing the sense of national identity and collective responsibility. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2024a) <sup>[2, 3, 4, 5]</sup>

This paper examines how Home-Grown Solutions interact to reinforce Rwanda's national identity. It explores the synergies between cultural preservation, creative expression, and indigenous innovation, arguing that such integration fosters cultural pride, unity, and sustainable development. By exploring these intersections, the study highlights the transformative potential of HGS in Rwanda's nation-building efforts. By exploring these intersections, the paper aims to highlight the transformative potential of combining Home-Grown Solutions in nation-building efforts. The study draws on a range of sources, including academic literature, policy documents, and case studies, to provide a comprehensive understanding of Rwanda's unique path toward cultural and national renewal.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Introduction to Rwanda's Home-Grown Solutions

According to the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB, 2026), Home-Grown Solutions (HGS) are Rwanda's distinctive, nationally recognised development approaches designed and implemented by Rwandans, drawing on local opportunities, cultural values, and historical experiences to accelerate socioeconomic development and strengthen national unity. These solutions reflect Rwanda's commitment to leveraging indigenous knowledge and participatory governance mechanisms to address development challenges in a sustainable and culturally relevant manner. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2023) <sup>[6, 7]</sup>

The most celebrated Home-Grown Initiatives (HGIs) in Rwanda include Umuganda, Gacaca, Abunzi, Imihigo, Ubudehe, Itorero and Ingando, Umushyikirano, Umwihero, and Girinka (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2014). These Home-Grown Solutions are firmly anchored in Rwanda's legal and policy framework and are protected at both national and international levels. At the national level, protected HGIs include Abunzi Committees, Gacaca, Girinka, Imihigo, Ndi Umunyarwanda, Ubudehe, Umuganda, Umwihero, Umushyikirano, and Kwita Izina, among others. Internationally, selected HGIs—particularly Abunzi, Imihigo, and Umushyikirano—have gained recognition as innovative governance and development models, highlighting Rwanda's experience in conflict resolution, performance-based leadership, and inclusive national dialogue (RGB, 2026). Sabiiti (2020) <sup>[35]</sup>.

The importance of Home-Grown Solutions is constitutionally grounded. The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of 2003, as amended in 2015, emphasises the preservation of national goodwill values and encourages Rwandans to develop indigenous mechanisms to address issues affecting

their society, Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2024a). As cited by RGB (2026), the Constitution underscores the responsibility of citizens to promote national culture, safeguard dignity, and actively contribute to nation-building through locally initiated solutions.

Being locally conceived and culturally embedded, Home-Grown Solutions are well adapted to Rwanda's socioeconomic and institutional context, Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2023) <sup>[6, 7]</sup>. They have played a central role in Rwanda's post-1994 reconstruction, reconciliation, and development efforts, particularly in restoring social cohesion, enhancing accountability in governance, promoting citizen participation, and fostering inclusive growth. Consequently, HGS continue to serve as a foundational pillar of Rwanda's transformation agenda following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

### 2.2. Home-Grown Solutions' (Background, Evolution, Institutional Frameworks)

#### 2.2.1. Umuganda

By definition and its cultural origins, Umuganda is an indigenous Rwandan practice whose name may be translated as "coming together in a common purpose to achieve a shared outcome." In traditional Rwandan society, community members mobilised family, friends, and neighbours to support one another in completing labour-intensive or challenging tasks. This collective approach strengthened social cohesion, solidarity, and mutual support within communities (Gatwa & Mboninkebe, 2019; Verma, 2025) <sup>[36]</sup>.

Households routinely worked together to share the burden of labour, ensuring that all members of the community had adequate shelter and that agricultural land was prepared in time for planting seasons.

Historically, Umuganda extended beyond general community work to include targeted support for vulnerable individuals. Activities included cultivating land for people unable to farm due to old age or physical disability, constructing houses for vulnerable households, and assisting with transportation to medical facilities for those in need (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2017).

Following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, *Umuganda* was revitalised as a key home-grown mechanism for rebuilding national unity, promoting reconciliation, and restoring trust among citizens. The practice was officially reintroduced by the Government of Rwanda in 1998 as part of the country's post-genocide reconstruction and nation-building strategy. Umuganda represents a compelling example of how a traditional cultural value has been transformed into an institutionalised tool for development, unity, and national pride (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2017; Verma, 2025) <sup>[36]</sup>.

Regarding organisation and participation, Umuganda is officially conducted on the last Saturday of each month, from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Participation is mandatory for all able-bodied citizens aged 18 to 65 years. However, in consultation with community members, local authorities may organise additional Umuganda activities more than once a month when necessary (RGB, 2017).



Source: Rwanda Parliament (2026) <sup>[23]</sup>

**Fig 1:** Illustrate 'Umuganda' in One of Rwanda Villages

For the coordination, the implementation of Umuganda is overseen by the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC), which serves as the central government authority responsible for its coordination. Other government institutions participate alongside key stakeholders, including Umuganda Supervising Committees, local leaders, and community members. These actors play a central role in planning, supervising, and executing Umuganda activities at all administrative levels (Rwandapedia, 2024) <sup>[28]</sup>.

### 2.2.2. Imihigo (Performance Contracts)

Imihigo is a performance-based approach deeply rooted in Rwandan culture. Traditionally, the *guhiga* (vowing) ceremony was presided over by the King, a chief, or the head of a clan or family. During this ceremony, individuals or groups publicly committed themselves to achieving specific objectives. The ritual involved the sharing of *inzoga y'Imihigo* (Imihigo beer), symbolising commitment, and the anticipation of *inzoga yo guhigura*, a beer reserved for performance reporting and consumed only by those who successfully fulfilled their pledges (Gatwa & Mbonyinkebe, 2019) <sup>[9]</sup>.

Historically, Imihigo was practised at both community and individual levels to define strategic military, political, economic, and social objectives. Participants publicly declared their commitments and later reported their achievements to leaders, peers, and the wider community through *guhiga ibigwi*, thereby reinforcing accountability, integrity, and collective responsibility (Rwandapedia, 2024) <sup>[28]</sup>.

Following Rwanda's post-1994 reconstruction and governance reforms, Imihigo was adapted from its traditional roots into a modern public-sector performance management

system. The Government of Rwanda formally introduced Imihigo in 2006 within the national planning framework of the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS), following the evaluation of the first phase of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP 2003–2005). This transition positioned Imihigo as a performance-based management tool aimed at strengthening strategic planning, accountability, and service delivery across both central and local government institutions (African Development Bank (AfDB), 2012; National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), 2023).

In the contemporary governance framework, activities included in Imihigo (performance contracts) are derived from key national and sub-national planning and policy instruments, including Sector Strategic Plans (SSPs), District Development Plans (DDPs), Cabinet resolutions, National Consultations (*Umushyikirano*), leadership retreats, and grassroots consultations. These activities are aligned with Rwanda's national development agenda and are clustered under the three pillars of the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1 and NST2), namely economic transformation, social transformation, and transformational governance (NISR, 2023).

In its current institutional form, Imihigo—commonly referred to as performance contracts—is signed annually between the President of the Republic, line ministries, and local government authorities. These contracts define clear and measurable targets derived from national priorities and community needs. Implementation follows a cascading framework, whereby targets are translated from the central government to districts and lower administrative levels, supported by systematic monitoring, evaluation, and public performance reviews (NISR, 2023).



Source: Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC), (2023) [17, 18].

Fig 2: The best 'Imihigo' Achievers Award

Imihigo targets are further informed by periodic evaluations of previous implementation cycles. At the district level, public accountability days are organised at the end of each quarter to disseminate performance findings and to receive feedback from citizens on service delivery and development outcomes. This feedback informs corrective measures and supports continuous performance improvement. In addition, an annual evaluation is conducted by a national quality assurance team to assess the extent to which districts and institutions have achieved their objectives and contributed to improvements in the socioeconomic well-being of citizens (AfDB, 2012). Overall, this institutional arrangement promotes transparency, accountability, and citizen-centred service delivery, positioning Imihigo as a cornerstone of Rwanda's results-based governance system.

### 2.2.3. Juridictions Gacaca

Gacaca jurisdictions represent an ancient and indigenous form of conflict resolution within Rwandan society. Traditionally, Gacaca was used to resolve disputes arising within the community and to restore social peace and harmony. Hearings were conducted publicly, allowing community members to participate actively in the justice process and reinforcing collective responsibility for social order (Buheji & Muhorakeye, 2023a) [6, 7].

