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peacebuilding and sustainable development in
Rwanda

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Track 2: Role of social economy in providing sustainable livelihoods in rural areas and in food sustainability, sovereignty and access

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Abstract

Many countries are facing repeated cycles of violence (World Bank, 2011; Walter, 2010), with more than 68 million people forcibly displaced worldwide. In a quest for sustainable peace, a growing interest can be observed regarding how civil society and business can help bring about peace. Cooperatives blend association and enterprise with significant potential for peace (MacPherson and Paz 2015; Joy and MacPherson 2007). As bottom-up initiatives, they provide solutions focused at the local level offering learning and practicing nonviolent interaction (Wanyama 2014; Sentama 2009; Havers 2007) and providing decent jobs and livelihoods (Date-Bah ed. 2003). The key word being supply, they are mainly seen as post-conflict community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide for basic human needs, gather labour, demobilize soldiers, and restart agriculture and services. Field observations, however, lend to a broader idea of how cooperatives contribute to positive peacebuilding by increasing trust and agency, raising empowerment, equality and empathy, while managing resources through a renewed notion of the commons (Ostrom 1990), even though challenges come as development takes place. Food security linked to SDG 2 can and need to be enhanced on this basis. The sample of visited cooperatives calls for further research.

Keywords: Peacebuilding; cooperatives; Rwanda; sustainable development; food security

TRACK 2: Cooperatives contribution to positive peacebuilding and sustainable development

JEL CODES : L2, Z1, P13, Q13, Q01

Cooperatives contribution to positive peacebuilding and sustainable development in Rwanda

Rwanda is known as the country of ten thousand hills, landlocked, with a high population density.¹ In 2018, it had approximately ten thousand cooperatives. In 1994, the country suffered the terrible trauma of Genocide. In the aftermath, several studies and theses support a positive view of cooperatives' contributions to the country in general and to peacebuilding in particular (e.g. Sentama 2009, Bititi 2013). In the first section, causes and theories about the Genocide will be reviewed, to understand the types of violence experienced. While many identify the main source of conflict in essentialized ethnicity exerted, others argue about a broader set including economic and political factors that led to famine in rural areas. Extreme gender violence has also been underlined. Food production, export crops and national infrastructure were devastated. In addition, Rwandan poachers were active, and known for having murdered Diane Fossey in the Virunga National Park. Such examples of direct, structural and cultural violence (Galtung and Fischer 2013) illustrate the extent and interconnections of conflict in the country.

This work is based on qualitative methodology (Yin 2018) and grounded theory (Strauss 1987; Charmaz 2006). The unit of analysis is the cooperative. Three types of cooperatives were selected after a study of the literature: 1) women's cooperatives or cooperatives led by women, 2) cooperatives linked to nature such as natural parks and tourism, and 3) cooperatives exporting crops that are key to the country: coffee and tea. However, other useful cooperative experiences were visited, such as a cooperative of the Twa people, artist and transport cooperatives during a field trip of three weeks in 2018. Cooperatives were visited following

¹ On 14th May 2019, Rwanda has 483.3 per km² (1,251.7 people/mi²). Source: <https://countrymeters.info/en/Rwanda>

such choice as well as availability, with interviews based on a semi-structured questionnaire, in group settings, small and/or large.² Several areas and sites of each cooperative were visited. Besides, public authorities and representatives of cooperatives at the national level were interviewed. Finally, photographs and other material was collected. Ethical considerations in research on peacebuilding in post-conflict settings cannot be fully discussed due to space limitations, but they were omnipresent due to the trauma still present and because the concept of peace can be interpreted in various ways. Conclusions are based on the cooperatives visited. The interest lies in understanding a) how the contribution to peaceful and sustainable development takes place, together with the factors that are conducive or restrictive, at three levels: personal, relational and structural (personal, community and environmental); b) to which extent this contribution is the result of public policy, and c) whether this potential contribution remains, expands or phases out after a transitional period. The intention is to: 1) identify dimensions of peacebuilding in terms of ‘positive peace’ (Galtung 2011) that may build sustainable peaceful societies on a path towards sustainable development; and 2) link peace and development studies to the study of cooperatives by overcoming peace studies’ focus on ‘negative peace’ (Gleditsch, Nordkvelle and Strand, 2014).

