Abandoned Orphan, Wayward Child: the United Kingdom and Belgium in post-1994 Rwanda

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In 2001, Peter Uvin observed the very different ways in which the Rwandan government, led by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which has been in power since 1994, could be analysed:

> Those who negatively judge the [Government of Rwanda] are troubled by its continued, if not increasing, dominance by the RPF; the weakness of systemic checks and balances on the government; the increasing 'Tutsification' of important government positions; the co-optation or repression of independent forces in civil society; and the allegations of major human rights violations. The contrary point of view is that the government is multi-ethnic; has respected the spirit of the Arusha agreement; is trying to improve the quality of its governance; allows for a largely free press and broad-based civil society; and more generally, given the reality of the genocide and continued civil war, has been remarkably willing to try to live up to high standards of governance. (Uvin 2001: 179)

The concept of the 'contradictory faces' of the RPF-led government emerges in the writings of a range of authors[2] and is raised frequently by representatives of donors and non-governmental organisations within Rwanda. This reflects not only optimistic versus pessimistic analyses of Rwanda's political environment, but also varying perspectives on the range of policy priorities of the government, some of which have been controversial. Thus, Rwanda can be considered to be performing well, by international standards, in development spheres such as health, education and macro-economic growth, but less well on human rights and civil liberties, and its often less than harmonious relations with its neighbours in the Great Lakes region have left it open to criticism. This impacts upon how donor countries interact with the government. As Uvin goes on to say, "donors have differed radically in their assessments of basic matters such as the current dynamics of the Rwandan conflict, the nature and intentions of the government, the weight of the past in explaining the present, or the nature of current ethnic, social and economic trends in society" (Uvin 2001: 178) Consequently, donors may have the same overall aims – since the late 1990s focused around poverty reduction – but not agree on priorities or policies, and make (sometimes odd) choices based upon their individual assessments of the situation.

This article applies these ideas to the policies of Belgium and the UK in Rwanda since 1994; while Belgium has had a long-standing presence in Rwanda, the UK has only become a significant player since 1994. It considers how the contrasting recent historical experiences of these two countries in Rwanda and their broader domestic political contexts have affected their decisions about supporting the RPF-led government. This reflects the wider phenomenon of differing reasons for how and why donors engage in Rwanda in a particular way; how they justify their choices; and how they chose to engage with particular aspects of the state or actors within that state in order to achieve specific development or strategic objectives. This does not necessarily derive from naïve acceptance of the government's 'positive' face, or merely from the manipulation of the international community by an adept regime in Kigali, as Pottier (2002) argues, but from the varied imperatives upon donor agencies. These shift over time, mitigating against a consensus about how to engage with a multifaceted government like that in Rwanda.

The paper firstly outlines the two case studies of Belgium and the UK, their recent history in Rwanda, domestic political factors and aid relations, before analysing the choices which

[2] See, for example, Unsworth and Uvin (2002); van Hoyweghen 2000; Mamdani 2001; Reyntjens 2001; Pottier 2002; Storey 2003.

are made and the justifications given for those choices. Recent Rwandan history provides a stark example of what can happen when donors get their analysis of the situation wrong; this article stresses the importance of taking an approach to aid and development which recognises the deeply political aspects of the relationship, and which recognises the intricacies of the choices individual agencies make.

Belgium in Rwanda

Belgium's official links with Rwanda go back to 1924, when it was given a mandate over the territory of Ruanda-Urundi, although economic and cultural ties date back to the late 19th century. Belgium left a heavy colonial imprint on Rwanda, economically, socially and culturally, fuelling ethnic tensions through its initial preferential treatment of the Tutsi followed by a switch of allegiance to the Hutu in the run-up to Rwanda's independence in 1962. Although colonial and post-colonial history has a limited bearing on day-to-day relations, as Rwanda goes through the self-reflection process underpinning attempts at national reconciliation, this legacy continues to resonate in broader Rwandan society.[3] It is Belgium's more recent history which has had the greater impact on the post-1994 relationship between the two governments. There were strong political, cultural, social and economic ties between the Belgian population (and the Belgian Government) and the previous Rwandan regimes under Kayibanda and Habyarimana, and Belgium was one of Rwanda's principal donors between the 1960s and 1994.[4] This history, together with the withdrawal of Belgian troops after the death of ten paratroopers during the genocide and the pressure exerted by Belgium on the United Nations to halt the peacekeeping mission altogether, created an atmosphere of mutual distrust between the post-1994 RPF-led government and Belgium, where the same government was in power before and after the genocide.

This mutual distrust is evident in Belgium's early approach to the RPF-led government, which was marked by 'constructive criticism'.[5] This was based on the belief that the RPF would not bring stability to Rwanda, as well as concerns by 1996-97 about Rwanda's military involvement in eastern Zaire where Belgium considered itself to be one of the few donors standing up for Zairian sovereignty (Debar, Renard and Reyntjens 1999; Verwimp and Vanheusden 2003). Aid volumes declined in the aftermath of the genocide and Belgium was among several donors to make demands of the new government with regard to democratic progress, the rule of law, human rights, and national reconciliation, including expecting the RPF to negotiate with elements of the former regime (UNDP 1995a, 1995b, 1996a). On the Rwandan side, senior politicians and the press did not hesitate to denounce Belgium's harbouring of genocide suspects and opposition politicians.[6]

The response of the Belgian government to the new regime in Kigali reflected confusion and shock within Belgian society about the genocide. Rwanda had been considered "virtually flawless" and a "model" for aid management (Renard and Reyntjens 1995), but suddenly media attention was turned on Belgium's past and present role, leading to a process of introspection on an individual and societal basis (de Lame 2003). A parliamentary enquiry

[3] See Institut de Recherche sur le Dialogue et la Paix (IRDP), 2003, for an insight into popular perspectives in Rwanda on history.

