

The Millennium Village Project, Rwanda: A snapshot of social life

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Introduction

The Millennium Villages project (MVP) is a multi-dimensional development intervention aimed to help reach the Millennium Development goals² at the local level in rural Africa. It is a science-based intervention meant to be a “proof of concept” that the MDGs can be reached, with concerted international investments and cooperation with governments, even in “hunger hotspots” and subsistence farming communities across sub-Saharan Africa. Complementarities, or synergies, are intended to emerge through simultaneous and broad-based interventions in health, infrastructure, education, agriculture and nutrition, and water, sanitation and the environment.³ While the health, agriculture and economic merits of the Millennium Villages are extensively queried and measured – and have been reported to show “remarkable progress” in some areas⁴ – the social dynamics and impacts of this development initiative remain relatively under-examined.

This paper provides a snapshot of social life in the Rwanda Millennium Village (MV) in Mayange and reports on perceptions of the social impact of the MV project. It is based on the perspectives of villagers from Mayange, gathered through qualitative fieldwork conducted in October 2009. It is intended to generate interest in the importance of examining the social impacts of development.

1. The Millennium Village (MV) and Research in Mayange Rwanda

The Rwandan Millennium Village is comprised of the entire sector of Mayange in the district of Bugesera, Eastern Province. Situated approximately 40 km from Kigali, Rwanda’s capital, Mayange has 5 cells (Kagenge, Kibirizi, Kibenga, Gakamba and Mbyo), encompassing a total of 35 villages or *umudugudu* (*imidugudu* is the singular) and about 25,000 inhabitants in all. The Rwanda Millennium Village Project has engaged in a multitude of interventions that are simply too numerous to list. These include agricultural innovations (such as new seed varieties, fertilizer and planting techniques), business development (loans), educational efforts (building new classrooms, scholastic materials, electricity and computer rooms), health improvements (free ambulance, health care centre, community health posts),

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² UN, "Millennium Development Goals," <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>.

³ Bronwen Konecky and Cheryl Palm, eds., *Millennium Villages Handbook: A Practitioner's Guide to the Millennium Villages Approach*, vol. 1.0 (New York: Earth Institute at Columbia University, 2008), 1; Pedro Sanchez and et al., "The African Millennium Villages," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 104, no. 43 (2007).

⁴ Kent Buse, Eva Ludi, and Marcella Vigneri, "Beyond the Village: The Transformation from Rural Investments to National Plans to Reach the Mdns," (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2008), vii.

infrastructure (electricity, wells, sanitation) and community development (committees, meetings, trainings).

I conducted qualitative interviews with 35 community members in October 2009. Four interviewees were recommended by the Millennium Village to represent key demographics in which I was interested and the rest were randomly selected.⁵ Each interview lasted between one and one and one half hours. Interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda, with a translator, thus the quotes below reflect my translator's simultaneous translation from Kinyarwanda into English.⁶ While I did not speak with enough individuals to render this a statistically representative sample – each cell has about 1000 households and I only had the opportunity to visit 6 to 12 of them – the Rwandans with whom I spoke represent a wide range of Rwandans and the key groups that live in Mayange:

- I conducted interviews in all five of Mayange's cells: 12 in Kagenge (MV-1), 6 each in Kibenga, Kiborizi and Gakamba, and 5 in Mbyo (MV-2).
- I spoke with 17 men and 18 women.
- Eight participants were under 25 years of age, 18 were between 26 and 59, and 7 were 60 years of age or older.⁷
- I could not ask about ethnicity explicitly – ethnicity is a banned topic in Rwanda and the project was desperately worried that I would do so – but my interviews covered a wide range of participants including 3 self-identified survivors, 3 self-identified released prisoners and returnees from nearby Burundi, suggesting ethnic diversity in my sample.
- Fourteen participants were born in Bugesera and 22 were born elsewhere, arriving in Mayange at different times, especially in the 1970s, and post-1994.
- Nineteen interviewees were exclusively farmers, 8 did primarily farming, but also spent time earning money in another way, 2 did primarily non-farming activities to earn money (6 didn't say).
- Twelve participants were illiterate, while 23 were literate.⁸
- Fourteen participants lived in "durable housing" (mostly mud bricks with plaster, cement floor, tin roof, shutters or glass in the windows) but eighteen lived in "non-durable" housing.⁹
- Twenty-nine interviewees lived in *imidugudu* (dense settlements), although a handful of those that said they live in a *imidugudu* still very much appeared to live on quite isolated homesteads (the term is also now a level of political organization so there is some confusion), and six called their dwelling a homestead.