The Gacaca courts were led by respected community members known as *Inyangamugayo*, literally meaning "people of integrity" or individuals who detest dishonour. These leaders were selected based on their moral standing, honesty, and wisdom rather than formal legal training. Their role was to guide deliberations, encourage truth-telling, and ensure fairness in the resolution of disputes (Hankel, 2019) [12].

Traditionally, Gacaca addressed a wide range of conflicts, including violations of agreements, property damage, inheritance disputes, and cases involving physical violence. The primary objective of these proceedings was not punishment alone but the restoration of social relationships and community cohesion. Judgments were guided by two core considerations: first, the restoration of peace and harmony within the community, and second, the delivery of

a verdict that acknowledged wrongdoing and promoted accountability (Buheji & Muhorakeye, 2023b; Hankel, 2019) [12].

In the years following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda faced an unprecedented judicial challenge, with more than 120,000 individuals detained on suspicion of participation in genocide-related crimes. Addressing such an overwhelming caseload through conventional justice mechanisms alone was not feasible. Consequently, Rwanda adopted a multi-tiered judicial response composed of three complementary mechanisms: The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), the national court system, and the Gacaca courts (ICTR, 2014).

In this context, Rwanda transformed the traditional Gacaca system into a modern, legally recognised mechanism of transitional justice. Through Organic Law No. 40/2000 and subsequent legal amendments, Gacaca jurisdictions were formally established in 2001 and became fully operational nationwide by 2005. This adaptation aimed not only to accelerate the prosecution of genocide-related crimes but also to promote truth-telling, reconciliation, and community participation in the justice process (Government of Rwanda, 2004).

Institutionally, the Gacaca jurisdictions were organised in accordance with Rwanda's administrative structure to enhance accessibility, community participation, and local ownership of the justice process. In each Cell, a Cell Gacaca Court was established, while each Sector hosted both a Sector Gacaca Court and a Sector Gacaca Court of Appeal. These courts were mandated, within the limits set by the Organic Law, to try offences constituting the crime of genocide and crimes against humanity committed between 1 October 1990 and 31 December 1994.

This decentralised institutional arrangement enabled cases to be adjudicated within the communities where the crimes had been committed, thereby strengthening community engagement, truth-telling, and reconciliation. By situating justice at the grassroots level, the Gacaca system reinforced public participation and contributed to rebuilding trust between citizens and state institutions in the aftermath of the genocide (Republic of Rwanda, 2004).



Source: Ingelaere (2019) <sup>[13]</sup>

Fig 3: Reparation in Rwanda's Gacaca Court

#### 2.2.4. Umushyikirano as a Home-Grown Governance Solution

Umushyikirano is a Rwandan home-grown governance solution that refers to the National Dialogue Council, a formal and inclusive platform for dialogue between citizens and their leaders. Rooted in Rwanda's history and cultural values, Umushyikirano draws from traditional practices of consultation, dialogue, and consensus-building, which were historically used to resolve communal challenges and guide collective decision-making. As such, Umushyikirano represents an indigenous model of participatory governance, strengthening citizen engagement, accountability, and national problem-solving in Rwanda (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016; Republic of Rwanda, (2026)).

The National Umushyikirano Council (NUC) is constitutionally established under Article 140 of the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of 4 June 2003, as revised to date. The Council brings together the President of the Republic and representatives of Rwandan citizens from various sectors and is mandated to convene at least once a year to deliberate on issues of national importance. Participants include members of the Cabinet and Parliament, representatives of local government authorities, civil society organisations, the media, the Rwandan community abroad, the diplomatic community, and other stakeholders invited by the President. To ensure broad inclusiveness, citizens who are unable to attend physically may participate through telephone calls, SMS, and social media platforms, while the

proceedings are broadcast live on television and radio to allow nationwide engagement (Republic of Rwanda, 2003a; Republic of Rwanda, 2026).

The National Umushyikirano Council (NUC) provides a national platform where Rwandans collectively assess issues related to the state of the nation, the performance of decentralised governance structures, and national unity. Each Umushyikirano session is organised around a specific annual theme, and from 2003 to 2025, a wide range of national development and governance topics have been discussed. For example, the 2013 theme, "*Building Rwandan Spirit for Sustainable Development*," emphasised national values and citizen responsibility, while the 2014 theme, "*Common Vision, New Momentum*," focused on strengthening unity and accelerating development outcomes (Gasana, 2024) <sup>[8]</sup>.

The significance and purpose of Umushyikirano were clearly articulated by Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, during the 2012 National Dialogue Council. He emphasised that Umushyikirano serves as a space where diverse perspectives, capacities, methods of action, and even differing political views are brought together in pursuit of consensus. The overarching aim, he noted, is to foster mutual understanding and agreement that advances national development and improves the wellbeing of all Rwandans. In this context, Umushyikirano embodies dialogue as a tool for unity, collective responsibility, and sustainable development (Gasana, 2024) <sup>[8]</sup>.



Source: MINALOC (2023)

**Fig 4:** 18<sup>th</sup> National Umushyikirano Council Opens in Kigali

At the close of each National Umushyikirano Council session, participants adopt NUC resolutions, which are consensus-based decisions reflecting citizens' concerns, priorities, and proposals raised during Umushyikirano deliberations. These resolutions guide government action and accountability mechanisms and are generally classified into four main clusters: economic development, governance, social affairs, and justice (Republic of Rwanda, 2003; Republic of Rwanda, 2026).

#### 2.2.5. Girinka Munyarwanda

The term *Girinka*, which translates as “*may you have cows,*” is a traditional Rwandan greeting that functions as a form of blessing bestowed upon those one meets. In Rwandan culture, cattle have historically symbolised wealth, social status, and prestige, and are regarded as one of the most valued gifts that can be offered. Beyond their symbolic value, cows provide essential by-products such as milk, meat, and blood-based foods, which contribute significantly to household nutrition. Additionally, cow hides are traditionally used as carpets and for house decoration, while cow horns serve practical purposes such as seed storage. In customary marriage practices, cattle are also given as dowry by the groom to the bride's family, underscoring their cultural and socioeconomic importance (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2018).

Girinka Munyarwanda, also known as the *One Cow per Family* Program, is a flagship Home-Grown Solution (HGS)

that is deeply rooted in Rwandan culture and traditional values of solidarity and mutual support. The Program emerged from the resolutions of the National Umushyikirano Council (NUC) in 2006, with the primary objectives of combating malnutrition through increased milk consumption, enhancing agricultural productivity through the use of organic manure, and improving household incomes through the sale of milk and related products (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016b, 2018).

The Girinka Program is coordinated by the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB), an agency under the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI). RAB is responsible for the selection, certification, and distribution of cows, as well as the management of the centralized budget and donations in the form of both funds and livestock. In addition, the Board oversees the training of beneficiaries in animal husbandry practices and conducts Program monitoring and evaluation. At the district level, each district appoints a focal person to facilitate coordination and implementation. The Program is implemented nationwide through a collaborative partnership involving the Government of Rwanda, the private sector, civil society organisations, and non-governmental institutions, which contribute by providing cows to vulnerable households with the aim of improving their socioeconomic welfare (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2018).



Source: (Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), 2016).

**Fig 5 & 6:** Illustrate 'Girinka Program, where A Vulnerable Woman being Given Cow and the Outcome of the Girinka program that supports feeding children at School

### 2.2.6. Abunzi committee

According to the Ministry of Justice (MINIJUST, 2020), *Abunzi* can be translated as "those who reconcile" or "those who bring together," derived from the verb *kunga*. In traditional Rwandan society, *Abunzi* were respected men within their communities, recognised for their personal integrity, and were called upon to intervene in the event of disputes. Each party to a conflict would select a trusted individual, known for problem-solving abilities and perceived impartiality, in order to avoid alienating either side. The primary objective of the *Abunzi* system was to resolve disputes amicably, reconcile conflicting parties, and restore harmony within the affected community. Sabiti (2020) [35]. The *Abunzi* system was reintroduced in 2004 as part of Rwanda's post-genocide justice and governance reforms (MINIJUST, 2026). Drawing on the experience of the *Gacaca* courts, the Government of Rwanda opted to institutionalise traditional methods of conflict resolution through *Abunzi* in order to empower communities to address and resolve disputes at the local level before resorting to the

formal court system. This approach was intended to complement existing dispute resolution mechanisms, strengthen unity and reconciliation, reduce the cost and time associated with formal judicial processes—particularly for vulnerable populations—and alleviate the backlog of cases in ordinary courts (MINIJUST, 2020).