[4] Belgian aid to Rwanda rose dramatically towards the end of the 1980s and into the early 1990s – a time when Rwanda was in the grip of an economic and political crisis. Aid from many donors was increased in the early 1990s to support economic reform and promote an end to the civil war which had begun in 1990 when the RPF invaded Rwanda from Uganda. Belgian aid rose from USD 20.2 million in 1985 to USD 55.8 million in 1991 (OECD 2007).

[5] Several informants within the Belgian administration used this term 'constructive criticism' to describe the Belgian approach; see also Reyntjens and Parqué (2000).

[6] See for example *La Nouvelle Relève*, No 345, 16-31 July 1997 and No 370, 30 October 1998.

into the genocide was commissioned which represented an act of purging to some extent (Belgian Senate 1998)[7], but it also had consequences beyond relations with Rwanda alone, highlighting profound flaws in Belgium's approach to foreign affairs and development cooperation (Willame 1997; Lanotte 2000; Willame 2000). This led to an in-depth reform of Belgian development cooperation and a shift in the foreign policy adopted by the Verhofstadt government – a coalition of Liberal, Socialist and Green parties which took power in 1999 ending thirty years of Christian-Democrat political domination – which saw a move from 'panic diplomacy' to a more ethical, moral diplomacy based on the centrality of human rights (Rosoux 2002; de Lame 2003). The change in government in Belgium in 1999 also brought about a thawing in relations with Rwanda and a shift to 'cautious engagement' which aimed at supporting Rwanda as constructively as possible, not disengaging, but not rushing in 'blind' either. In so doing, Belgium aimed to lay the groundwork for a deeper aid relationship as Rwanda stabilised. A further turning point came with the public apology to the Rwandan people on behalf of the Belgian people by Prime Minister Verhofstadt in April 2000, and relations have continued to warm since then.

This demonstrates how changes in government in a donor country can greatly impact upon diplomatic and aid relations, but also how the nature of that government matters. Belgium's federal system, built around regional and linguistic communities,[8] tends to result in coalition governments at the national level. Differences in political and ideological positions are consequently evident between the ministers of development cooperation and foreign affairs. Under the 1995-1999 administration, Development Cooperation Minister Reginald Moreels (Christian Democrat) was often at odds with Foreign Minister Erik Derycke (Socialist), notably over relations with Zaire; under the 1999-2003 administration, Cooperation Minister Eddy Boutmans (Flemish Green) had a different perspective to Foreign Minister Louis Michel (Francophone Liberal); under the 2003-2007 administration both ministers were Liberals and the ideological consensus was evident in the overall aid programme with a stronger role advocated for the private sector in development cooperation. This situation has often led to tensions over priorities, responsibilities, autonomy and budgets.

These differences in opinion within the administration reflect a broader story. Contrasting viewpoints about Rwanda are expressed within political, civil society and academic circles, often split along political and social lines.[9] For example, in the pre-genocide period there was seen to be a division between Francophone academics who were more supportive of the Tutsi and Flemish academics who supported the Hutu; this has become an enduring stereotype to some extent.[10] Although a new generation of Belgians are working on Rwanda with fewer

[7] The enquiry was widely reported in the Rwandan newspaper *La Nouvelle Relève* in early 1998, with Belgium praised for undertaking such a public and in-depth analysis (in contrast to France). It was not without criticism, however. One article by Sevilien Sebasoni (an academic and RPF activist) considered the enquiry to have avoided the difficult questions about ethnicity and anti-Tutsi sentiments prevalent in Belgium (*La Nouvelle Relève ,* 31 March 1998).

[8] Belgium is made up of three linguistic and cultural communities (Flemish, Walloon/Francophone, and German-speaking). These divisions run through political and social life, leading to complex federal institutions as well as political parties split along Francophone and Flemish lines; NGOs, civil society organisations and government-funded bodies follow a similar pattern. There have been profound tensions between the Flemish and French-speaking communities in the past, the Flemish population having been repressed under Walloon political control until the middle of the 20th Century, leaving lasting scars on the national identity.

[9] Prunier (2002) considers the Belgian struggle for its national identity to have been transferred to Rwandan soil. Flemish missionaries took the side of the repressed Hutu during the colonial period, helping to develop the Hutu ideological position vis-à-vis the Tutsi, associated with the ruling Francophone elite in Belgium, as independence approached.

[10] Several informants referred to the problem of shaking off this stereotype, a perspective reiterated by the Rwandan Ambassador to Belgium (interview, Brussels, 2 November 2004). See also Reyntjens (1999b). The

links to the pre-genocide era, there are a great many practitioners and academics who have a long history in the country and region which impacts upon their personal perspectives. There are also splits between those involved in technical cooperation activities who are keen to keep the politics out, take a long-term view and support Rwanda's development, and more politicised critics who see renewed conflict as imminent and who are pushing for more political sanctions. In addition, Belgium is home to large numbers of people of Central African origin. Amongst the Rwandan diaspora, very different political views can be observed with Belgium housing opposition groups in exile as well as supporters of the Kagame government (ICG 2002; Rafti 2004).

Consequently, it is possible to discern two tendencies in Belgian thinking on Rwanda. On the one hand, there are those who seem to be emerging from the distrust of the 1995-1999 period. This group, largely comprised of technicians, bureaucrats and diplomats, is looking to build a more constructive relationship with the Rwandan government, which is considered to deserve support to set it on the right path to stability and change. On the other hand, there are those who see things as deteriorating in Rwanda under an authoritarian regime, particularly amongst politicians, academics and civil society (11.11.11 2003; Reyntjens 2004). Yet, even the latter are caught between the desire to disengage entirely and to continue working in Rwanda in order to retain their potential capacity to influence events through local civil society.[11]