⁵ A women's leader, a youth leader, a destitute or very poor community member (*umutindi nyakujya* or *umutindi*), and a cooperative member. The randomly chosen participants were selected based on walking around communities with 5 to 10 minutes between choices, depending on the size of the cell. If I had too many men in a given sector and came upon another man, I went to the next household to find a woman.

⁶ This was a university student from the community. I tested his translation skills – which proved to be excellent – by having him translate my questionnaire from English to Kinyarwanda, then having a professional translator back translate the questionnaire.

⁷ Two ages were not determined.

⁸ These approximate national literacy rates in Rwanda of 70.5% (76.4% for men and 64.7% for women, 2003 estimates). Central Intelligence Agency CIA, "The World Fact Book," <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>.

⁹ Three were not at home, so I was unable to assess. The definition of durable was determined in conversation with my translator and a few of his neighbors, who lived in the community. We considered homes made of mud bricks, thatch, and/or adobe, with or without plaster, with a dirt foundation and tin roof to be non-durable.

Interviews were open-ended and gave participants a chance to explain their answers. Guiding questions for the interviews came from the World Bank's work on "Measuring Social Capital"¹⁰, previous studies of social cohesion, and the World Values Survey¹¹ and were informed by the literature on Peace and Conflict Impact Assessments.

I additionally conducted eight focus groups with pre-existing groups in the community: three cooperatives, two parent-teacher associations, and three local committees.¹² I also conducted two focus group discussions with most of the staff in the Rwanda MV office, was given a tour of the MV by a staff member, conducted individual interviews with several staff at the Rwanda Millennium Village office, the Earth Institute and Millennium Promise, and reviewed available project material. I analyzed the data with the help of *Atlas-ti* qualitative data analysis software and excel.

Many methodological challenges arise when conducting interviews in a divided society, where history is highly contested and freedom of speech is limited. Key issues include historical memory, selective telling, and demographic (ethnic) representativity.¹³ I always had to remain aware of the political pressures and personal limits of what people were willing to share, especially with a foreigner, and one seen to be associated with the MV. Respondents may also have exaggerated some issues, in the hopes of securing more funding, even though I tried to be clear that I was an independent researcher. Methodological challenges also arose in the point in time in which I entered the project and community; not having a pre-project baseline makes assessing change and attribution difficult.

2. *Social Life in Mayange*

The history of Mayange makes social cohesion a particularly challenging and pressing task. From 1959 through 1970, waves of Tutsi fled violence and discrimination to the swamplands of Bugesera. These were followed by Hutu migrations from northwestern Rwanda in search of available land. With a comparatively high Tutsi population – approximately 50% instead of the national average of about 15% - - "Bugesera is widely regarded as the epicenter of the [1994] genocide" that left approximately 800,000 Rwandans dead. A common estimate is that 60% of Bugesera's population was killed in the genocide and the government calculates that this amounts to 60,000 deaths in this district alone.¹⁴ There are an estimated 2,676 households of genocide survivors in Bugesera today and there remain approximately 4,000 orphans living on their own.¹⁵ Bugesera is also home to a great number of returnees, especially from Burundi where they had been exiled since massacres against Tutsi in 1959. One could extrapolate that from fact 60% of population was killed and that "almost everyone there is a resettlee" to conclude that most residents of Mayange today are Tutsi, although "whether that is 60% of 80%" is unclear.¹⁶

¹⁰ The World Bank, "Measuring Social Capital," <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTSOCIALCAPITAL/0,,contentMDK:20193059~menuPK:418220~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:401015,00.html>

¹¹ World Values Survey, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

¹² I randomly selected which groups to visit based on a list at the Millennium Village Rwanda office, with the exception of the community development committee and the unity and reconciliation imidugudu committee.