The legal framework governing *Abunzi* committees is established under Law No. 37/2016 of 8 September 2016, which defines their organisation, jurisdiction, competence, and functioning. This law was subsequently amended by Law No. 020/2020 of 19 November 2020, further clarifying the mandate and procedural responsibilities of *Abunzi* committees (Republic of Rwanda, 2020). Under this legal framework, *Abunzi* are authorised to mediate specific civil and minor criminal disputes, ensuring that local conflicts are resolved amicably before parties escalate cases to formal courts. *Abunzi* committees operate at both cell and sector administrative levels, reinforcing community-based access to justice (MINIJUST, 2020).



Source: (Sabiti, 2020)

**Fig 7:** Illustrate 'Abunzi Committee' that brings in the Rwandan Legacy of Mediation Justice

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive case study approach to explore the role and impact of Rwanda's Home-Grown Solutions (HGS). The research is grounded in

documentary analysis, drawing on a wide range of secondary sources to construct a comprehensive understanding. These sources include official government publications, policy documents, and impact assessments from Rwandan

institutions such as the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), the National Institute of Statistics (NISR), and relevant ministries. Furthermore, the analysis incorporates academic literature, peer-reviewed journal articles, and reports from international organizations to provide multiple perspectives and contextual depth.

The methodological process involved the systematic collection, review, and thematic synthesis of this documentary evidence. Key HGS programs—including Umuganda, Gacaca, Imihigo, Umushyikirano, Girinka, and Abunzi—were identified as primary units of analysis. For each solution, data was organized to trace its historical evolution, institutional framework, stated objectives, and documented socio-economic outcomes. This structured review enabled the identification of recurrent themes related to community participation, governance innovation, social cohesion, and economic development, which form the core of the paper's analysis.

By synthesising insights from this triangulated body of evidence, the methodology facilitates an integrative assessment of how these indigenous mechanisms collectively contribute to Rwanda's post-genocide nation-building. The case study design allows for an in-depth exploration of the unique Rwandan context, examining the interconnection between cultural revival, policy implementation, and measurable development results as presented in the available literature and official records.

#### **4. Case Study – Role of Rwanda's Home-Grown Solutions in Socioeconomic Contributions and National Identity**

This section examines how Rwanda's Home-Grown Solutions (HGS) contribute to the country's socioeconomic development and foster national unity. It highlights the ways initiatives such as Umuganda, Gacaca Courts, Umushyikirano, Girinka Program, and Abunzi Committees enhance economic welfare, improve community livelihoods, promote social cohesion, and reinforce a shared sense of national identity.

##### **4.1. Role of Umuganda**

According to the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB, October 2017), the contributions of Umuganda can be understood through two main dimensions. First, Umuganda contributes to socioeconomic development through activities such as infrastructure development, environmental protection, community sanitation, and the implementation of government development programs. Second, through community meetings and interactions conducted within its framework, Umuganda facilitates information sharing, strengthens social cohesion, and promotes peacebuilding and reconciliation across the country.

In terms of monetary achievements, the value of Umuganda activities, as consolidated by the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC), was estimated at RWF 106 billion (approximately USD 127 million) for the period 2007–2016. This represents a substantial contribution to the national budget, as resources that would otherwise have been required to implement these activities were saved and reallocated to other priority development programs (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2017).

The estimated annual value of Umuganda increased from Rwf 12 billion in 2012 to Rwf 19 billion in 2016, and exceeded Rwf 22.8 billion by 2024. In relevance to

infrastructure, Umuganda contributed nearly 62% of the total cost for constructing classrooms for the Nine and Twelve Years Basic Education (9&12YBE) programs. Also, Umuganda helped to construct more over 3,400 houses for vulnerable people between 2017 and 2018, alongside environmental initiatives like terracing and tree planting.

Beyond its financial contribution, Umuganda has significantly supported socioeconomic development. Community works conducted under Umuganda have facilitated the construction and rehabilitation of infrastructure such as roads and bridges, improving the transportation of goods and people. In addition, soil stabilisation and erosion control activities have helped protect agricultural land, thereby enhancing agricultural productivity. Tree-planting initiatives undertaken during Umuganda have also contributed to environmental protection and sustainable natural resource management (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2017).

Umuganda has further played a critical role in promoting good governance, unity, and reconciliation. By bringing community members together on a regular basis, it strengthens social interaction, fosters mutual understanding, and promotes cooperation among neighbours. The platform also supports conflict resolution through community-based arbitration, contributing to peaceful coexistence and social harmony (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2017).

Moreover, Umuganda contributes to social protection and community welfare by supporting the construction of houses for vulnerable households, schools, health facilities, and the preparation of settlement sites for those in need. Through these combined contributions, Umuganda remains a key home-grown solution for inclusive development and social cohesion in Rwanda (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2017).

##### **4.2. Role of Imihigo (Performance Contracts)**

Imihigo contributes directly to the achievement of Rwanda's national development objectives as articulated in key policy frameworks, notably the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1). NST1 aims to attain high standards of living for all Rwandans, promote economic transformation, and strengthen accountable governance. Through performance contracts, public institutions and leaders commit to clearly defined and measurable targets, thereby reinforcing efficiency, transparency, and citizen-centered service delivery (African Development Bank Group [AfDB], 2012c; National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda [NISR], 2023).

As a governance and management tool, Imihigo plays a central role in the planning and implementation of development programs in Rwanda. Performance targets under Imihigo are derived from national and sub-national development frameworks, including Vision 2020, the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS), and successive National Strategies for Transformation (NST1 and NST2). This alignment ensures that government institutions at all levels are held accountable for delivering concrete results consistent with national socioeconomic priorities (NISR, 2023).

Evidence shows that Imihigo has contributed to improved service delivery in critical sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, agriculture, and social protection. By establishing clear indicators and timelines, performance

contracts enhance efficiency in public investment implementation and promote prudent use of public resources. At the district level, Imihigo has supported local development initiatives including feeder road construction, access to clean water and sanitation, development of schools and health facilities, agricultural productivity enhancement, and job creation, thereby improving community living standards (AfDB, 2012).

Furthermore, Imihigo promotes decentralisation and inclusive development by integrating District Development Plans (DDPs) and community-identified priorities into performance contracts. This approach ensures that development interventions respond to local needs while remaining aligned with national policy objectives, contributing to poverty reduction and balanced regional development (NISR, 2023).

#### 4.3. Role of Gacaca Court System

Between June 2002 and June 2012, the Gacaca court system operated extensively across Rwanda, comprising 12,103 courts nationwide and supported by a total of 16,442 judges (*Inyangamugayo*), of whom 34.3% were women and 65.7% were men. During this period, 1,951,388 cases related to the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi were tried through Gacaca courts (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016).

The scale and efficiency of the Gacaca courts generated significant economic benefits for the Rwandan state, particularly by reducing the costs associated with prolonged pre-trial detention and prison maintenance. Following the genocide, national prisons were severely overcrowded due to the large number of accused individuals awaiting trial, creating a substantial financial burden on the government.

Compared to the formal national court system and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), Gacaca courts processed cases at a much faster rate. This accelerated adjudication significantly reduced the backlog of genocide-related cases, leading to a decline in prolonged incarceration. As a result, prison overcrowding decreased, public expenditure on detention and prison operations was lowered, and pressure on the national economy was eased. The efficiency of the Gacaca system therefore, contributed not only to justice delivery but also to post-genocide economic recovery (Penal Reform International [PRI], 2010; Haberstock, 2014) <sup>[14, 11]</sup>.

Through community service (*Travaux d'Intérêt Général – TIG*), convicted individuals contributed unpaid labor to public works such as road rehabilitation, construction of houses for genocide survivors, environmental protection, and agricultural infrastructure. This converted punishment into productive economic activity, reducing the need for government-funded labor and generating direct economic value for communities. At the same time, it avoided the financial burden of continued imprisonment (Penal Reform International [PRI], 2010).