1 Genocide in Rwanda: extreme violence and trauma

This section reviews the causes and theories regarding the extreme violence of the 1994 Genocide in which about one million people in Rwanda were killed. Most common explanations of this barbaric violence fall into four categories: primordialist (emotional hatred inherent in people), institutional (violence after a major upheaval or change), political entrepreneurs (fanning the flames

² Cooperatives were visited in the following regions of the country: Kigali, Gasabo, Kicukiro, Huye, Nyaguru, Nyamagabe, Musanze. In addition, the Rwanda National Confederation of Cooperatives (NCCR) and the Rwanda Cooperative Agency were interviewed.

and competing for power), and competition over resources. Blagojevic (2009) connects these in a useful manner but the arguments are not satisfactory for Rwanda. Indeed, the first cause that comes to mind is primordialist: ethnic group hatred between Tutsis and Hutus. Yet, as explained below, the main traditional groups in Rwanda, together with the Twa or the people of the forest who are the longest living group in the region, had been wrongly classified as ethnic groups by the colonizers. Second comes the competition over resources: a Malthusian solution to high demographic density competing for land. Yet, recent research provides evidence of the extent of structural, cultural and direct violence (Galtung, 2011) from both a political economy and a constructionist historical perspective. A key trail of structural violence, from a political economy perspective, follows the collapse of coffee price due to the structural reforms of the coffee international trade regime (Ponte 2002). Coffee had been imposed as the main national crop by the colonial powers, destined to export, as the means to introduce a monetary economy and force the subjects to pay taxes. The Rwandan Hutu governments following independence copied the colonial system (Verwimp, 2003, page 162). Coffee prices and quotas were regulated internationally until 1989. Prices collapsed after 1989, leading to famine and hunger. Kamola (2007) also explains that Germans introduced coffee in Rwanda and how the global coffee regime upheaval was a major cause in the Genocide. Making matters worse, the government applied a structural adjustment programme.

“Four economic and political factors played havoc within the society in the 1980s: 1) the abrupt drop in the price of coffee, the principal income source for 60 per cent of Rwandan families, coupled with a 40 per cent currency devaluation in 1989 and rapid inflation after 1990; 2) a structural adjustment program that curtailed or reduced social services and charged for health care, schooling, and water, combined with a drought in the southern regions, which turned into a famine; 3) from 1990, the war in the north, which drained government resources and led to rapid army recruitment, and which created huge refugee camps just north of Kigali—the displaced came from Rwanda’s ‘breadbasket’, exacerbating the external factors contributing to inflation; and 4) the paradox of democratization, which encouraged opposition to the already embattled government (Newbury, 1999)” (Turshen, 2001: 3).

Verwimp confirms the upheaval of the rural world due to the real decline in the price of coffee seen as ‘*irrational*’ by the farmers. Farmers uprooted trees in spite of government sanctions. “*Tardiff-Douglin et al. (1993) reports that a bag of coffee would buy the Rwandan farmer in 1991 only half the goods it bought in 1980. It was especially this real decline in the price of coffee that made coffee cultivation unattractive to the farmer*” (Verwimp, 2003 page 174).

From a constructionist perspective, another key trail of violence was built by colonialism and continued by the first two governments after independence. From the 14th to the 19th century, Rwanda was a centralized kingdom, larger than what it is today, with one language, and no ethnic divisions. Tutsis and Hutus were not ethnic groups nor a race, but rather social strata based on occupations and people could move from one to the other. Tutsis were traders and owned cows, the Ankole. Hutus worked the land. A Hutu could become Tutsi if he had enough cows. Inter- marriage, such as those arranged by the king by giving a Tutsi woman to a Hutu man, were possible. There was a system of organic solidarity based on the division of labour and work specialization that created interdependence and conventions for exchanges among the groups, resulting in bonds of solidarity.³ Belgium officially phased out the system in 1958 after the Rwandan King accepted in 1954. Well before, the colonial power had invented their races and classified them according to physical appearance. Identities were rigidly fixed through racialization and top-down institutionalized practices based on myths such as the Hamitic hypothesis (Piton, 2018). The use of identity cards institutionalized discrimination against each other. People could not freely develop according to their capacities, needs and