¹³ Elisabeth King, "From Data Problems to Data Points: Challenges and Opportunities of Research in Postgenocide Rwanda" *African Studies Review* 52, no. 3 (2009).

¹⁴ Leana. Wen, "Glimpses of Hope," *New York Times*, June 14 2007. MINALOC, "Plan De Développement Du District De Bugesera (2008-2012)," (Kigali: Republic of Rwanda, 2007), 10.

¹⁵ Republic of Rwanda, "Monographie Du District De Bugesera," (Bugesera: Republic of Rwanda, 2006), 51, 56.

¹⁶ Interviews with staff.

Mayange is also a site of resettlement for “new caseload refugees” (Hutu who fled Rwanda in 1994 and returned in 1996), as well as released prisoners.

Mayange is unique from other parts of Rwanda in its post-conflict physical and social settlement patterns. In contrast to most of the country, where individual homesteads still dot Rwanda’s “thousand hills”, Mayange is characterized by *umudugudu*, or dense settlements of households. Originally built by the government to house returnees after the genocide, villagization is now a widely promoted (if not yet followed) government policy, across Rwanda, related to efficiency of land use and provision of infrastructure and security. Mayange includes a special “reconciliation *umudugudu*” where homeless survivors, perpetrators and returnees were provided with free housing in return for living together.

Near the beginning of the interview, I asked people **what it was like to live in Mayange**. Typical responses focused on economic conditions, especially agriculture, and showed modesty in what people expect from life. “Life in Mayange... In general it is not bad, it is not good, it’s in between.”¹⁷ Another man told me that “people live on agriculture - sorgum, maize, cassava, and beans, and things are good when we have a good harvest.”¹⁸ Nearly half of respondents mentioned weather or dryness in their answers -- *inzara itewenizuba*. As one woman explained to me, “In general, life is not very complicated but sometimes it is very dry here and getting food is very difficult.”¹⁹ Another woman said that “Life is normally bad because it is very dry very often.”²⁰ Participants told me that “life is very different for different people”²¹ in the community and noted differences in lives for farmers, small traders, those with land, and the landless, for example.

Many respondents also commented on social dimensions of life in the community. A few respondents were quite positive: “Social relationships are pretty nice even though the tragedy of genocide occurred in 1994”.²² Others were openly negative: “People used to work together in peace and now after the genocide it has become tough in the social relationships of people.”²³ A few felt the cleavages in the community were simply too strong to ever reach social cohesion. “Genocide survivors and released perpetrators... I don’t know how they will work together”.²⁴ Another woman told me “Things have changed... The way people used to work before 1994 is not how they are working now.”²⁵ Most often, I heard mixed accounts like “There are no problems. But there are always some small problems between people though” and “We live normally in good conditions. There is no conflict, no problems. But there are different social classes. If I have a store and have some money to improve my house, people are jealous.”²⁶ These types of contradictory responses are typical in Rwanda; in past research, I found that people downplayed negative aspects of social life and tended to embed negative reflections within positive pro-government “bookends”.²⁷

¹⁷ Interview 18. Please see the appendix for interview details.

¹⁸ Interview 6.

¹⁹ Interview 14. See also David Matthews, "Global Rhetoric, Local Actors: Community Health Workers and the Concept of Participation in Rwanda," (undated).

²⁰ Interview 26.

²¹ Interview 1.

²² Interview 20.

²³ Interview 21.

²⁴ Interview 22.

²⁵ Interview 24.

²⁶ Interviews 13, 1.

²⁷ King, "From Data Problems to Data Points."