The influence of critical voices over Belgian policy is limited, however. The Belgian government's increasingly positive approach to Rwanda runs counter to academic and NGO lobbyists. Since Rwanda's involvement in the 1998-99 war with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), there has been more overt criticism about Rwanda amongst civil society in Belgium; there was a parliamentary enquiry into mineral exploitation in the DRC (Belgian Senate 2003); questions have been raised about the opening of political space in Rwanda, with Belgian NGOs demanding that more conditions be applied to aid; and people who were once considered rather favourable towards the RPF have grown more critical.[12] Although there have been some tense words between Brussels and Kigali over these issues,[13] on the whole the signs from the Belgian government are of increasing warmth towards Kigali. This was clearly demonstrated shortly after the Rwandan elections in 2003 when the Foreign and Development Cooperation Ministers visited Rwanda and praised the conduct of the elections, contradicting the European Union position which had criticised many aspects of the process. This was interpreted by the Rwandan ambassador to Belgium as a realisation on the part of the Belgian government that it had been mistaken in its early analysis of the RPF-led government and as a reaffirmation of the trend towards a positive engagement which began with Verhofstadt's apology.[14]

Defining characteristics of Belgian policy towards Rwanda are therefore confusion in the immediate aftermath of the genocide leading to a gradual warming of relations, but affected by a complex domestic political environment with divergent views about Rwanda and the Rwandan government within the administration and broader society. Aid flows reflect these factors. From USD 55 million in 1991 aid declined to just over USD 11 million by 2001. It has risen again since then, reflecting both the implementation of reforms to development

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Rwandan government, for its part, has often been hostile towards Belgian academics and NGOs which have criticized it.

[11] Interviews, Belgian NGO 11.11.11, Brussels 19 June 2003 and 22 January 2004.

[12] See for example the recent book on the DRC by Colette Braeckman, a journalist who has grown increasingly critical (Braeckman 2003).

[13] See, for example, 'Tension entre Bruxelles et Kigali' [Tensions between Brussels and Kigali], Rossel et Cie SA, Le Soir en ligne, Bruxelles, 2002.

[14] Interview, Rwandan Ambassador to Belgium, Brussels, 2 November 2004.

cooperation – which are one factor in explaining diminishing amounts[15] – and new commitments to Rwanda as a priority country. A new programme for Rwanda was adopted in 2002, with a new convention signed in 2004, following the first bilateral partnership talks in 15 years. In 2002 aid totalled USD 21.5 million and rose again in 2005 to USD 27.2 million (OECD 2007).

This also reflects how Central Africa – Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC – represents a cornerstone of Belgian foreign and cooperation policy. After a period of relative disengagement during which time a policy of *'Afrique aux Africains'* (let Africans sort out Africa's problems) was pursued under the guise of expanding ownership,[16] with the change of government in 1999, Central Africa was once again re-affirmed as a priority. This is seen as the one area in the world, beyond the European Union, where a small country like Belgium is able to have any influence on the international stage.[17] Additional administrative arrangements were made to reflect this renewed prioritisation, with a Great Lakes analyst appointed to the Cooperation Department, a Great Lakes desk created in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Great Lakes special ambassador appointed in 1996 and again in 2002, and an expanded budget for conflict resolution activities. The DRC, Rwanda and Burundi are among Belgium's top aid recipients, and there are very frequent high-level ministerial visits to the region.

Even when relations were at their worst in the immediate post-genocide years, Belgium never stopped providing aid to Rwanda. A number of pre-genocide projects were resumed, for example in agriculture and health, where very long-standing cooperation relationships existed; and new ones were initiated, notably in support of Rwandan civil society working on human rights and in the justice sector. Support for the latter captures the guilt and shock response to the genocide, a way of dealing with direct consequences through a range of measures including support to the Ministry of Justice in classic justice and *gacaca* courts, and via NGOs working on governance, human rights and support to survivors. This is an area where Belgium considered itself willing to 'take a risk'.[18] Much of the continuity in activity can be attributed to individuals on the Belgian and Rwandan sides; the same cooperation minister was in place in Rwanda before and after the genocide, and the head of Belgian cooperation programmes in Rwanda returned as soon as possible after the genocide, describing how he sought to pick up the pieces of Belgian projects in the aftermath with very limited resources. For the initial period, much of this activity was relatively informal, relying on personal networks, and close relations were established with some senior Rwandan civil servants and politicians despite the tense official relations between the two countries.[19]

Nevertheless, the way in which aid is delivered to Rwanda has been affected by the domestic political climate and divergent views. In the aftermath of the genocide, programme aid, such as balance of payments support, was not resumed, reflecting the decision not too engage too closely with the new government. While some donors, such as the World Bank, the European Commission and the UK categorised Rwanda as post-conflict after 1994, Belgium continued to see it as a country in conflict until troops were withdrawn from the

[15] The disruptive effect of the reform should not be underestimated when considering aid flows. The reform saw shifts in the relationship between foreign affairs and development cooperation, with two name changes for the department, and five different ministers of development cooperation between 1994 and 2004; an autonomous project management agency was also established. During the reforms, no new programme for Rwanda was adopted.

[16] Interview with Louis Michel, *La Nouvelle Relève,* 31 August 1999.

[17] Belgian ministers have tended to stress how limited Belgium's influence in world affairs is; however, through its colonisation of the Congo, Belgium was a powerful force in shaping modern Central Africa (Clément and Roosens 2000).

[18] Interview, DGCD official, Brussels, 20 January 2004.

[19] Interviews, DGCD desk officer for Rwanda, Brussels, 3 June 2003 and 22 January 2004.

DRC in 2002. This comes out in the *Great Lakes Plan* of 2001 which recommended a two-tier approach to development cooperation on the basis of progress on conflict resolution: a 'partnership *towards* peace'; and a 'partnership *in* peace'. In theory, as stability was established through adherence to regional peace agreements the relationship would progress from the former to the latter (Government of Belgium 2001). During this time, aid was only provided in project form to avoid its potential diversion to military ends. At the same time, the project was the preferred mechanism for aid delivery for nearly all Belgian aid in the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s. It was only in 2003 that the Belgian government made a commitment to increasing the use of sector-specific and general budget support, although not to 'crisis states' such as Rwanda (Government of Belgium 2003: 14). In interviews in 2003, informants felt that budget support would never be approved for Rwanda. Rwanda's weak institutional framework for ensuring accountability was the most public reason given, but behind this lies more political debates, lingering doubts about the nature of the RPF-led government and political pressure exerted on the Belgian government by NGOs and political lobby groups.