³ The governing regime previous to the colonial one was built on the social system of Ubuguhake, based on contracts between a Hutu and a Tutsi by which those labouring land used cattle herders’ cows in exchange for services. Cows’ manure was essential to fertilize the land and ensure food security. Tutsi land could also be used by Hutu cultivators through the Ubuguhake system in which land was affected to individuals, a system centrally determined by the King (or Queen).

aspirations, but forced to accept whatever the power in place established or prohibited. Colonial investment was low, and education and health were left in the hand of some religious congregations. Land ownership was never clarified, and women lacked rights to it. During the Genocide, gender violence was systematic and women were seen as property because women's assets were considered critical for recovery, for their reproductive and productive labour first of all, and then for their access to land and livestock and/or their reproductive labour that could generate claims to the land. Rape was called *kubohoza*, literally: liberate land (Turshen, 2001: 7). Still, more men died, and many women survived as widows with no help. Many widows became members of cooperatives after the Genocide. Not only people were devastated but also villages, infrastructure, buildings and the state itself.

2 Rwanda Cooperatives and Positive Peacebuilding

Johan Galtung is considered the founder of modern peace studies. His concept of positive peace is a situated experience, understood as empathy and sanity, freedom from suffering, economic development and social justice. By doing so, the process of de-polarization can be scaled up and the rule of law enhanced through stronger trust in some inter-connected and shared truth. Structural violence related to inequality, issues of poverty, wealth and land concentration, power or institutional structures that are unjust, unfair and arbitrary must be addressed. For Galtung, who differentiates between negative and positive peace, peace in the fullest sense is positive peace and based on patterns of cooperation (Galtung, 2011), emphasizing cooperation and cooperatives as a major way to achieve positive peace (Galtung, 2012). His peace formula is:

$$\frac{\text{equity} \times \text{empathy}}{\text{trauma} \times \text{conflict}}^4$$

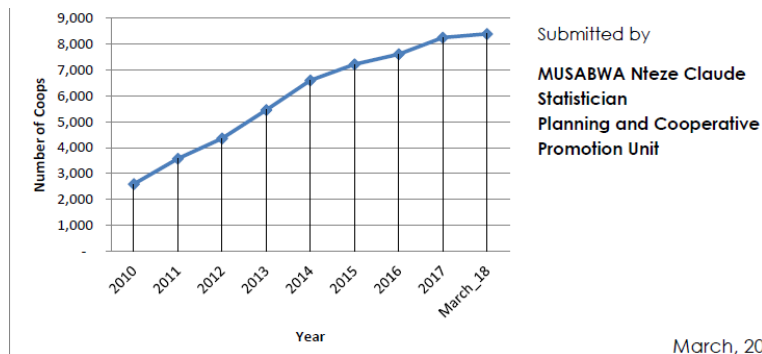
⁴ <https://i2.wp.com/www.transcend.org/tms/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Galtungs-Peace-Formula.jpg?ssl=1>

Cooperatives⁵ blend association (civil society) and enterprise (business) and, according to MacPherson and Paz (2015), their contribution to peacebuilding has significant potential, as more than 800 million human beings take part in the cooperative movement worldwide (when we consider a probable double-counting as many human beings are members of more than one cooperative, Sanchez Bajo and Roelants 2013, ch. 4, point 2.2). Cooperatives abide by an internationally recognized business model, are incorporated under sub-national or national legislation and exist in virtually all economic sectors. Cooperatives are “*jointly owned and democratically controlled*” (International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), n. d.), namely governed by a one-member one-vote system, regardless of business done with or investment in the enterprise, and they are part of the wider social and solidarity economy. Bourdieu saw cooperatives as part of the groups and collectives that underlie the values of solidarity and humanity, capable of winning back democracy from structural violence (Bourdieu, 1998). In *Making Democracy Work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*, Putnam et al. affirm that cooperatives, which grew out of the mutual aid societies, strongly contribute to democracy and civic culture (Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti, 1994: 139, 142, 148). Putnam’s social capital is a pre-requisite for such civil culture and a social virtue, linking up social structuring with norms, and utilitarian strategies with democracy and public policy (Putnam, 2000: 19; 1996).