Responses were mixed as to **how well people in the community know one another**. While a few noted that “even before 1994 people were living here together”²⁸, most respondents shared reflections like “because of the genocide and civil war people have come from all places. We don’t know each other all that well”.²⁹ Many responses suggested that even if people have lived in Mayange a long time, this does not necessarily mean that they really know each other. One respondent had lived in the community for 15 years and noted “I know people well. But then, people are private and one only knows one’s own problems.”³⁰ Another man explained “I was born seeing people together in this community, but that was before the civil war. As people came from exile it was new blood coming together so people don’t know each other very well. [It has only been] fifteen years since the civil war.”³¹ Several people said that even if some people have been in Mayange a long time “you can never know what anyone is thinking.”³² Besides high levels of migration, other social dislocations in the community include the move from homesteads to dense settlements and a planned airport.

When I asked people if they **felt accepted as a member of their community** (whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement “I feel accepted as a member of this village”) nearly all respondents strongly agreed. Birth, marriage and children were common factors in respondents’ explanations of why they felt accepted in the community. “This is the place where I was born and got married, it is the place I am used to. Therefore I feel accepted here.”³³ Another woman told me that she felt accepted “because I grew up here and all of my activities are around here. I got married here. I feel like I am at home. It is my traditional place.”³⁴ Land and home ownership were another very common response, especially among ex-refugees. When asked how she felt about the statement, one respondent, who had recently inherited land, said that she agreed “Very much! For example, when we were renting we were worried every end of month for payment and even had to sacrifice food. Now I have my own land and house and I am not worried.”³⁵ Similarly, the few respondents who felt that they were not accepted in their community explained that this was because they had neither homes nor land. “I don’t have land or a house and I don’t feel a member of the community. I could be kicked out of my home at any moment.”³⁶ A third common response to explain feelings of belonging was that there were “no problems”. Specific examples included economic conditions – “I am able to do my businesses as I want even if there are some interruptions it is generally ok”³⁷ – as well as security and social relations – “I like it because it is safe and secure and the government is mobilizing the population to live in peace and security.”³⁸

When I asked people about **social and economic marginalization** in the community, respondents gravitated towards the economic side of the question. The most common answers were widows (including genocide survivors as well as “ones whose husbands died in prison”³⁹), the homeless and the landless. Respondents mentioned many different answers, however, and most mentioned a group of

²⁸ Interview 19.

²⁹ Interview 4.

³⁰ Interview 16.

³¹ Interview 13.

³² Interview 33.

³³ Interview 18.

³⁴ Interview 3.

³⁵ Interview 23.

³⁶ Interview 5.

³⁷ Interview 12.

³⁸ Interview 9.

³⁹ Interview 30.

which they were a part such as genocide survivors, orphans (because of HIV/AIDS, other diseases and war), released prisoners (“because when they arrive it is like starting a new life), “all people in the neighborhood”, farmers, those with less than 2 hectares of land (what people consider they need for subsistence), “those who can’t work anymore” (the elderly), people without children to help them, returnees from Congo brought back by UNHCR, and “those that were already in the country” who do not have connections to the new, mostly Tutsi-returnee, government.⁴⁰ Villagers did not seem to want to speak to the issue of social marginalization. The vast majority only dealt with this side of the question when I specifically prompted it. That there is no one who is socially marginalized was a quick, and fairly frequent, response. It seemed that most participants wanted me to move on, and I respected this. A few people mentioned orphans, widows, and women with husbands in prison as the most socially marginalized.