However, by the second half of 2004, informants were considering that the shift to sector or budget support was more or less inevitable. This reflected firstly a recognition that Belgium would have to go this way if it wanted to 'catch-up' with other donors in relation to shifts in global thinking on the delivery of aid, and secondly the reality that the project mechanism was inadequate to enable disbursement of the large new aid budget approved for Rwanda. Belgium has recently agreed to provide sector-specific budget support for the education sector, and plans to do the same in the agricultural sector from 2009 (Ministry of Finance 2007: 9).

Aid instruments and the domestic political climate have also mitigated against the imposition of conditions to Belgian aid. Policy documents imply that aid to Rwanda is conditional upon performance in areas such as governance, or rather conditional upon the Rwandan government upholding its own commitments on governance, conflict resolution and peace-building (Government of Belgium 2001; DGCD 2002), and officially the partnership is based on a process of dialogue and consultation, with regular bilateral discussions. However, in practice, conditions are rarely imposed. In the early 1990s attempts were made to use aid to promote human rights, governance and democracy (Renard and Reyntjens 1995);[20] but after the genocide, the use of conditions was undermined by the poor relations between the two governments, by Belgium's record during the genocide and deeper reflections on its long-term role in Rwanda, and by the much more positive stance of other, notably 'new', donors (Debar *et al.* 1999). Even where Belgium would have considered applying conditions, there was reluctance to stop support for core development activities such as basic education and health, rural development or emergency assistance (Renard and Reyntjens 1995). So even when aid was frozen to Rwanda briefly in 1995 over the Kibeho incident,[21] emergency aid and support to the justice sector continued (Pottier 2002: 165).

However, the actual implementation of Belgian aid policy is determined largely by the technical requirements of specific projects. Individual projects are negotiated with the relevant line ministry then managed jointly; conditions attached to each project are specific to

[20] The application of human rights conditions was inconsistent, however. Aid was halted to Zaire in 1990 over human rights abuses, but at the same time supplied to the Habyarimana regime in Rwanda. This reflects the more widely held international perspective on the corrupt Mobutu versus the developmental Habyarimana (Verwimp and Vanheusden 2003).

[21] In April 1995 the Rwandan army emptied by force the final internally-displaced peoples camp in south-west Rwanda at Kibeho, resulting in the massacre of thousands of people, civilian and military alike. Disputes over the incident, the role of the Rwandan army and the casualties, led several donors, including Belgium and the European Commission, to suspend aid temporarily. This incident raised doubts for many donors about the nature of the RPF-led regime. See Pottier (2002).

that project, and rarely extend beyond technical issues. Conditionality for Belgium in reality is very much of a micro-economic, project-specific nature (Renard and Reyntjens 1995). This emerged clearly during the 2004 negotiations of a new programme with Rwanda. When NGOs began calling for Belgium to adopt a system of political benchmarks for the disbursal of aid, the administration dismissed this as unfeasible in light of the project approach. Consequently, day-to-day cooperation is in many respects divorced from the broader political and diplomatic considerations which have affected overall relations between the two countries and patterns of aid flows. There has been remarkable continuity on the ground in actual activities, with many rolling projects being extended and renewed as others are completed. It remains to be seen whether the shift towards more sector-specific budget support will change the nature of the policy dialogue between the two countries.[22]

Belgian relations with Rwanda since 1994 constitute an evolving story, with caution in the aftermath of the genocide giving way to increasingly close relations. Divergent perspectives are evident within the Belgian administration and wider society about the nature of the Rwanda government and the direction the country is going. There has been considerable debate about how aid should be delivered and to what end, reflecting broader debates about the purpose and administration of Belgian aid. Despite sometimes frosty official relations, the long-standing relationship between the two countries meant that personal networks and embedded project systems ensured continued cooperation activities. The genocide caused a rupture in Belgian relations with Rwanda, with a more critical approach to the new authorities in Kigali and a great deal of soul-searching within Belgian development circles. Although critical voices remain and some officials within the Belgian administration are wary of the less positive 'face' of the RPF regime, the strategic interests of Belgian within the Great Lakes region and its embedded relations, have seen ever closer ties forming with the Rwandan government. This is reflected in increasing aid amounts since the early 2000s and new forms of cooperation.

United Kingdom in Rwanda

In contrast to Belgium, the UK had no history as a donor in Rwanda prior to 1994. Although strongly present in Uganda and Tanzania, with diplomatic representation in Zaire, the UK's bilateral relations with Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Zaire were extremely limited. Engagement in Rwanda since 1994 has therefore been premised upon the UK's 'clean slate', untainted by association with the former regime. The lack of an historical legacy was considered central to gaining the trust of the new regime by officials involved in the Rwanda programme in the immediate aftermath of the genocide, who emphasised the UK's innocence at the time to what was coming.[23] This 'innocence' is seriously questionable, however, reflecting rather an attitude of "total indifference" given that Rwanda lay beyond Britain's sphere of influence or interest (Williams 2004a), and Britain's lack of vision vis-à-vis Africa more broadly (Porteous 2005) at a time when Britain was focusing upon support for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and strategic middle income countries (Healey 1997).