In addition, the timely adjudication of cases enabled many convicted individuals—particularly those who confessed and received reduced sentences—to be released earlier and reintegrated into their communities. Upon release, these individuals were able to participate in productive economic activities and contribute to local community development, further reinforcing the socioeconomic impact of the Gacaca system.

The Gacaca courts played a critical role in fostering

reconciliation by enabling victims to learn the truth about the fate of their family members and relatives. At the same time, perpetrators were given an opportunity to confess their crimes publicly, express remorse, and seek forgiveness before their communities. This restorative justice dimension distinguished Gacaca from purely retributive judicial mechanisms and contributed to rebuilding social cohesion at the grassroots level. The Gacaca courts officially concluded their mandate on 4 May 2012, marking the end of a central chapter in Rwanda's transitional justice process (ICTR, 2014).

The Gacaca courts significantly enhanced civic participation in post-genocide Rwanda by directly involving citizens in the administration of justice. Community members elected the *Inyangamugayo* (persons of integrity) to preside over proceedings, while public hearings enabled broad participation in truth-telling and evidence-sharing. This participatory approach strengthened democratic practices, promoted local leadership, and reinforced the belief that communities themselves were best placed to establish the truth about crimes committed within their midst. As a result, citizens developed a strong sense of ownership over justice and national recovery processes, contributing to long-term social resilience (Buheji & Muhorakeye, 2023a; Penal Reform International [PRI], 2010).

In addition to strengthening civic engagement, the Gacaca courts made a substantial contribution to rebuilding national unity by promoting transparency, dialogue, and collective healing. Proceedings were conducted publicly, allowing community members to witness trials and actively engage in discussions about past atrocities. This openness brought hidden grievances, resentment, and unresolved tensions into the open, enabling them to be addressed in a structured and inclusive manner (Haberstock, 2014).

Through direct interaction between victims and perpetrators, Gacaca created spaces for truth-telling, confession, and acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Victims and their families were able to learn the circumstances surrounding the deaths of their loved ones, providing a level of moral and psychological closure that conventional judicial systems often fail to achieve. At the same time, perpetrators were given the opportunity to admit responsibility, express remorse, and seek forgiveness, thereby fostering accountability and reintegration at the community level (Haberstock, 2014) <sup>[11]</sup>.

The emphasis on dialogue and truth facilitated mutual understanding and reconciliation, helping communities overcome fear, mistrust, and social fragmentation. By openly confronting the past, Gacaca also served an important educational function, particularly for younger generations, by documenting the causes and consequences of genocide and reinforcing shared values of unity, justice, and peaceful coexistence. In this way, the Gacaca courts functioned not only as a judicial mechanism but also as a foundational pillar for rebuilding Rwanda's social fabric and strengthening national cohesion and resilience (Buheji & Muhorakeye, 2023b).

#### 4.4. Role of National Umushyikirano Council (NUC)

Through Umushyikirano meetings, five highly impactful innovations have emerged, significantly contributing to Rwanda's socioeconomic development and national unity. Some of these innovations include the Electricity Access

Rollout Program, 9- and 12-Year Basic Education, Umwarimu SACCO, etc. They originated from various National Umushyikirano Council (NUC) deliberations across key sectors such as agriculture and animal husbandry, infrastructure development, education, justice, and social protection.

Umushyikirano has served as a popular platform that enables citizens and their leaders to openly discuss national development Programs, identify challenges, and propose solutions to improve efficiency. Citizens who are unable to attend in person participate through telephone calls, SMS, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, or by following the discussions live on television and radio (Mutebi, 2024).

Umushyikirano fostered a strong sense of national ownership over development Programs, with the objective of reducing Rwanda's dependence on foreign aid and ultimately achieving economic self-sufficiency, Buheji and Muhorakeye (2023a). This commitment to self-reliance led to the establishment of the Agaciro Development Fund, which was initiated by Rwandans in December 2011 during the ninth Umushyikirano as Rwanda's sovereign wealth fund. In 2012, Umushyikirano was convened under the theme "Agaciro: Aiming for Self-Reliance," focusing on the promotion of values and principles of self-reliance, Mushimiyimana and Buheji (2024). The discussions emphasised home-grown solutions and self-development approaches adopted by Rwandans, under the guiding theme "Strive for our dignity; together we pitch for rapid development" (Mutebi, 2024; Rutikurabanzi, 2023) <sup>[29]</sup>.

In the same year, the National Umushyikirano Council (NUC) deliberated on the second Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS II), which was published in May 2013 and implemented until 2018. EDPRS II constituted a series of medium-term national strategies aimed at poverty reduction and economic development in line with the implementation of *Vision 2020*. *Vision 2020* translated Rwandans' aspirations for national recovery and transformation following the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, providing a framework of priorities to overcome poverty, foster unity, and promote reconciliation. As a result, Rwanda recorded strong economic and social performance, with average economic growth of 7.2 per cent per year over the decade to 2019, while per capita GDP grew at an average rate of 5 per cent (Mutebi, 2024; Rutikurabanzi, 2023) <sup>[29]</sup>.

The National Umushyikirano Council (NUC) has also contributed to national infrastructure development through its role in shaping and supporting key socioeconomic programs. One such initiative is the Electricity Access Roll-Out Program (EARP), which was launched in 2009 as a strategic program aimed at expanding access to electricity and stimulating economic growth in Rwanda. The program was implemented within the framework of the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategies (EDPRS I and EDPRS II).

The first phase of EARP (2009–2012) focused on increasing electricity connections from approximately 130,000 households (6 per cent) in 2009 to about 350,000 households (16 per cent) by the end of 2012. Priority was accorded to connecting essential social infrastructure, including health facilities, schools, and administrative offices, in order to

enhance access to public services and promote inclusive development.

The second phase of EARP (2013–2017) significantly scaled up national electrification efforts, with the objective of achieving a cumulative household electricity access rate of 70 per cent, consisting of 48 per cent on-grid connections and 22 per cent off-grid solutions. Additionally, the program aimed to ensure 100 per cent electricity access for health centres, schools, and key administrative offices nationwide (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016).

Beyond electrification, other major infrastructure development initiatives were also highlighted. These include the Kivu Belt Road, which was opened in 2017 and connects five districts in the Western Province—Rusizi, Nyamasheke, Karongi, Rutsiro, and Rubavu—while strengthening regional linkages with neighbouring countries, notably the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi. Furthermore, Gisagara District, which for a long time had been identified as Rwanda's only district without a tarmac road, was connected through the Huye–Ndora road in 2020. Additional road projects include the Nyaruguru–Huye road and the Gicumbi–Base road (Rutikurabanzi, 2023) <sup>[29]</sup>.

In the health sector, Rwanda has made substantial investments in infrastructure, resulting in the construction of more than 510 health centres, 1,245 health posts, and 56 hospitals nationwide. These achievements reflect continued progress in strengthening service delivery. Moreover, Rwanda has emerged as a hub for biomedical innovation. In December 2023, the German biotechnology company BioNTech inaugurated its first African manufacturing site in Kigali, aimed at supporting the production of mRNA vaccines and enhancing local pharmaceutical capacity (Rutikurabanzi, 2023) <sup>[29]</sup>.

In addition to infrastructure development, the National Umushyikirano Council (NUC) has generated several innovative reforms aimed at strengthening the education sector. One of the most significant initiatives is the Nine Years Basic Education (9YBE) Program, which emerged from the resolutions of the 5th National Umushyikirano Council held in 2007. The Program was designed to ensure universal access to basic education by integrating six years of primary education with the first three years of lower secondary education (Tronc Commun). Its primary objective is to guarantee equitable access to free and compulsory basic education for all children in Rwanda, thereby enhancing human capital development and promoting social inclusion (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016f; Republic of Rwanda, 2008).

In terms of achievements, a total of 3,172 classrooms were constructed under the 9YBE Program through a collaborative effort between parents and the Government of Rwanda. This expansion of educational infrastructure contributed significantly to Rwanda's progress toward the Millennium Development Goals, particularly the goal of achieving universal primary education. As a result of the Program's implementation, enrolment in basic education reached approximately 97 percent. This achievement has played a critical role in advancing Rwanda's vision of building a knowledge-based economy, as articulated in *Vision 2020* (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016).



Source: (RGB, 2016).