Networks are an important element of social life. When I asked whom respondents would turn to for help if their home were destroyed, most replied themselves. “You just try to solve it yourself. There is no one else who can help you.”⁴¹ Many elaborated, thinking about their own resources and resourcefulness. One woman explained that she could draw on “savings or turn to my own farm. There is no one else.”⁴² Several, mentioned “maybe a bank loan but it is very different because you have to prove how you will do repayment. Also I am a farmer, so I can try to solve it using my farming or my work, otherwise I don’t know what I can do.”⁴³ Only when I prompted respondents for second answers did they mention the government, and most of those specified the local government. Other answers included members of groups, and neighbors, and just one person mentioned NGOs/“projects”. When I presented my findings to the Millennium Village project staff in Rwanda, they were very skeptical about participants’ responses that in case of emergency, they don’t have anyone to turn to. They felt that respondents were most likely trying to “get more” out of the interview and/or project and that they frequently turned to the government. Indeed, one interviewee told me “There is no one, only someone like you.”⁴⁴ I, however, believe that there is more to this story. The specific question of asking people about *housing*, while used in other contexts, had special connotations in post-genocide Rwanda where housing has been promised to many survivors and returnees often without results. In conversations over other questions, several respondents mentioned that if they didn’t have enough food, or time to prepare food on a given day, their neighbors might share with them. (Although in contradictory remarks others told me that you don’t eat away from home since people might try to poison you). One homeless genocide survivor that I met was living in a dwelling in another villager’s yard, free of rent. The strength of networks is mixed and depends on the need in question.

Generalized trust was, unsurprisingly, very low among respondents. In response to a broad question (from the World Values Survey) -- “generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?” – nearly all respondents were clear that “you need to be very careful in dealing with people”. These findings are consistent with the results of the World Values Survey in Rwanda.⁴⁵ Many respondents referred to “differences” in understandings, behavior and ideologies: “Because I don’t share the same understandings and behavior so you must be careful to know the person very well before you trust them” and “because people are very different.

⁴⁰ Interviews 12, 16, 26, 31.

⁴¹ Interview 23.

⁴² Interview 1.

⁴³ Interview 13.

⁴⁴ Interview 22.

⁴⁵ World Values Survey, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

They have different ways of behaving, understanding and acting. You must know who you can trust. Everyone is not good. There are good people and bad people.”⁴⁶ Several interviewees talked about differences between appearance and reality, and about hypocrisy. “You can only trust yourself. If you trust a friend, they can go behind your back”, and “you never know what they are thinking.”⁴⁷ A few respondents mentioned fears of people wanting to poison them. A couple of interviewees said that “you can only trust in God”.⁴⁸ Other explanations for distrust referred more explicitly to the country’s history of violence. “Some people don’t trust their neighbors. [Some say] ‘You killed my parents’ and others say ‘you put my family in jail’ and it goes back and forth depending on the experience. This is not always true. Some people don’t take care of their fellow neighbors depending on their experience and which things they are the victims of.”⁴⁹ High levels of migration also fostered distrust: “Because of genocide and civil war, people come from all over – even different countries – and we need to be very careful.”⁵⁰ I also saw signs of low trust in the community. Most doors were padlocked. When I met with one committee, those that arrived on bicycle brought them indoors to the meeting rather than leaving them outside. All of these answers make sense in the context of Rwanda’s genocide and the involvement of neighbors in killing people with whom they had often long lived and interacted, but distrust was quite high in pre-genocide Rwanda as well. These answers also speak to the challenge of “creating expectations of regular and honest behavior” that are fundamental to trust.⁵¹

In terms of **reliability and trust of specific groups** (question: can you trust that x will do what they say?), respondents tended to trust teachers, doctors and nurses, and police, whereas trust in civil and *gacaca* courts, neighbors, people from other villages, and NGOs was more mixed. When I asked people about trust and reliability in the government, most participants praised the national government. The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission survey found that national government approval ratings were a globally incomparable 97%.⁵² Assessments of government are a particularly sensitive topic and “yes” answers were usually automatic. Relatively few respondents wanted to elaborate on their “yes” answers and I suspect that “yes” answers were somewhat over-reported.

Many respondents, however, were more wary of local leaders whom they often felt were corrupt. Participants talked about the need to “buy a beer”⁵³ for officials in order to get things done, and claimed that local leaders often siphon off the top of projects (discussed below). While distrust of local leaders indicates a lack of vertical social cohesion, that so many would call out local leaders despite strong norms against doing so, and possible repercussions, may contrarily indicate a degree of accountability and vertical social cohesion in the community. Some participants talked about local leaders being replaced when they “do bad things” but this did not amount to accountability to citizens. Participants explained that the national government is in charge of replacements, without their participation or even knowledge of what the officials did wrong. Ingalaere writes about “the chain of accountability [going] upwards towards higher authorities and not downwards towards the population”.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Interviews 2, 13.