Despite evidence that the UK ignored or sidelined calls for intervention in Rwanda by the UN Security Council (Melvern 2004; Melvern and Williams 2004), the UK, unlike donors such as France and Belgium, has never received open recrimination from the RPF-led government for its lack of action, beyond the general blame placed upon the international

[22] DGCD Press Release on bilateral partnership talks, 26 October 2006.
[23] Telephone interview with Lynda Chalker (former UK Minister for Development Cooperation), 8 September 2004. See also (DFID 1999: 5).

community as a whole. UK officials never encountered a sense of specific bitterness; quite the reverse in fact. The UK's strongly supportive stance of the RPF from the outset in 1994 meant it was viewed as a 'good friend'. Although it only had a very small budget for direct action beyond indirect assistance provided through the UN and NGOs from 1994 to 1996, officials felt that it had made a considerable difference because they were willing to engage positively with the government, not to be judgemental or expect rapid change, and to be flexible in their approach.[24] This reflects the positive opinions expressed by a range of Rwandan politicians and government officials who described the UK as "very supportive", "genuinely trying to help", having a real "will to cooperate", and recognising Rwanda's determination to "do the right thing".[25]

Hence, while Belgium was going through a turbulent time in its relationship with Rwanda, the UK was engaging with limited regard for the qualms expressed by other donors about the direction the new government in Kigali was taking. The policy from 1995 was to cooperate positively with the RPF, for whom there was a great deal of respect and in whom there was considerable trust. Officials accept how little knowledge the UK government really had of the situation, despite drafting in academic and NGO analysts, speaking of their 'enormous naivety' and 'complete ignorance'. Nonetheless, there appears to be a genuine belief that the UK did the right thing in placing faith in the new regime in Kigali.

The initial rationale for supporting Rwanda was therefore a humanitarian response to the genocide, with individual politicians taking a personal interest in the country. The Minister for Overseas Development at the time, Lynda Chalker, visited Rwanda in July and August 1994 and established a temporary one-person office to assist UK military personnel and NGOs. The decision to open an embassy in late 1995 was a sign that the UK presence in Rwanda was to be permanent,[26] although at the time there were no plans for a bilateral aid programme. It was with the election of the Labour government in 1997 that the Rwanda programme really took off. International Development climbed significantly up the political agenda, and was no longer subjugated to foreign policy and commercial interests as had been the case more or less between 1979 and 1997. The establishment of the Department for International Development (DFID) also brought changes in the management of aid money, greater decentralisation to expanded country offices, more in-house capacity for research and analysis, greater transparency, and frequent public consultation exercises. The new Secretary of State for International Development from 1997 to 2003, Clare Short, therefore had a strong mandate; she re-affirmed the UK's support for Rwanda, visiting the country within three months of taking office,[27] and support subsequently grew exponentially. By 2003 the DFID had a fully devolved office in Rwanda with a large number of senior advisory staff, and a programme budget of around USD 60 million in 2004 (OECD 2007).

The rapid expansion of the programme can be attributed to the very deep personal commitment of Short to Rwanda. She was shocked at the limited direct support the new regime was receiving from other donor agencies and took the stance that the UK should champion the government as no-one else was prepared to do it. This rubbed off on her staff; a common thread running through interviews with nearly all officials involved in the Rwandan programme over the 1994-1999 period is a strong personal commitment, with time spent in

[24] Interviews: former UK Minister of Overseas Aid, 8 September 2004 (telephone); former Ambassador to Rwanda 1995-1998, 23 August 2004 (telephone); FCO official, 4 June 2004; former ODA/DFID official, 2 June 2004. This is also reflected in the Rwandan press which is very enthusiastic about British aid (see *La Nouvelle Relève*, 30 April 1999; 15 May 2000; *New Times*, 24-26 November 2003).

[25] Interviews, Kigali, Rwanda 2003-2004.

[26] One British informant claimed that the opening of a UK embassy in Kigali was less to do with guilt than NGO pressure.

[27] According to Short's biography, her first visit was in 1998 (Short 2004:86); however, her first official visit took place in October 1997 (DFID Press Release, 9 October 1997; IRIN Update 167, 10 October 1997).

Rwanda described as "weird and wonderful", "really interesting and very challenging", "very interesting", "rewarding" and "exciting". Some said it had been the best placement they had had. Several have retained close ties with Rwanda, visiting regularly or becoming involved in voluntary organisations supporting the country. As one informant said, other donors were drawing back when Rwanda needed their help most; another stated that the position of other donors was "morally inadequate" and the response of the UK was to make up for the loss,[28] a viewpoint reflected in the Rwanda *Country Assistance Plan* of 2004:

> The country's traditional donors and the new Government were unwilling to re-engage. The UK, through DFID, therefore committed itself to becoming Rwanda's major bilateral development partner. (DFID 2004c: 15)[29]

Short's very positive position on Rwanda provided little space for criticism of the programme either internally or from NGO and political lobbyists, although in general there were few really critical voices within the UK. Across the political spectrum, those politicians interested in Rwandan affairs shared a common perspective. Several members of parliament have visited Rwanda since 1997, and have been supportive of DFID's approach to assisting the country's recovery from the genocide.[30] It was only with the publication of reports into the illegal exploitation of resources and human rights abuses in the eastern DRC implicating the Rwandan army, and with reports of human rights violations in the run-up to the 2003 elections, that more critical questions began to be raised within the UK Parliament[31] and amongst British NGOs. These voices did not deeply affect the British programme, however. Despite public consultation exercises on policies, NGOs active in Rwanda, based in the UK and in Rwanda, felt that their voices were not being taken into account and that DFID was reluctant to listen to alternative viewpoints. For example, at a consultation meeting in June 2003 on DFID's draft *Country Assistance Plan*, NGOs voiced concerns that DFID was too focused on its good relations with the Rwandan government and was not bringing its influence to bear over human rights abuses. The response of British civil servants was that the Rwandan government was misunderstood and just not very good at getting its message across; they could not give precedence to NGO 'speculation' and 'rumour' over DFID's official partner without hard evidence, and they stressed the importance of behind the scenes political dialogue.[32]

In contrast to Belgium, Rwanda does not represent any strategic importance to the UK. Nevertheless, Rwanda has risen up the list of main recipients of UK aid since 2000, seeing a vary rapid rise in resources.[33] Although the genocide legacy remains central, the rationale for

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[28] DFID official, London, 10 November 2004.