**Fig 8:** 9YBE Classrooms under construction for Rural Pupils

Another major innovation arising from the National Umushyikirano Council is Umwarimu SACCO (Savings and Credit Cooperative), a financial cooperative established to improve the socioeconomic welfare of teachers in Rwanda. The term “Umwarimu” means teacher, reflecting the SACCO’s exclusive focus on educators. The initiative originated from resolutions of the National Umushyikirano Council held in 2004, during which teachers’ welfare and access to affordable financial services were identified as national priorities (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016).

Following these resolutions, Umwarimu SACCO officially commenced operations in 2008, initially covering all 30 districts of Rwanda at that time. Its establishment was driven by the education sector, with the objective of mobilising teachers’ savings and providing accessible credit facilities tailored to their professional and social needs. Over time, the SACCO expanded its reach nationwide and currently serves teachers at all levels of education, including pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016).

The growth of Umwarimu SACCO was supported by nationwide sensitisation campaigns aimed at encouraging a culture of saving and cooperative membership among teachers. Between 2009 and 2015, the SACCO recorded substantial growth in membership, increasing by approximately 89 per cent, which corresponds to an average annual growth rate of nearly 15 per cent. This expansion demonstrates the SACCO’s effectiveness in addressing teachers’ financial needs and its contribution to broader national objectives of financial inclusion and socioeconomic development (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016k).

#### 4.5. Abunzi committee

Overall, Abunzi committees contribute significantly to local governance, access to justice, reconciliation, and social stability in Rwanda by providing an inclusive and culturally rooted mechanism for conflict resolution. The Abunzi system in Rwanda is a free and decentralised community-based justice mechanism that operates in close proximity to disputing parties. By resolving disputes at the grassroots

level, Abunzi committees play a significant role in reducing both the financial costs and the time associated with formal court proceedings. This dual benefit of saving time and money enables community members to avoid prolonged litigation and instead devote their time to productive and income-generating activities. Consequently, the Abunzi system not only enhances access to justice but also promotes social harmony and peaceful coexistence within communities (Ministry of Justice [MINIJUST], 2020).

Following the institutionalisation of Abunzi committees within Rwanda’s justice system, annual reports from the Ministry of Justice indicate a steady volume of cases received and resolved at the community level, Sabiiti (2020) <sup>[35]</sup>. Specifically, Abunzi committees received 40,111 cases in the 2014/2015 fiscal year, 47,966 cases in 2015/2016, 51,016 cases in 2016/2017, 50,878 cases in 2017/2018, and 48,989 cases in 2018/2019. Across all these fiscal years, the resolution rate consistently exceeded 90 per cent, demonstrating the effectiveness of Abunzi committees in managing local disputes and reducing the burden on formal courts (Ministry of Justice [MINIJUST], 2020) <sup>[15]</sup>.

Considering that dispute and conflict resolution is conducted within the community, Abunzi committees—operating at the grassroots level—are widely regarded as effective local actors. Their close and continuous interaction with disputing parties enables contextual understanding of conflicts, which contributes significantly to peacebuilding processes. Through mediation and reconciliation, the Abunzi system has played an important role in strengthening the social fabric, restoring trust, and reinforcing reconciliation among community members (Ministry of Justice [MINIJUST], 2020) <sup>[15]</sup>.

#### 4.6. Girinka Program

Between 2006 and 2016, a total of 297,060 cows were distributed to an equivalent number of vulnerable households under the Girinka Program, benefiting approximately 1,217,946 Rwandans nationwide (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016). The distribution of cows to poor households led to a substantial increase in milk production, which contributed to the reduction of malnutrition and supported poverty alleviation efforts among beneficiary

families. Beyond nutritional benefits, the Girinka Program has demonstrated strong potential to enhance crop production and household incomes. For crop–dairy farmers, who constitute the majority of Rwanda’s agricultural producers, livestock provides an essential source of organic fertiliser, particularly in a context where inorganic fertilisers remain insufficient and costly (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2018).

Beyond its direct economic and nutritional benefits, the Girinka Program has also played a significant role in strengthening social cohesion through community-based practices such as the cow pass-on mechanism (*kwitura*), which reinforces unity, solidarity, and shared responsibility among beneficiaries. In Rwandan culture, the act of gifting a cow establishes a lasting social bond between the giver and the recipient, thereby fostering mutual trust and communal support (Buheji & Muhorakeye, 2023a; Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2016g, 2018).

The identification of beneficiaries is conducted at the *umudugudu* (village) level, where local leaders and community members jointly participate in the selection process. This approach demonstrates active citizen participation in the implementation of government socioeconomic Programs (Rwanda Governance Board [RGB], 2018).

## 5. Role of Rwanda’s Home-Grown Solution in Re-Wiring its Culture

### 5.1. Role of Rwanda's Home-Grown Solutions in Creating Multi-layered Cultural Change.

Rwanda's Home-Grown Solutions (HGS) has created a deliberate suite of policies and cultural programs designed to rebuild the social fabric, foster unity, and drive development after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Their mechanism for cultural change is multi-layered, iterative, and deeply embedded in Rwanda's context.

HGS bring key mechanisms through which they create cultural change. The core philosophy of Rwanda’s HGS is that it is context-specific and participatory. The primary mechanism is the rejection of one-size-fits-all external models. Instead, HGS draw from pre-colonial Rwandan culture (like *Gacaca* and *Umuganda*). Besides, the grassroots participation, ensuring ownership and legitimacy creating unifying narrative ("*Ndi Umunyarwanda*" – I am Rwandan) to transcend ethnic divisions. This makes HGS culturally resonant and psychologically acceptable to the population. Buheji *et al.* (2024)

### 5.2. Key HGS Programs and Their Specific Mechanisms for Change

Table (1) summarises how the HGS brought a specific mechanism for cultural change that led to specific outcomes.

**Table 1**

Home-Grown Solution	Mechanism for Cultural Change	Intended Outcome
Gacaca Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Transitional Justice &amp; Collective Truth-Telling: Replaced a collapsed Western-style justice system.</li> <li>-Communities tried genocide suspects locally (except planners).</li> <li>-Perpetrators confessing received reduced sentences, often commuted to community service.</li> <li>-Victims heard the truth about lost relatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Catharsis &amp; Social Repair: Created a shared, public record of events. Forced interaction and a form of reconciliation at the grassroots level.</li> <li>-Aimed to clear the emotional poison of secrecy and lies.</li> </ul>
Ingando & Itorero	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Re-education &amp; Re-socialisation: Ingando are solidarity camps for returnees, ex-combatants, leaders, and students.</li> <li>-Itorero are civic academies moulding values.</li> <li>-They teach national history, the constitution, and the vision of a unified Rwanda.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Reshaping Identity &amp; Ideology: Deconstructs genocide ideology and rebuilds a civic national identity (Rwandanness) over ethnic identity.</li> <li>-Creates a cadre of citizens imbued with the values of responsibility and service.</li> </ul>
Umuganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Mandatory Community Service: On the last Saturday of each month, all able-bodied adults (18-65) perform community projects—building schools, cleaning, terracing.</li> <li>-Leaders participate alongside citizens.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Social Cohesion &amp; Shared Purpose: Creates a habitual, tangible experience of working together for the common good. Breaks down social barriers through shared labour.</li> <li>-Fosters a culture of mutual obligation and collective responsibility.</li> </ul>
Ubudehe	<p>Participatory Poverty Assessment &amp; Mutual Support: Communities categorise themselves into wealth brackets through consensus. This data targets pro-poor programs. Historically, it referred to collective farming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Social Contract &amp; Eradicating Dependency: Encourages self-reliance and community-based problem-solving.</li> <li>-Reinforces the idea that development is a collective effort, reducing stigma and envy through transparency.</li> </ul>
Girinka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Asset Transfer &amp; Dignity: "One Cow Per Poor Family" program.</li> <li>-The first female calf is passed on to a neighbour, creating a chain.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Social Cohesion &amp; Economic Empowerment: Cows are deeply culturally valued.</li> <li>-It restores dignity, provides nutrition (milk), and creates organic fertiliser, linking to agricultural productivity.</li> <li>-The "pass-on" mechanism builds interdependence.</li> </ul>
Ndi Umunyarwanda	<p>Public Dialogue &amp; Confession: A nationwide program where communities hold dialogues about the genocide's causes. Citizens, including leaders, publicly confess to holding divisive ideologies or stereotypes and ask for forgiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Psychological Transformation: Aims to uproot the deeply ingrained prejudices that enabled genocide.</li> <li>-Makes ethnicity a taboo public identity, replacing it with a unified national one. -It's an ongoing process of "self-de-ethnicization."</li> </ul>

### 5.3. Overarching Mechanisms of Systemic Change

Rwanda managed to mix between 'Top-Down and Bottom-Up' frameworks, where the mandates (e.g., laws on Umuganda, Gacaca) are supported by the deeply local implementation, ensuring community internalisation. Programs like Umuganda and Gacaca (which ended) became monthly or regular rituals. This repetition embeds new behaviours (working together, public discourse on unity) into the cultural routine. Buheji *et al.* (2024)

Ingando and the national curriculum aggressively promote the narrative that the genocide was a political project by divisive leaders, not an eternal ethnic conflict, which led to a collective community effort for re-framing history and identity. It reframes pre-colonial Rwanda as a relatively unified kingdom, suggesting unity is the "natural" state.