⁴⁷ Interviews 2, 33.

⁴⁸ Interview 22.

⁴⁹ Interview 29.

⁵⁰ Interview 4.

⁵¹ Francis Fukuyama, “Trust,” (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1995).

⁵² NURC, “Social Cohesion in Rwanda: An Opinion Survey Results 2005-2007,” (Kigali: National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, 2007), 2.

⁵³ Interview 5.

⁵⁴ Quoted in An Ansoms, “Faces of Rural Poverty in Contemporary Rwanda: Linking Livelihood Profiles and Institutional Processes” (University of Antwerp, 2009), 92.

I also asked participants about **problems in the community**. Given Rwanda's political landscape, this is a particularly sensitive topic and I suspect that problems are under-reported. As one woman reminded me, "power and freedom of speech are limited here so people don't complain, even if they do in their home."⁵⁵ When I asked about particular cleavages, most did not believe there were generational problems, although a few mentioned inheritance issues and the inability of parents to pay school fees angering their children. Only a few people thought there were problems with new migrants or returnees (from famine or war) but many said that it used to be a problem closer to the end of the war. Most said that there were no problems with released prisoners, but almost as many, including two of the three released prisoners with whom I spoke, said that social tensions between prisoners and others remain. Here too, respondents tended to mention that there used to be more problems with released prisoners "but now it is getting better."⁵⁶ The two principal reasons cited for problems included that the government, not the community, pardoned prisoners -- "so you're ok with the government but not necessarily with the people"⁵⁷ -- and issues of reparations. Very few reported gender problems at the community level, but most said that they were common in the household. Examples included men disrespecting or discriminating against women in the household, how women do not own property, how men sometimes marry several women and only support one of the co-wives, men drinking too much, and women having to hand over their hard-earned income to their often wasteful husbands. I was not allowed to ask directly about problems along ethnic lines and this seemed sometimes an elephant in the room. A final issue that arose as divisive is the difference between those that get special assistance and those that do not. Many respondents said that this was a problem, including all of the most well-off respondents. "Of course because the Rwandan population has limited financial capacities and once someone has something, the other people will be unhappy that they don't. It is very hard to get loans, so people are very jealous of any kind of 'special treatment'"⁵⁸, such as housing, assistance for school fees, or a cow via a new government program.

3. The social impact of the Rwanda Millennium Village

In studying the Rwandan Millennium Village, I first wanted to understand **how familiar villagers were with the MV**. All interviewees had heard of the Millennium Village and only one person could not name at least one intervention or initiative of the MVP. Most of participants were also personally involved in the Millennium Village in some way. I asked respondents about tangible changes in the community due to the MV with an average response of 2.5 changes, predictably the highest in Kagenge (MV1). The most common type of change that people mentioned was agricultural change. Health was the second most common answer, but mentioned much less than agriculture. Villagers also mentioned (in declining frequency) infrastructure, education, cooperatives, and small business. Respondents realized that "everyone" benefits from interventions like better health care, schools, and agricultural training and no one thought that the MV *negatively* affects any community members.

I was particularly interested in **learning about the social impacts of the MV**. When I spoke with participants about their **membership in groups**, almost three quarters of those with whom I spoke were members of at least one group. The most common type of group cited was a **production group or**

⁵⁵ Interview 28.

⁵⁶ Interview 12.

⁵⁷ Interview 2. Hatzfeld had similar findings in nearby Nyamata. Jean Hatzfeld, *The Antelope's Strategy: Living in Rwanda after the Genocide* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009).