[29] This sentence was revised from earlier drafts: "For political reasons related to its recent history, the Government of Rwanda was not willing to re-engage with its traditional bilateral development partners – France and Belgium" (February 2003), changed to "For political reasons related to recent history, Rwanda's traditional bilateral development partners, France and Belgium, were unwilling to re-engage with the new Government" (May 2003). There is no explanation of why traditional donors were not engaging, and there is no analysis of other reasons why donors may not be so enthusiastic. Rather, the UK recognises Rwanda's need for "wide-ranging, substantial and predictable support", and "the commitment of the new Government to national reconciliation and poverty reduction for all Rwandans" (DFID 2004c: 15).

[30] In 1998 the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Great Lakes and Genocide was established, bringing together MPs as well as interested NGO actors and members of the public. This Group organises visits to the Great Lakes Region, holds talks and seminars, and has published a number of reports. See http://www.appggreatlakes.org/cgi-bin/site/index.cgi

[31] Parliamentary questions and debates, various years (See http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmhansrd.htm)

[32] Observations, Consultation meeting on the Rwanda Country Assistance Strategy, DFID London, 30 June 2003.

[33] Between 1997 and 2008 (projected), aid to Nigeria is set to rise from £9.3m to £100m, Ethiopia from £5m to £130m, Sierra Leone from £3.1m to £40m and Rwanda from £6.2m to £47m. Since 2000, the DRC has seen a

the programme now leans more strongly towards the UK's comparative advantage and support for Rwanda's poverty programme, which reflects the UK's overarching commitment to achieving global poverty alleviation goals:

> Our engagement with Rwanda acknowledges the country's traumatic past, its continuing severe needs, the potential for instability in Rwanda to spread beyond its borders, and the Government's strong commitment to poverty reduction and democratic governance. We must also remember that the UK is now Rwanda's major bilateral development partner and its most consistent ally in international negotiations. (DFID 2004c: 17)

The UK has also expanded its presence in other Great Lakes countries. There has been a growing awareness that Rwanda cannot be treated in isolation either developmentally or politically; moreover, the argument has been put forward that DFID cannot seriously be concerned with poverty reduction while ignoring the DRC. Consequently, the UK has become increasingly involved in the political transition processes in Burundi and the DRC, with several high-level visits to the region, new programmes and a large budget for the DRC.

As with the Belgian programme, the way in which aid is provided stems from the UK perspective upon Rwandan needs and the domestic political environment within the UK. In contrast to Belgium, the UK provides the majority of its assistance as general budget support. Initially this aimed to support the cash-strapped Rwandan government in the late 1990s, but later became linked to Rwanda's poverty reduction agenda (DFID 2004b); however, it also reflects shifts in thinking within the UK on aid provision. Rwanda presented an opportunity for Short's newly created department to try out a new approach to aid, concentrating on poverty reduction using programme aid, in a country which did not require former project and management systems to be dismantled first.[34] It was considered a high risk venture administratively, politically and financially,[35] but Short had sufficient political authority to take that risk and pushed her staff to come up with a plan for Rwanda, against the judgement of some civil servants who were concerned about DFID's lack of knowledge in the region, the lack of French-speaking staff, the poor understanding of Rwanda's institutional systems, and the lack of precedents upon which to base the new style of working. The risk was justified on the grounds that conflict may have flared up again unless a donor like UK took a positive approach to Rwanda.[36]

Consequently, from 1997, the UK worked closely with the World Bank and Sweden to promote Rwanda as a "special case" for assistance (World Bank 1999: 11; DFID 1999: 9), promoting the provision of direct budget support. A number of DFID officials referred to the Rwandan programme as a 'model', a 'test case', a 'ground-breaking exercise', 'innovative' and 'pioneering', with the UK working on a 'blank sheet', even as a 'good prototype' for the budget support approach. New instruments were developed to monitor the programme, notably the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 1999 which laid down 'mutual commitments' on both sides of the partnership. This built on what DFID saw as its capacity to "have an honest, open and frank policy dialogue" with Rwanda's senior political figures (DFID 1999: 5).

The provision of budget support and institutional support to specific central government ministries, such as the Ministries of Finance and Education, where senior staff were

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rapid increase also – from £3m in 2000 to a projected £70m by 2008 (DFID 2002a, 2002b, 2004d, 2005b, DFID 2007).

[34] For an interesting study of how the shift in UK approach from projects to programme aid affected existing projects and processes, see Mosse (2005), especially chapter 8.

[35] Interviews: former UK ambassadors to Rwanda, Kigali 1 December 2003, telephone 23 August 2004; former DFID official, London, 2 June 2004.

[36] Interviews: former ODI fellow, 28 July 2003; DFID official, London, 30 July 2003.

Anglophone rather than Francophone,[37] has brought the UK in for criticism about its lack of engagement with non-state actors or with actors outside the capital. This has been seen as diminishing its access to alternative perspectives, such as within civil society, and its access to realities beyond the city of Kigali. Although DFID in Rwanda claims to be engaging with civil society, there is limited realisation of this on an official level. The preference to concentrate on government actors, and a specific group of people amongst these, was evident from the start of the programme. Initial attempts to engage with Rwandan civil society were limited to 'influential' groups in the scheme of power, largely Tutsi organisations linked to the ruling elite. A former UK Ambassador to Rwanda was very clear that it was scarcely worth talking to others who did not have sufficient influence.[38] As a consequence, the networks necessary to expand the UK's knowledge of deeper Rwandan political and social processes are weak.