HGS explicitly connected social cohesion to material progress. Umuganda builds infrastructure. Ubudehe targets poverty. Girinka improves livelihoods. This makes the cultural project tangible and beneficial in daily life. Through these programs, what is "good" and "shameful" is redefined. Ethnic divisionism becomes the ultimate social and legal transgression. Participation in collective efforts becomes the expected norm.

### 5.4. Integration of Home-Grown Solutions in Rwandan Culture

Rwanda's Home-Grown Solutions (HGS) are locally designed initiatives that integrate traditional practices with modern governance to address socioeconomic challenges, promote reconciliation, and foster national unity. These programs have been particularly critical in Rwanda's post-genocide recovery, helping to rebuild social cohesion, reduce poverty, and strengthen citizen participation in development. Collectively, HGS such as Umuganda, Gacaca Courts, Umushyikirano, Girinka Program, and Abunzi Committees have made substantial contributions to economic development and community welfare and national unity and identity of Rwanda.

#### 5.4.1. Umuganda Cultural Integration

Umuganda contributes significantly to Rwanda's socioeconomic development by mobilising citizen labour for infrastructure projects, environmental conservation, and public health initiatives, reducing public expenditure while enhancing productivity. Between 2007 and 2016, its economic value was estimated at RWF 106 billion (approximately USD 127 million).

Beyond its economic impact, Umuganda strengthens national unity and identity by providing a platform for collective action, social interaction, and shared responsibility. By bringing citizens together to work toward common community goals, it fosters cooperation, mutual understanding, and solidarity, while supporting dialogue and community-based conflict resolution that promote reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. Additionally, Umuganda reinforces shared national values such as self-reliance, mutual support, and collective ownership of development outcomes, and through its support to vulnerable households and community infrastructure, it enhances social protection and inclusion, making it a key home-grown solution for social cohesion and national unity in Rwanda. Buheji and Muhorakeye (2023a).

### 5.4.2. Gacaca Courts Cultural Integration

Gacaca Courts generated substantial economic benefits by reducing costs of prolonged pre-trial detention and prison maintenance. Between 2002 and 2012, 1,951,388 genocide-related cases were tried, and early release for confessing perpetrators enabled their reintegration into communities, allowing participation in productive economic activities and local development.

In terms of national unity and identity, Gacaca strengthened them by embedding justice within communities, actively involving citizens in truth-telling and reconciliation. Through the election of *Inyangamugayo* and open public hearings, it promoted civic participation, local leadership, accountability, and collective ownership of justice. By facilitating confession, forgiveness, and reintegration, Gacaca rebuilt trust, restored social relations, and reinforced a shared national identity. Additionally, it served an educational and moral role, passing lessons of the genocide to future generations and supporting long-term social cohesion and resilience.

#### 5.4.3. Imihigo Cultural Integration

Imihigo has made a significant socioeconomic contribution to Rwanda's development by serving as a results-based governance and management tool aligned with national development frameworks, particularly the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1). It has contributed to improved service delivery in key sectors such as health, education, infrastructure, agriculture, and social protection. By establishing clear performance indicators and timelines, Imihigo enhances efficiency in the implementation of public investments and promotes the prudent use of public resources. In addition, Imihigo supports decentralisation and inclusive development by integrating District Development Plans (DDPs) and community-identified priorities into performance contracts, ensuring that development interventions respond to local needs.

#### 5.4.4. National Umushyikirano Council (NUC) Cultural Integration

National Council Umushyikirano, Rwanda's national dialogue platform, engages citizens and leaders in discussions on governance, development priorities, and policy implementation. It ensures development programs respond to local needs, fosters national ownership, and generates major socioeconomic initiatives, including Electricity Access Roll-Out Program (EARP): Launched in 2009 to expand electricity access and stimulate economic growth, Kivu Belt Road: Opened in 2017, connecting five districts in the Western Province—Rusizi, Nyamasheke, Karongi, Rutsiro, and Rubavu, Health Sector Infrastructure: Construction of over 510 health centers, 1,245 health posts, and 56 hospitals nationwide, Education Initiatives: Programs such as Umwarimu SACCO and the Nine Years Basic Education (9YBE) program, enhancing access to quality education and strengthening human capital.

Umushyikirano also strengthens national unity and identity by providing an inclusive platform for dialogue, allowing citizens from all regions and social groups to share concerns, ideas, and solutions. This participatory process builds mutual trust, transparency, and accountability, fosters a sense of belonging, and reinforces the principle that national development is a shared responsibility. By addressing

common challenges and collectively defining development priorities, Umushyikirano promotes a shared national vision, unity beyond local interests, and a collective Rwandan identity centred on dialogue, consensus, and inclusive nation-building.

#### 5.4.5. Abunzi Committee Cultural Integration

Abunzi Committees are decentralised, community-based mediation bodies that handle civil and minor criminal disputes at the grassroots level. By providing free, accessible, and timely conflict resolution, they save citizens time and financial resources that would otherwise be spent in formal courts, enabling greater engagement in productive economic activities. Their role in resolving disputes locally reduces economic disruptions, promotes household and community stability, and significantly eases the caseload burden on formal courts, thereby improving the efficiency of the justice system.

Beyond their socioeconomic impact, Abunzi Committees contribute strongly to national unity and identity through dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation. Their close interaction with disputing parties allows for culturally sensitive and inclusive conflict resolution, which restores trust, promotes peaceful coexistence, and prevents escalation of disputes. By prioritising reconciliation over punishment, the Abunzi system strengthens social cohesion and reinforces shared values of unity, mutual responsibility, and community solidarity, contributing to a collective national identity grounded in peace and justice.

#### 5.4.6. Girinka Program Cultural Integration

The Girinka Program has made a significant socioeconomic contribution by improving nutrition, increasing agricultural productivity, and generating income for vulnerable households. Between 2006 and 2016, nearly 300,000 cows were distributed, benefiting over one million Rwandans and leading to increased milk production and reduced malnutrition. The program also strengthened household livelihoods by improving crop yields through the use of organic manure, particularly among smallholder crop-dairy farmers, thereby contributing to poverty reduction, food security, and sustainable agriculture.

The Girinka program has also played an important role in strengthening national unity and identity by reinforcing traditional values of solidarity, mutual support, and shared responsibility. Community-based practices such as the *kwitura* (cow pass-on) mechanism create lasting social bonds and promote communal interdependence. Additionally, the participatory selection of beneficiaries at the *umudugudu* level enhances transparency, citizen engagement, and trust between communities and local leadership. Through these mechanisms, the Girinka Program not only improves livelihoods but also fosters social cohesion and a shared national identity grounded in unity, dignity, and social solidarity.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1. Case of Re-wiring Cultural Integration – Rwanda

Rwanda's trajectory since 1994 stands as a profound testament to the transformative power of culturally rooted, participatory governance. This study has demonstrated that Home-Grown Solutions (HGS) are not merely isolated development programs but constitute an integrated socio-

political ecosystem engineered for national renewal. By deliberately reviving and institutionalising indigenous practices such as Umuganda, Gacaca, Imihigo, and Umushyikirano, Rwanda has executed a dual-purpose strategy: achieving rapid socioeconomic progress while fundamentally rewiring its social fabric and national identity. The effectiveness of HGS lies in their synergistic operation. Gacaca courts provided a form of restorative justice that delivered truth and accountability at a scale impossible for conventional courts, while simultaneously serving as a public ritual of collective catharsis. Umuganda transformed mandatory community labour into a monthly engine of infrastructure development and a ritual of shared purpose, materially building the nation while fostering social cohesion. Imihigo embedded a culture of accountability and results-oriented governance from the national to the local level. Umushyikirano institutionalised inclusive dialogue, ensuring that national policy remained responsive to grassroots realities and fostering a powerful sense of collective ownership over the development agenda. Together, these and other HGS have systematically deconstructed the ideologies of division and replaced them with a unifying civic identity centred on “Rwandanness,” mutual obligation, and collective dignity.