⁵⁸ Interview 4.

cooperative. As a type of group, this was mentioned far more often than the second top option of savings/credit groups. Respondents mentioned cooperatives such as farming groups, the health workers cooperative, the cassava cooperative, the basket-weaving cooperative, and the bee-keeping cooperative. This trend lies in contrast to savings and credit groups which were, by far, the most popular form of group in Rwanda according to a large-scale national 2007 survey⁵⁹ and suggests the important role of the MV in the initiation and support of cooperatives. According to a December 2009 tally of all twenty-seven cooperatives currently in Mayange⁶⁰, all but six have been started or supported by the MV. As a member of an agricultural cooperative told me, “the [MV] project is telling people to put land together and to cultivate a larger area of one crop.”⁶¹ Although cooperatives (or “associations”) have historically existed in Rwanda, and Mayange in particular, they disbanded when the leaders took the profits or during the genocide.⁶²

Membership in groups is often considered to be a **positive indication of social cohesion**, especially when membership includes different groups in the community.⁶³ The women’s basket-weaving cooperative from one cell told me that they sometimes visit the weaving cooperatives in other cells and thus get to know more women that they wouldn’t have otherwise known: “Now we sit together and have social conversation”. Another respondent told me that cooperatives are contributing to social cohesion since “farmers, small traders and women didn’t used to work together”⁶⁴. In addition, “joining associations brings people together to meet, talk and socialize. People wouldn’t meet so often without them.”⁶⁵ In Mayange, cooperatives also appear to stretch across key cleavages in the community. As a local political official explained, “people are in cooperatives irrespective of what they are, their backgrounds.” Members of one MV-initiated cooperative explained their collaboration is playing a role in reconciliation “because it is including people from different ethnicities and people from different cells. For example, in this coop there are no Twa – there are none in the neighborhood – but it includes Hutu and Tutsi aiming for the same goals. So the cooperative has played a role in reconciliation.” One respondent explained that “people that weren’t working together before are working together now. For example, when the basket-weaving cooperatives started, genocide survivors and those that were not victims didn’t work together or know each other. Now they sit together and work together and cooperate.”⁶⁶ These findings run in contrast to Colletta et al. that post-genocide groups (often initiated by the government for special groups, such as survivors) are predominantly exclusive.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the overall strength of relations developed through cooperatives remains to be queried. As one man from Bugesera district told journalist Jean Hatzfeld, “I joined two agricultural cooperatives with the sugarcane planters along the Nyabarongo River: that’s eighty-three Hutu and Tutsi farmers in all and, with the farmers growing foodstuffs, one hundred and thirty growers. We organize raffles to help with

⁵⁹ NURC, “Social Cohesion in Rwanda.”

⁶⁰ Assembled via contact with cell leaders who have this information. The list is quite comprehensive but a few may be missing.

⁶¹ Interview 21.

⁶² Republic of Rwanda, “National Policy on Promotion of Cooperatives,” (Kigali, 2008), 2,

http://www.minicom.gov.rw/IMG/pdf/POLICY_DOCUMENT-COPERATIVES.pdf

⁶³ Elisabeth King, Cyrus Samii, and Birte Snilstveit, *Interventions to Promote Social Cohesion in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 3ie Synthetic Review 002, (Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, 2010).

⁶⁴ Interview 20.

⁶⁵ Interview 23.

⁶⁶ Interview 18.

⁶⁷ Nat J. Colletta and Michelle L. Cullen, *Violent Conflict and the Transformation of Social Capital: Lessons from Cambodia, Rwanda, Guatemala, and Somalia* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2000).

purchases, we stand one another to drinks, we talk together quite properly. But speaking in friendship, that's another matter."⁶⁸

In addition, three **factors that may undermine social cohesion** arose in regard to cooperatives. First, as has been the case in other contexts, economic status appears to matter for density of group membership.⁶⁹ While the majority of villagers with whom I spoke are members of groups, many were not. A common explanation for not joining groups is that one needs money to do so. Typical answers were "I am not in a coop because I am poor. You have to join the coop when you have money" and "How can I get in as I am a poor man?"⁷⁰ One respondent explained that one makes 600RWF per day working for neighbors. He thought that it would cost about 3000 RWF to join a cooperative and asked me "How could you eat?"⁷¹ Another reason for not joining groups related to competing responsibilities: "[I'm not in a coop] because I can't handle it. For example, with the farming associations, I can't go cultivate with them and with my little kids" or "It is not that I don't understand the benefits. I am busy and have difficulties and need to struggle to meet needs"⁷². These findings suggest that not all segments of the population can access some MV-supported activities. Economic inequality tends to decrease social cohesion.⁷³