However, a shift in the UK's stance was tangible by 2004. The 2004 *Country Assistance Plan* is a more political document than its predecessor, including a comprehensive risk assessment and an analysis of political conditions in Rwanda (DFID 2004c), and the revised MoUs of 2004 and 2006 lay greater emphasis on Rwandan commitments with regard to human rights and political governance, and set tighter conditions than the loose, vague statements of the 1999 version. The UK has also shown more readiness to apply political conditions to aid; in 2004 and early 2005 several instalments of budget support were delayed due to the actions of Rwanda's army in the eastern DRC (Killick, Katumanga and Piron 2005).[39] While Rwanda's security concerns in the DRC are still considered to be legitimate, there has been more criticism from the UK government of the Rwandan government's tactics. A statement issued in 2005 demonstrates the caution entering the relationship with the British considering Rwandan action to be "inconsistent" with commitments, that it was "right and necessary" to withhold budget support, and that "Rwanda's threat posed an immediate and extraordinary hazard to regional peace and security". This was considered to constitute the "exceptional circumstances" under which the UK could renege on its agreement to provide predictable support.[40] This demonstrates the interesting situation whereby donors providing budget support, who by the nature of the instrument are considered to be working in a close relationship with the Rwandan authorities based on trust and dialogue, may make politicised decisions about the provision of aid, effectively applying conditions. This contrasts with those donors providing more detached project aid. As the Belgian example demonstrates, the overall package for Rwanda may be affected by political choices, but this has little bearing on the actual running of projects on the ground.

Various reasons can be advanced for the change in the UK's tone, including different personalities and staff without such an emotional attachment to the country,[41] a reduction in the Rwandan government's 'genocide credit', turbulent years in Rwanda with controversial elections in 2003 and tensions with the DRC, and accumulated years of knowledge by the UK government about the Great Lakes region leading to a different base from which to assess the situation. At the same time, British aid to Rwanda is by no means diminishing with continued

[37] Unlike most African countries, Rwanda has the advantage of one dominant language – *Kinyarwanda*, spoken by almost 100% of the population. This is the first language of business, including within the administration. However, in interactions with the international community two languages prevail – English and French. Many of the ruling elite in Rwanda speak English, having been raised in English-speaking countries of Eastern Africa. Although English has become an official language of Rwanda, it is not widely spoken. Even French is not widely spoken outside urban areas, in a country largely considered to be Francophone. Research in 1996 put the number of English speakers at 1.3% and French speakers at 5.3% (reported in E. Williams 2003).

[38] Interview, former UK ambassador to Rwanda, Kigali, 1 December 2003.

[39] Footnote on Rwandan alleged involvement in DRC in 2003-04

[40] Press Release, UK government, 10 June 2005

[41] A new Secretary of State, Hilary Benn, was appointed in mid-2003 following the resignation of Short.

commitment to the provision of budget and sector-specific support, Rwanda remains at the heart of the UK's new approach to aid more broadly, and ties have been reaffirmed with several visits of Benn to the region in the last few years. The emotional response of the early post-genocide years, during which time the UK appeared to accept the RPF-line at face value with extremely rare public criticism, dismissing the more negative analyses of other donors and experts alike, has given way to greater caution, bringing the UK perspective more into line with other donors. However, the UK maintains its position as Rwanda's primary bilateral donor, providing aid in the most coveted form – as direct budget support – which gives it clout in policy dialogue with high-level Rwandan officials. Working with what it calls Rwanda's "progressive champions of change" (DFID 2004: 6) enables the UK to claim that its privileged access allows it to exert some influence in encouraging the Rwandan government in the 'right' direction with regard to social, economic and political development.

Conclusion

The cases of Belgium and the UK offer two contrasting examples of how donor countries have related to Rwanda in the post-1994 period, illustrating how different historical trajectories, strategic interests and domestic environments lead to different understandings of the RPF-led government and therefore to different choices about how to engage with it. While Belgium has treated Rwanda as something of a wayward child, to be treated with caution but maintained within its circle of core states, the UK has approached Rwanda as an orphan, abandoned and rejected by its former friends and in need of the special attention which a 'clean' donor like the UK could provide. In the early years after the genocide these contrasting views on Rwanda stood out starkly. The Belgian perspective was riddled with suspicion about the RPF, a suspicion wrapped up in the socio-political relationship of Belgium with Rwanda since colonial times. This manifested itself in doubts about the nature and intentions of the RPF, a guerrilla movement which had wrested power through force from a regime which Belgium had supported; but also in a desire to remain supportive of Rwanda on the grounds of long-standing relationships and strategic and developmental interest. This was a country which mattered to Belgian foreign policy, but it was also one where it had invested time and resources in development activities which it sought to reconstruct after the genocide. Internal reflection and reform led at first to decreased aid from Belgium, with official statements demanding progress from the new government in Kigali on issues such as governance, human rights and regional peace. Belgium was not alone in this regard. Several other donors had similar qualms, notably France, Germany and Switzerland, but also Norway and the Netherlands, two donors which like the UK were unencumbered by an existing relationship with Rwanda. While the former three countries were affected in similar ways to Belgium, the perspectives of latter two constituted a reaction to events after 1994, notably the attitude of the RPF towards human rights and democracy.

By contrast, the UK position was highly supportive of the RPF. Its willingness to support the RPF-led government when others failed to do so won it a position of particular closeness to the new leadership. While others were critical, the UK accepted many of the decisions taken by the government as justifiable, for example with regard to the regional security threat. By providing aid in the coveted form of budget support, the UK gained privileged access to the highest authorities in Rwanda, and close personal relationships were formed. The UK treated Rwanda as a post-conflict country, while Belgium only considered Rwanda as emerging from conflict by 2002. Again, the UK was not alone in its interpretation of the

Rwandan situation – its line was similar to that of the Netherlands in some respects,[42] to Sweden and the World Bank.