The socioeconomic outcomes, as documented, are substantial and measurable—from the billions saved in public expenditure through community labour and accelerated justice to improved service delivery, increased agricultural productivity, and expanded access to education and electricity. However, the most significant achievement may be intangible: the restoration of trust, the cultivation of a shared future vision, and the construction of a resilient national culture that explicitly links individual well-being to communal progress.

In a nutshell, Rwanda's experience offers a compelling counter-narrative to externally imposed, one-size-fits-all models of post-conflict development. It presents a case where the strategic adaptation of cultural heritage has been central to forging a modern, cohesive, and forward-looking state. The Rwandan model underscores that sustainable development is inextricably linked to the processes of healing identity, rebuilding social capital, and fostering a collective moral contract. While challenges and critiques regarding the depth of transformation and the balance between cohesion and dissent persist, the HGS framework provides invaluable insights for other societies navigating the complex path from fragility to resilience, demonstrating that the seeds of renewal can often be found in a nation's own historical and cultural soil.

## 6.2. Implications of this Study

The findings of this study carry significant implications for theory, policy, and practice, extending beyond Rwanda's borders.

### 6.2.1. Theoretical Implications for the Development of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Paradigm

This research challenges conventional, externally-driven models of post-conflict reconstruction and development. It provides robust empirical support for the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) paradigm, demonstrating that locally-conceived solutions can be systematically scaled into effective national policy. The Rwandan case validates the

concept of "developmental patrimonialism" within a specific cultural context, showing how a strong, directive state can harness traditional social capital to accelerate modernisation and foster social cohesion. Furthermore, it enriches theories of nation-building by highlighting the indispensable role of cultural engineering and the strategic construction of a unifying civic identity as prerequisites for sustainable development.

### 6.2.2. Policy Implications for Post-Conflict States and Developing Nations

For policymakers, Rwanda's HGS model offers a replicable framework, albeit one requiring careful contextual adaptation. Key transferable principles can be seen in the institutionalisation of social ritual through transforming collective practices (e.g., communal labour, public dialogue) into mandated, regular institutions that can efficiently build infrastructure while repairing social trust. Other principles apply through linking and integrating restorative justice mechanisms (like Gacaca) with community service and development projects, which can accelerate reconciliation while contributing tangible economic benefits. Imihigo introduces also introduces another angle for adapting traditional pledge systems that would create a powerful tool for enforcing governmental accountability that resonates with local notions of honour and public commitment. Then come platforms like Umushyikirano, which demonstrate how to create structured, top-down-enabled spaces for bottom-up feedback, ensuring policy remains responsive without devolving into fragmentation.

### 6.2.3. Practical Implications for International Development Actors

For bilateral and multilateral development agencies, the study implies a need to shift from prescribing standardised toolkits to facilitating contextual innovation. Support should focus on identifying and strengthening latent indigenous institutions with potential for modern application. Thus, technical and financial support can be provided for the adaptation of home-grown models, rather than their replacement. The paper shows that investments in social cohesion and cultural reconciliation are not separate from, but foundational to, economic development projects.

## 6.3. Limitations of the Paper

While this study provides a comprehensive analysis, certain limitations must be acknowledged to frame the findings appropriately and suggest avenues for future research.

### 6.3.1. Methodological and Data Limitations

The analysis relies heavily on government reports, policy documents, and impact assessments published by Rwandan institutions (e.g., RGB, NISR, MINALOC). While these are essential primary sources, future research would benefit from incorporating longitudinal, independent quantitative studies measuring attitudinal changes (e.g., levels of social trust, strength of ethnic vs. national identity) over time across different demographics. More granular, ethnographic qualitative research to capture nuanced, subjective experiences of HGS at the individual and household level, particularly regarding perceptions of voluntarism and social pressure.

### 6.3.2. Scope and Generalizability Limitations

The profound success of HGS is deeply intertwined with Rwanda's unique historical trauma, geographic compactness, and post-genocide political context. The model's direct transferability to larger, more heterogeneous, or differently fractured societies is not automatic and requires critical examination. The paper primarily documents outcomes and official perspectives. A more complete picture requires dedicated study of implementation challenges, regional variations in effectiveness, and the experiences of those who may feel marginalized by or dissent from the dominant national unity project.

### 6.3.3. Critical Perspectives and Unanswered Questions

The study engages with the transformative outcomes of HGS but acknowledges the scholarly debate surrounding them. Key limitations inviting further inquiry include understanding to what degree participation is driven by genuine internalised belief versus social obligation or state sanction. The long-term sustainability of cultural change hinges on this balance. Also, ethnic identities and grievances need to be understood to genuinely transcend, or merely suppressed into the private sphere? This question is central to assessing the durability of peace. The paper notes the critique that the powerful ethos of unity may constrain open political debate and dissent. The long-term implications of this trade-off for democratic development remain a critical area for ongoing study.

Recognising these limitations does not diminish the documented achievements of Rwanda's HGS but rather grounds them in academic rigour. They delineate the boundaries of the current analysis and chart a clear course for a more nuanced, multi-perspectival, and interdisciplinary research agenda to further understand this pivotal case in nation-building.

## 7. References

1. Byamukama B. Performance contracts and social service delivery: lessons from Rwanda. Abidjan: African Development Bank; 2012. Available from: [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Policy\\_Brief\\_-\\_Performance\\_Contracts\\_and\\_Social\\_Service\\_Delivery\\_-\\_Lessons\\_from\\_Rwanda.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Policy_Brief_-_Performance_Contracts_and_Social_Service_Delivery_-_Lessons_from_Rwanda.pdf)
2. Buheji M, Mushimiyimana E, Kwizera A. Adapting to change: understanding Rwanda's socioeconomic resilience in the face of climate variability. *Resour Environ*. 2024;14(2):51-59. Available from: <http://article.sapub.org/10.5923.j.re.20241402.03.html>
3. Buheji M, Mushimiyimana E. Optimising socioeconomic resilience strategies - case study of Rwanda. *Int J Soc Sci Res Dev*. 2023;5(2):94-113. Available from: <https://iaeme.com/Home/issue/IJSSRD?Volume=5&Issue=2>
4. Buheji M, Mushimiyimana E. Realising the community goodwill-value (case of Rwanda). *Gradiva*. 2024;63(8):85-98. Available from: <https://gradiva.it/august-2024/>
5. Buheji M, Mushimiyimana E. The path to recovery - insights from Rwanda's experience for Syria's peacebuilding efforts. *Libr Prog Int*. 2024;44(6):301-312. Available from: <https://bpasjournals.com/library->

