

# Structural barriers to Batwa/HMP inclusion in development in Rwanda

## Policy Brief

This document provides an overview of our project findings and makes recommendations that are relevant to all policy-makers and policy implementers interested in achieving *inclusive development*. While our recommendations are specific to Batwa and Rwanda, our findings are not.

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### Key Findings

***Disadvantage spreads.*** Severe socio-economic disadvantage produces additional vulnerabilities. The depth and range of Batwa poverty affects their participation in community activities, which creates new vulnerabilities, particularly in relation to the law, violence, access to the benefits of community participation, their ability to make their voice heard, and their ability to seek redress. *The key to addressing disadvantage is to identify corrosive disadvantages and fertile functionings.*

***Lack of access to land is a corrosive disadvantage.*** Lack of access to (adequate) land is central to Batwa disadvantage and to feelings of exclusion and thus constitutes a major barrier to inclusion. Land is not only key to securing the minimum standards necessary for a good life e.g. food security, but is essential for empowerment, dignity and inclusion in society. Land is overwhelmingly identified by our interviewees as the most important ‘thing’ that they need to lead a good life. *Inclusion in development does not start with participation and with empowerment; material well-being is the basis for dignified, meaningful participation.*

***Discrimination does not necessarily play a significant role in group-based exclusion.*** The strong feelings of unfairness that our interviewees presented were rarely due to discrimination but to the feeling that the local authorities were not treating them equally compared to others, both Batwa and non-Batwa. *We should not assume that identity-based issues play a causal role in social exclusion.*

***Barriers to inclusion can occur at any level of governance.*** The feelings of unfairness were targeted entirely at local governance (cell, sector, district). Our findings suggest that this stems in large part from a lack of understanding as to how local governance works. A disconnect from the most relevant decision-making impacts

hugely on feelings of inclusion (voice, redress). Moreover, not understanding how the system works means that it is difficult to gain access to material goods. **This led us to label voice in relation to local authorities as a fertile functioning i.e. one that has the potential to improve their lives across all areas.**

**Identity recognition, e.g. indigenous status, is not a quick solution to inclusion problems.** Batwa widely view their identity as Batwa as a barrier to their own inclusion. They strongly assert their identity as Rwandan and want to belong to the broader society. For many, this means leaving Twa identity behind, with which they have negative associations. Identity as an indigenous people has no resonance on the ground. Indigenous identity may not be a barrier to inclusion at the local level but it may be a barrier at the national and international level, as fixation with achieving a certain status fails to reflect the wants and needs of the community members themselves. **Identity and disadvantage are frequently inter-twined but overcoming exclusion means really listening to what inclusion looks like and not imposing a pre-determined frame, such as human rights or indigenous status.**

## Recommendations

These recommendations are targeted at decision-makers and stakeholders involved in working on the inclusion of Batwa in Rwanda. *They are the product of intense discussions with a wide range of stakeholders and strategic actors who have assisted us in translating our findings into policy recommendations.*

- **The government should continue investing in its pro-poor programming,** in particular the Girinka programme and access to free health insurance for the very poorest. Our research suggests that the vast majority of those who need it have access to free health insurance and many are beneficiaries of other programmes too. The programmes work.
- **Access to land and decent housing should be the focus of government efforts towards alleviating Batwa/ HMP marginalisation in the immediate future.** Where land distribution is not possible, efforts should be made to find solutions that guarantee food security and allow individuals to work for themselves. This could be achieved by supporting small businesses with loans and by providing skills and small business training. Working for themselves will empower Batwa/HMPs and allow them to take greater control over their own lives.
- In order to ensure children can participate in school and can thrive, **a nation-wide school feeding programme is necessary for all children from the poorest backgrounds** (categories 1 & 2). Ideally, this would involve a full meal, preferably at the beginning of the school day, as this has been shown to have the best results on pupil concentration. In ideal circumstances, free school milk should be offered to all pupils to ensure that all children receive the basics of a healthy diet. Attention should also be paid to ensuring that all children who need it have free access to school uniforms, notebooks and pens.
- **Local authorities at all levels need to involve Batwa/HMPs in the making of decisions that impact on their lives. They also need to communicate more effectively with Batwa/HMP community members and explain their decisions to them.** The poor should be understood as participants in decision-making rather than purely as beneficiaries of government programmes. This is easily said and very

difficult to achieve; however, real inclusion in society also means feeling included and this cannot happen in the absence of participation in decision-making. Such participation may well entail representation within decision-making bodies, particularly at the local level. Strategic actors, such as donors, NGOs and churches, should provide assistance to local authorities in developing a more participatory relationship with all their constituents.

- The Ndi Umunyarwanda program (“we are all Rwandans” or shared Rwandan identity) appears to be successful in assuring this marginalised community of their place in the broader society, and it is important that it continues. However, in order to address the negative attitude of many towards Batwa/HMPs, and to support the elements of Batwa/HMP culture that community members fear are dying out (singing, dancing etc), **recognition of certain aspects of Batwa/HMP culture as a positive contribution to Rwanda society could have large benefits and should not necessarily be understood as undermining pursuit of national unity.** Batwa/HMPs feel strongly Rwandan already and all citizens would benefit from the contribution that Batwa/HMPs can make to national culture.
- **HMPs/Batwa, particularly the elite from the community, should take co-responsibility for facilitating their own inclusion in society.** This recommendation stems from the views of many of our stakeholders, who felt strongly that HMP community members need to accept that they share responsibility for their individual progress. It should be noted that the vast majority of our HMP interviewees do accept this responsibility and stated that they want to work hard in order to improve their lives. As part of co-responsibility, we suggest the creation of a shared taskforce at the district levels to oversee the implementation of Batwa inclusion.

**Comments, questions or requests for clarification on this policy brief can be directed to the Project Co-ordinator: Prof. dr. Morag Goodwin, Tilburg Law School; [m.e.a.goodwin@uvt.nl](mailto:m.e.a.goodwin@uvt.nl)**