However, these contrasting examples warn against a simplistic divide into pro-RPF and anti-RPF donors. Although some similarities can be traced across donors, each has its unique perspective. Positions have fluctuated over the decade and more since the genocide, reflecting changes in domestic political contexts and the international environment. In the late 1990s a distinct divide could be observed between 'old' and 'new' donors (see Baaré, Shearer and Uvin 1999); by the early 2000s this was less clear cut. 'New' donors such as the Netherlands were expressing concerns, and Norway and Ireland had halted bilateral programmes altogether. By 2005 even the UK's delivery of aid was being delayed due to its concerns about Rwanda's agenda in the Great Lakes region. At the same time, 'old' donors such as Belgium were increasing their aid, with Germany and Belgium both pledging more direct support to the government in specific sectors; Japan, which had halted its bilateral activities in 1994, negotiated a new programme in 2004 and is increasing its aid; Norway and Ireland are now involved in 'silent partnerships' – that is working through other donors – in certain sectors (Ministry of Finance 2006). Since 1994 there have been no dramatic changes in Rwanda's relations with donors countries (with the exception of the relationship between France and Rwanda), but there have been continual subtle movements in the positions of donor countries. Where the UK and Belgium were once seen as being as opposite ends of the spectrum of 'new' and 'traditional' donors, now their positions are closer together with Belgium becoming less critical and the UK more cautious.

Over time, therefore, the distinction between donors which engaged in Rwanda because of the genocide and donors with a long-standing relationship has diminished. Indeed, the main rationale now given by donor agencies for their programmes in Rwanda is to support Rwanda's poverty reduction and economic growth agenda.[43] This reflects shifts at the international level also, with a renewed emphasis on poverty reduction as the primary objective of development, coupled with efforts to improve the effectiveness of aid by promoting better coordination of aid around country-led strategies. Since the early 2000s, this has formed the main framework within which donors have engaged with the Rwandan government, bringing donors as a group into a much closer collaborative relationship with the government on policy issues.

Nevertheless, the consensus which is inherent in the collective support for Rwanda's poverty agenda masks differences amongst donors which continue to have important impacts upon their actions. The development agenda consists of two broad but inter-connected strands: social and economic policy to address poverty on the one hand, such as macro-economic growth, rural development, health and education; and governance, both administrative and political, on the other. It is a multi-faceted agenda, with each donor agency working in a variety of areas, using different instruments to achieve their respective aims. How donors interpret events in Rwanda are defined by who they are engaging with in the country, be it government or civil society, and what they aim to achieve through development assistance. Moral choices often have to be made in order to balance progress in

[42] The Netherlands makes another interesting example. In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, the Dutch cooperation minister of the time, Jan Pronk, was highly supportive of the RPF, with the Netherlands providing huge aid contributions. At the same time, the Dutch were not averse to criticising the Rwandan government, such as over the Kibeho incident and human rights. Changes in the Dutch government in 1998 brought in a more critical perspective. While the Netherlands remain an important 'new' donor to Rwanda, limitations have been set on the programme. Most notably, the Dutch parliament (influenced by a powerful NGO lobby) has prohibited the use of direct budget support on the grounds of Rwanda's governance record, although sector-specific support is provided.

[43] See Hayman (2006) for a full overview of the main bilateral donor agencies in Rwanda, their objectives, policy frameworks, activities and approaches to aid and conditionality.

certain areas against backsliding in others, such as between improvements in the education or health sector, which are seen as directly contributing towards achieving poverty reduction, versus poor results in civil liberties, media freedoms and the consolidation of democracy. To put it another way, the balance has to be struck between Rwanda's 'developmental' and its 'authoritarian' faces. Several donor representatives justified the decision to continue supporting Rwanda's poverty agenda despite qualms over governance on the grounds that it is harder to exert influence from the outside; remaining in close, positive dialogue with the government may allow donors to encourage the government in the 'right' direction.[44] The risks of withdrawing from Rwanda in terms of the stability of the country and the region are outweighed by the benefits of remaining supportive.

At the same time, there is no incentive for agencies to withdraw once they have invested in an aid programme. As the Belgian example demonstrates, technical, daily realities often override broader, more political concerns. The same goes for the UK programme to a great extent. The daily dialogue on technical policy matters by officials on the ground is given precedence over in-depth analysis of political events. Agencies on aggregate, as well as local offices and individuals within those offices are expected to achieve results and to spend their budgets. This often leads to greatly contradictory practices by different agencies in a country. For example, while the UK was delaying disbursements of budget support to Rwanda in late 2004 the European Commission and the World Bank were continuing to disburse; when the European Union and the Netherlands froze aid to the election process in 2003, Belgium was one of the first donors to praise the newly elected Rwandan government. Even within donor actions, contradictions are evident. Belgium has had a shaky relationship with the post-1994 Rwandan government but never showed signs of withdrawing; the UK has been a great friend of Rwanda yet is becoming more cautious while still increasing its aid allocations.

This raises concerns about how the choices donors make may contradict each other. Strategic decisions about what 'face' of the Rwandan government to engage with at any given time are framed by the aims of each individual agency, aims which may be specific to Rwanda or of a more general nature. The failure of donors to see the genocide coming has been attributed to voluntary and involuntary 'blindness' to socio-political realities in Rwanda. The analysis presented here begs the question of whether the different perspectives of donors, informed by their varied prerogatives, would cause them to act any differently if Rwanda appeared to be descending towards conflict again in the future. Oomen (2005), in her work on justice in Rwanda, claims that aid to the justice system in post-genocide Rwanda ignores the political context in which the legal and justice framework is being redefined, mirroring Uvin's (1998) concerns about donor blindness. The examples of Belgium and the UK in Rwanda demonstrate that the problem is not so much naivety and blindness as strategic choice about what aspects of the Rwandan state to engage with and how in relation to the broader objectives of donor countries. The claims made by donors that they are seeking to push Rwanda in a 'developmental' direction through their support are underpinned by their own interests, which means that they have a very subjective opinion of what the 'right' path for Rwanda might be. This presents the risk of them making the wrong choices about who to support and how.

[44] This does of course assume that donors have real influence over government actions; even a donor such as DFID, considered to be closest to the Rwandan government, admits that the extent of its influence is limited in politically sensitive areas (DFID 2004c: 14).

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