- science/index.php/journal/article/view/4085/3834
6. Buheji M, Muhorakeye L. Impact of self-sufficiency approaches on socioeconomic development in East African communities – a comparative study between Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan. *Int J Manag.* 2023;14(7):171-189. Available from: <https://iaeme.com/Home/issue/IJM?Volume=14&Issue=7>
  7. Buheji M, Muhorakeye L. Mitigation of drought impact on livestock husbandry - a socioeconomic resilience review for cases from Kenya & Rwanda. *Int J Manag.* 2023;14(7):61-76. Available from: [https://iaeme.com/MasterAdmin/Journal\\_uploads/IJM/VOLUME\\_14\\_ISSUE\\_7/IJM\\_14\\_07\\_007.pdf](https://iaeme.com/MasterAdmin/Journal_uploads/IJM/VOLUME_14_ISSUE_7/IJM_14_07_007.pdf)
  8. Gasana V. Umushyikirano: Rwanda's participatory democracy in action. Kigali: KT Press; 2024. Available from: <https://www.ktpress.rw/2024/02/umushyikirano-rwandas-participatory-democracy-in-action>
  9. Gatwa T, Mbonyinkebe D. Home-grown solutions: legacy to generations in Africa: drawing resources from the Rwandan way of life. Geneva: Globethics.net; 2019. Available from: <https://repository.globethics.net/server/api/core/bitstreams/2eca7366-1a88-4458-90db-0cb711e276bf/content>
  10. Government of Rwanda. Organic Law No. 16/2004 establishing the organization, competence and functioning of Gacaca courts. Kigali: Government of Rwanda; 2004. Available from: <https://www.rlrc.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=102155>
  11. Haberstock L. An analysis of the effectiveness of the Gacaca court system in post-genocide Rwanda. Malibu (CA): Pepperdine University; 2014. Available from: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1094&context=globaltides>
  12. Hankel G. Gacaca courts. In: Max Planck encyclopedia of public international law. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2019. Available from: <https://opil.ouplaw.com/display/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e1667>
  13. Ingelaere B. Reparation in Rwanda's Gacaca courts. *Temoigner Entre Hist Mem.* 2019. Available from: <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/8633>
  14. International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The justice and reconciliation process in Rwanda: outreach program on the Rwanda genocide and the United Nations. Arusha: ICTR; 2014. Available from: <https://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/assets/pdf/Backgrounder%20Justice%202014.pdf>
  15. Ministry of Justice (Rwanda). Abunzi capacity building strategy (ACBS) 2020–2024. Kigali: MINIJUST; 2020. Available from: <https://www.minijust.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=47710&token=d0242bd70da38154315becc4939153b6eb245389>
  16. Ministry of Justice (Rwanda). Mediation committees (Abunzi). Kigali: Government of Rwanda; 2026. Available from: <https://www.minijust.gov.rw/services/mediation-committees-abunzi>
  17. Ministry of Local Government (Rwanda). The best Imihigo achievers get awards. Kigali: MINALOC; 2023. Available from: [https://minaloc.prod.risa.rw/news-](https://minaloc.prod.risa.rw/news-detail/the-best-imihigo-achievers-get-awards)
  18. Ministry of Local Government (Rwanda). 18th National Umushyikirano Council opens in Kigali. Kigali: MINALOC; 2023. Available from: <https://minaloc.prod.risa.rw/news-detail/18th-national-umushyikirano-council-opens-in-kigali-1>
  19. Munyaneza G, Uwimbabazi E. Home-grown solutions in Rwanda: a path to social cohesion. Kigali: Rwanda Development Press; 2016. Available from: <https://www.rwandadevelopmentpress.rw/home-grown-solutions>
  20. Mushimiyimana E, Buheji M. Rwanda's self-sufficiency journey - analysis of achievements, challenges, and way-forward in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa. *Int J Manag.* 2024;15(1):43-66. Available from: <https://iaeme.com/Home/issue/IJM?Volume=15&Issue=1>
  21. Mutebi E. Umushyikirano has been Rwanda's backbone for socioeconomic development. *The Great Lakes Eye.* 2024. Available from: [https://thegreatlakeseye.com/post?s=Umushyikirano--has--been--Rwanda%E2%80%99s--backbone--for--socio--economic--development\\_1286](https://thegreatlakeseye.com/post?s=Umushyikirano--has--been--Rwanda%E2%80%99s--backbone--for--socio--economic--development_1286)
  22. National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda. Evaluation of Imihigo implementation, 2021/2022. Kigali: NISR; 2023. Available from: [https://alpha.statistics.gov.rw/sites/default/files/documents/2025-02/Imihigo\\_2021\\_2022\\_evaluation\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://alpha.statistics.gov.rw/sites/default/files/documents/2025-02/Imihigo_2021_2022_evaluation_report_0.pdf)
  23. Parliament of Rwanda. Umuganda is an innovative Home-Grown Solution, Senate President says. Kigali: Parliament of Rwanda; 2026. Available from: [https://www.parliament.gov.rw/news-detail?tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bnews%5D=7629&cHash=6d6cb9d0da5a7440081ad111b953ce5d](https://www.parliament.gov.rw/news-detail?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=7629&cHash=6d6cb9d0da5a7440081ad111b953ce5d)
  24. Penal Reform International. Eight years on: a record of Gacaca monitoring in Rwanda. London: Penal Reform International; 2010. Available from: <https://cdn.penalreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/WEB-english-gacaca-rwanda-5.pdf>
  25. Republic of Rwanda. Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda of 4 June 2003, as revised to date. Kigali: Government of Rwanda; 2003. Available from: [https://www.rwandabar.org.rw/attached\\_pdf/Constitution%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Rwanda-1608275353.pdf](https://www.rwandabar.org.rw/attached_pdf/Constitution%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Rwanda-1608275353.pdf)
  26. Republic of Rwanda. Nine Years Basic Education (9YBE) implementation: fast track strategies. Kigali: Ministry of Education; 2008. Available from: <https://www.mineduc.gov.rw/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=5829&token=bf8a7972c64261a5555e9a9c9e34f76f4d7ab5d8>
  27. Republic of Rwanda. 18th National Umushyikirano Council opens in Kigali. Kigali: Government of Rwanda; 2026. Available from: <https://www.gov.rw/blog-detail/18th-national-umushyikirano-council-opens-in-kigali>
  28. Rwandapedia. Umuganda. 2024. Available from: <https://rwandapedia.rw/hgs/umuganda/how-it-works>
  29. Rutukurabanzi J. Rwanda: Umushyikirano, a unique

- platform for participatory democracy. The Great Lakes Eye. 2023. Available from: [https://thegreatlakeseye.com/post?s=Rwanda%3A--Umushyikirano%2C--a--unique--platform--for--participatory--democracy--\\_927](https://thegreatlakeseye.com/post?s=Rwanda%3A--Umushyikirano%2C--a--unique--platform--for--participatory--democracy--_927)
30. Rwanda Governance Board. The assessment of the impact of Home-Grown Initiatives: fostering good governance for sustainable development. Kigali: RGB; 2014. Available from: [https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/RGB/Publications/HOME\\_GROWN\\_SOLUTIONS/Impact\\_of\\_Home\\_Grown\\_Initiative\\_2014.pdf](https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/RGB/Publications/HOME_GROWN_SOLUTIONS/Impact_of_Home_Grown_Initiative_2014.pdf)
  31. Rwanda Governance Board. National Umushyikirano Council: a decade of delivering democracy and development to Rwandans (2003–2014). Kigali: RGB; 2016. Available from: [https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/RGB/Publications/HOME\\_GROWN\\_SOLUTIONS/National\\_Umushyikirano\\_Council.pdf](https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/RGB/Publications/HOME_GROWN_SOLUTIONS/National_Umushyikirano_Council.pdf)
  32. Rwanda Governance Board. Impact assessment of Umuganda (2007–2016). Kigali: RGB; 2017. Available from: [https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/RGB/Publications/HOME\\_GROWN\\_SOLUTIONS/Impact\\_Assessment\\_of\\_Umuganda\\_2007-2016.pdf](https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/RGB/Publications/HOME_GROWN_SOLUTIONS/Impact_Assessment_of_Umuganda_2007-2016.pdf)
  33. Rwanda Governance Board. Assessing the Girinka Program (2006–2016): citizens' perspectives. Kigali: RGB; 2018. Available from: [https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/RGB/Publications/HOME\\_GROWN\\_SOLUTIONS/GIRINKA\\_REPORT\\_2018.pdf](https://www.rgb.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/RGB/Publications/HOME_GROWN_SOLUTIONS/GIRINKA_REPORT_2018.pdf)
  34. Rwanda Governance Board. Home-Grown Solutions: an overview of Rwanda's Home-Grown Solutions. Kigali: RGB; 2026. Available from: <https://www.rgb.rw/1/home-grown-solutions>
  35. Sabiiti D. Abunzi: the legacy of mediation justice made in Rwanda. KT Press; 2020. Available from: <https://www.ktpress.rw/2020/06/abunzi-the-legacy-of-mediation-justice-made-in-rwanda>
  36. Verma K. Rwanda's Umuganda: how a cultural practice shapes communities. Rwanda Blog; 2025. Available from: <https://rwandablog.com/blog/culture/rwandas-umuganda>

### How to Cite This Article

Buheji M, Muhorakeye L. Re-weaving the social fabric: home-grown solutions in reconstructing post-genocide Rwanda. *Int J Soc Sci Except Res.* 2026;5(1):145–161. doi:10.54660/IJSSER.2026.5.1.145-161.

### Creative Commons (CC) License

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.