Cooperatives in Rwanda appeared under colonial rule. They have been generally promoted and even initiated by governments, usually seen as enterprises (Musahara, 2012). The current government, with its Vision 2020, has taken the view that, like in the post-war period

⁵ ILO *Recommendation N°. 193 on the Promotion of Cooperatives* includes a clear definition of what a cooperative is, in accordance with the definition voted by the global cooperative movement at the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) centenary congress in 1995. Cooperatives are enterprises in the formal economy with their own values, standards and representation bodies, while a broader range of initiatives are called Social and Solidarity Economy units (SSE). The term cooperative means “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.” (International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), n.d.),

in Europe, cooperatives could be key to national development in peace.⁶ A new cooperative policy was approved in 2006 and another law on cooperatives' modern roles in 2007. In 2008, the government created the Rwandan Cooperative Agency to support their development, including the SACCOs (savings and credit cooperative organizations). Since then, more than 3.6 million of Rwandans have joined cooperatives, namely 55.3% of the population.⁷



March, 2018 ⁸

UN organizations rally cooperatives mainly as community-based organizations (CBOs) providing for basic human needs and supplying labour, in the aftermath of violent conflict, to demobilize soldiers and restart agriculture (UNEP 2013, ILO 2015). Surprisingly (or not), in Rwanda, this took place ten years after the Genocide. Interviewees explained that, in the beginning, they were too afraid to meet others, to go out. NGOs and foreigners helped them to restart their lives. Gradually they got together, bringing what they still had as means of production. Only after working together, and trusting more each other, they came to the idea of cooperatives. The national government has promoted their conversion from associations into cooperatives since 2005.⁹ Interviewees explained that, in part, they wanted to abide by the law, but also expressed various common points: as cooperative members they could register

⁶ Interview with NCC Chairman, Kigali.

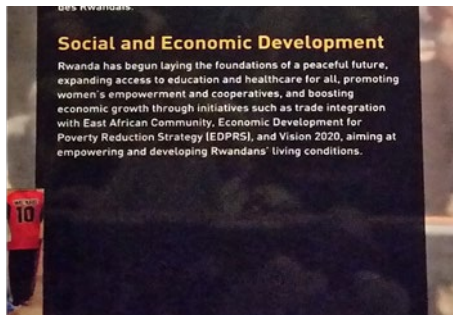
⁷ http://www.rca.gov.rw/uploads/media/Statistics_on_cooperatives-March_2018.pdf

⁸ http://www.rca.gov.rw/uploads/media/Statistics_on_cooperatives-March_2018.pdf

⁹ This was done to reduce NGO projects duplication and fragmentation, according to the IMF progress report on the PRS (IMF 2011: 64), namely it was a studied strategy agreed with multilateral organizations.

nationally and thus be able to trade and work across the country and abroad; they all had to work while as associations only the leaders got involved and benefitted from the association's network. Members are now able to save capital, individually and together in the cooperative, which enables them to invest, start new activities and/ or scale up what they already had, while before it was not possible. Women also expressed a feeling of empowerment and safety regarding their work, their children, their living conditions, even their capacity to buy a decent dress. In all cases, cooperatives continue to work with NGOs including international ones, and, in 2018, they were looking to further collaboration and projects. They all brought up that they were paying taxes which supported the country's reconstruction, while previously as associations they did not. This goes counter to usual explanations, but Italian social cooperatives underwent a similar learning process, and other successful cases such Mondragon show that a long period of learning and trust-building can be a success factor for cooperatives.

Rwandan interviewees also shared personal stories of how cooperatives helped them survive, overcome trauma, build solidarity, and reconcile with themselves, others and society in general. *“While cooperatives are usually used to counter market imperfections and to avoid trade injustice, in Rwanda after 1994 cooperatives offered a possibility of addressing vulnerability, assisting in poverty reduction and as one of the few vehicles for reconciliation.”* (Musahara, 2012: 5). Indeed, cooperatives are mentioned at the Kigali Genocide Memorial in a panel explaining the Rwanda strategy for social and economic development, as part of the foundations of a peaceful future. Cooperatives, as shown in the photo, are part of the Government strategy and Vision 2020.



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Regarding gender, Masabo's MA thesis, although not usually seen as agents of change, cooperatives contribute to the abolishment of the sexual division of labour, facilitate access to assets and resources, change women's sense of self, and change women's strategic choices in life for themselves, their families and communities. Cooperatives are a vehicle for empowerment, although there are no guarantees, they provide the space or sphere based on values and principles that have the potential to unlock change. In the aftermath, *"economic opportunities are not the most important aspect when it comes to women's empowerment through cooperatives... Social inclusion seems to be of high value for the women studied."* (Masabo, 2015: 73). Sentama's PhD thesis studies a cooperative case with a membership of more than 50 % female. The cooperative restores interpersonal relationships in post-conflict peacebuilding in a private manner, enabling to overcome previous negative and dehumanizing contacts with positive and (re)humanizing relations (Sentama, 2009: 164). According to the 'contact theory', conflicting parties working for a common goal cooperatively engage in positive communication that enables truth to emerge, while reciprocal acknowledgment of wrongdoing and expressions of forgiveness take place (ibid.: 166). This goes beyond what the literature say on the instrumental value of cooperatives. People from both sides of the genocide are working together and are able to engage in peacebuilding. This lends to the idea of cooperative space as a refuge, a safe space, a shelter from where to go out again into the world. Women had been on both sides of the Genocide but all "became a driving force of the socio-economic development of the country after the Genocide. A vast network of women groups such as NGOs, associations and cooperatives at the grassroots level played a pivotal role in

empowerment initiatives. Socio-economic development is used as an entry point to peace building and reconciliation” (Mutamba and Izabiliza 2005: 26). Women formed all-women cooperatives as well as cooperatives with men, have taken over leadership and technical roles in cooperatives as interviewees showed, but now also generally take part in building sites beside men, and in most income-generating activities. Women interviewed shared stories of solidarity among the cooperative members, not only in the face of Genocide but also in the face of male violence, such as an expulsion of her family home after her father remarried; with her cooperatives’ colleagues helping her to find housing and being able to marry. The government, in a remarkable historical step, recognized women land ownership by law in 2005, with land registration and titling in 2009. Yet, customary law continues to favor male ownership. Bayisenge argues that this may be seen as joint management where gender empowerment is taking place, albeit equality is not there yet (Bayisenge, 2018).

The trauma affected rural communities and agriculture production. Lands were abandoned, tools had been used in killings, survivors were agonizing, many women were infected with HIV, refugees were roaming in and outside the country and orphans were at a loss (Breed, 2008). Government officials had been decimated. Many Rwandans living abroad came back from different countries and had to establish a common language to understand each other. Many foreign NGOs came to help, and this can be observed in every visited cooperative, in which members always keep on the wall one or more photos of their benefactors and friend, including mentions of their projects and certifications. An important project was PEARL, later SPREAD, lead by the Texas University A & M and the University of Michigan. They supported the coffee associations, then their transformation into cooperatives. The SPREAD Community Theatre project worked with rural cooperatives to make member farmers grasp and have confidence in that they were the true leaders of their communities, feeling responsible for their own education and training. Farmers went through the experience together in a safe

environment, a cooperative, to speak up, raise empathy and equality (Chatterjee et al., 2015). People “*acquire new skills best where it is safe enough to try them out*” (Schwartz, 2002: 72). Empathy is essential to reach competence. Knowledge and information can be accessed and acquired but competence needs repeated practice and self-confidence, with impact on their sense of self. Empathy is not about emotions although it can heighten them. Empathy allows to link up skills with tolerance, practice and work in various ways that can lead to competence, as “*we are acknowledged not just for what we know but for what we can handle. The other understands our intent and potential, conscious or unconscious*” (Ibid.: 69).

Instead, trauma is associated with utter helplessness or being overwhelmed in the case of a severe dilemma (Ibid.: 70). Nothing is more destabilizing than food insecurity. A UN study explains how cooperatives reduce food price volatility and insecurity in the region: “*During the so-called hunger months, there can be very high price differences between cooperatives and traders, and the main task of agricultural cooperatives is to reduce these differences. Traders usually pass by and buy large quantities of crops ... when the farmer runs out of stock the trader returns and sells the grain back to the farmers, at a much higher price. The cooperative also buys it off from the farmer, stores it and then sells it back to the farmer to the original price. So, the main role of these cooperatives is to level off seasonal price fluctuations*” (Havers, 2007) This improves food security and farmers’ livelihoods, linked to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2 under the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Cooperatives are included in the Rwandan Vision 2020 not only as part of the poverty reduction strategy but also to give a market orientation to agricultural production, which brings about other challenges. Rural population has decreased from 97.4% in 1960 to 82.88% in 2017, while employment in agriculture as part of total employment has gone down from 90.72% in 1994 to 66.46% in 2017. Poverty has fallen from 44% in 2011 to 39% in 2014. The Gini coefficient was 0.45 in 2018. Due to its policy success, amidst the global financial crisis,

producers and cooperatives were facing marketing challenges (IMF 2011: 42).¹⁰ Since then, efforts have focused on postharvest and strategic storage as well as logistics. Besides, as urbanisation takes pace, cooperatives are also at the forefront of providing more jobs in cities. Visited cooperatives showed warehouses, storage management efforts, and fuel stations. Not only main export products followed this path. According to the Chairman of the National Cooperative Confederation of Rwanda, Agustin Katarwa, potato cooperatives were looking to improve processing and storage, because as a key food staple they are essential for Rwandan food security. Coffee and tea cooperatives continue to be strategic exports and in their contribution to GDP, together with horticulture, hides and minerals. Since 2010, investment in infrastructure has been significant, in roads in particular. Still not enough in electricity by 2018. Education and training continue to be an issue, as there are so many cooperatives, with many in need of learning, improving cooperative knowledge and management skills. A new Institute is being formed in the capital to focus on their needs. The RCA has also identified IT and digital marketing as a focus for intervention and support. The coffee and tea cooperatives visited and interviewed take part in the upstream chain linkages, participating in the processing and export plants, but with a reduced stake and participation, which present opportunities as well as challenges. They have started their own branding such as Rwashosco, separating markets by taste, income and quality. Some have tasting workshops but not all. Cupping is institutionalized and experts come from the capital. Cupping events are promoted by the Rwanda NCCR. By organizing in cooperatives, members have accessed specialty foreign markets, and in some cases have digital processing of the produced farmer-members take place in the cooperative; the information goes directly abroad while the farmer keeps the receipt for her/his accounting.

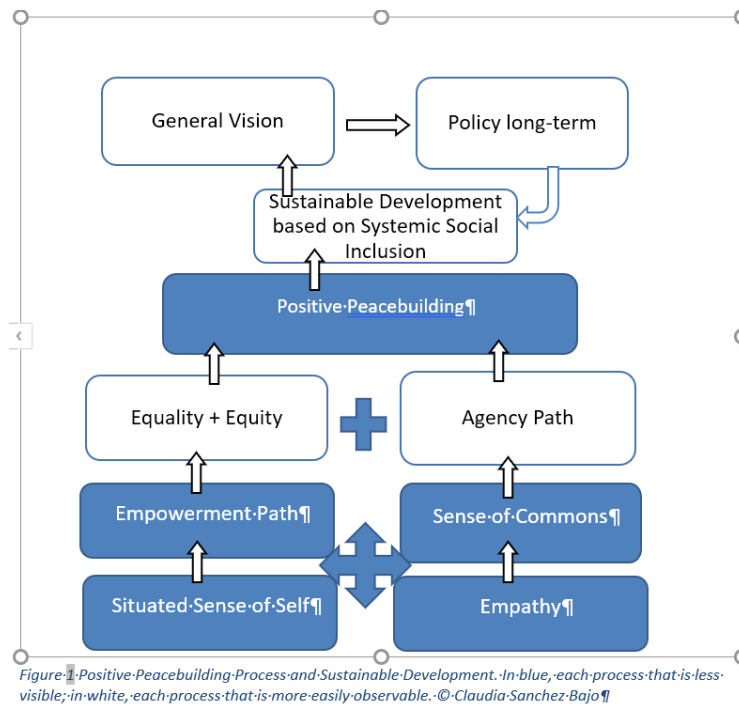
¹⁰ “Exports increased by 25.4 percent (f.o.b., US Dollar terms) compared to 2007, driven by traditional products such as tea and coffee which have grown strongly due to good weather conditions, high prices and a rebound effect for coffee from last year” (IMF 2011: 30).

Cooperatives also offer discounts and bulk purchases of first necessities and food to their members, usually have a credit cooperatives or intend to have one, by which they facilitate local savings and members access to credit, and have opened logistics facilities such as transport fuel stations. They facilitate members' buying solar panels for their housing and have also begun to pay member fees to the health system of '*mutuelles de santé*', also close to the cooperative model. Verhofstadt and Maertens (2013: 20) mention that "*most previous studies have indicated positive effects of cooperative membership for products such as fruits, dairy and coffee*", which seems confirmed by the visits to the cooperatives in 2018. There is a debate on transport costs for farmers that would benefit mainly those farther away from the cooperative station. Interviewees said they all pay the same for transportation but assert that this gives them a sense of equality. When management has been an issue and members not satisfied with the results, managers were sacked, and the cooperative issued an open call to university graduates, with the support of environmental and agricultural NGOs. Moreover, cooperatives are a vehicle for modernisation such as the policy to replace roofs in the face of climate change, for which they provide credit at low rates or donations. Cooperatives, in addition, donate to the community in cash and in labour, its members contribute in building infrastructure such community clinics and schools, as well as roads or rebuild bridges after the rainy season, help Genocide survivors, the blind and other disabled people, and contribute to government development funds.

Conclusion

Cooperatives can build a path towards agency, engage in advocacy, build and reconstruct social capital and strive for fair trade and just economic development on a sustainable and peaceful basis. Capacity for innovation is enhanced as risks are better accepted when undertaken together. Their network-style behaviour show a capability for institutional arrangements and thus to solve potential conflict by negotiation peacefully. This is not to deny cooperatives' direct post-war contributions to reintegration and immediate supply, but to

acknowledge that cooperatives contribute beyond such 'expected' roles before, during and after conflict. Following Galtung and other authors mentioned above, Figure 1 shows the connections between empathy, equality and agency, leading to positive peace building and sustainable development.



Further fieldwork is envisaged to better grasp the emerging challenges and opportunities of cooperatives in terms of contributions to positive peacebuilding. During the 2018 field work, certain common characteristics could be observed in the cooperatives visited, which should be taken as field observation and data gathered from interviews and dialogue: resilience was improving and there were examples of solidarity exercised by the members. There were stories shared of personal wellbeing such as being able to marry were possible thanks to the help of other cooperative members. Businesses were expanding upstream and in networks. Family housing member and non-member needs were addressed in the communities. Families were helped and cooperative members could better sustain food security, their children's needs and send them to study including the university. Genocide survivors had found a safe space to restart their lives. There were projects for the future (personal, community-wise, business investments,

etc.). Cooperative members could express themselves and in particular women and know more about the world. There was investment in infrastructure, such as schools and roads, in which cooperatives participated. There was also transmission, of knowledge, training and skill learning. These points lend to increasing empathy, situated knowledge and empowerment, that help raise equality and capabilities for agency both individual and collective. These examples of positive peacebuilding seem to sustain food security and inclusive sustainable development in the rural areas in Rwanda.

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