Second, some participants accused cooperative leaders of corruption and of trying to get more than their share. Two focus groups accused the leaders of a specific cooperative of "benefiting the most". "If people don't start watching what those are doing," they told me, "we are going to go to the ombudsman with complaints." Details involved leaders spending cooperative funds to hire workers without transparency in who they were hiring, how many people, and how much they were paying. Respondents suspected that leaders were hiring their families and/or keeping the money for themselves. These types of suspicions can damage social cohesion.

Third, cooperative members with whom I spoke were much more, or even solely, interested in individualization of benefits – how the profits could be divided up amongst them – in contrast to gains for the group or community.⁷⁴ This may detract from the cooperatives' contribution to social cohesion. While some measures of social cohesion may be up (group membership, collective action), others are likely to remain low (trust).

Another social impact of the MV that merits investigating relates to **gender**. Alongside strong government programming to improve the **status of women** in Rwanda, several women with whom I spoke attribute some of the positive changes in their position to the MV. I asked one woman if being a part of the basket-weaving cooperative has changed her relationship with her husband. "Thoroughly! Big Impact! Husbands see that we are doing something important for them and for us. It has increased

⁶⁸ Hatzfeld, *The Antelope's Strategy*, 204.

⁶⁹ Mary Kay Gugerty and Michael Kremer, "Outside Funding and the Dynamics of Participation in Community Associations," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 3 (2008).

⁷⁰ Interviews 16, 25.

⁷¹ Interview 35.

⁷² Interviews 27, 29.

⁷³ Anirudh Krishna, "How Does Social Capital Grow? A Seven-Year Study of Villages in India," *The Journal of Politics* 69, no. 4 (2007), Antonio C. David and Carmen A. Li, "Exploring the Links between Hiv/Aids, Social Capital, and Development," in *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper Series No. 4679* (World Bank, Policy Research Department and University of Essex, Department of Economics, 2008).

⁷⁴ Colletta and Cullen (2000) also found a high focus on individualism, as did Peter Uvin and Joseph Nyirankundabera, "Le projet ubudehe: Une reflexion et evaluation prospectives" (2003).

peace in the households because the husbands see that we are doing something useful.”⁷⁵ Another woman told me that “I used to ask for lotion or food or clothes from my husband, now I am able to buy these things for myself”. Even though she told me that she and her husband have always talked before making decisions, she feels that it is better now because “there is something that I can contribute”.⁷⁶ Making money through the cooperative seems to have changed power dynamics in some households, and also confidence among women. The main woman’s cooperative (basket-weaving) is no longer making a real profit, however, thus raising concerns about the sustainability of gains.

Assessing the winners and losers from a project is another important element of investigating social impacts. When I asked respondents **who gains the most from the MVP**, the most common answer was the MV staff. Most villagers seemed to say this matter-of-factly, a testament to the value of reliable, salaried jobs. The most pessimistic answer was: “The only beneficiaries of NGOs are its employees and their relatives because they are making salaries. The impact on the population is really nothing.”⁷⁷ The rest of the respondents, though, did not feel like the impact on the population was nothing, they just felt the impact was the highest on project staff. People with land and the able-bodied (in contrast to the elderly, weak or disabled) were also cited as a common “winner”. Local leaders were also frequently mentioned to gain the most from the MV: “I don’t trust local government very well because they meet privately first before seed distribution”⁷⁸ [and take some before sharing]. Another had encountered corruption in his effort to register for MV-supported health insurance (*mutuelle*). “Some don’t get a *mutuelle* card because they don’t have a chance to meet with the local officials and get registered. The leaders of 10 households registers vulnerable people in his 10 household compound, but he may ask you to pay 500 RWF because you are going to receive 1000 RWF free from *mutuelle*. This even happened to me.”⁷⁹ MV staff disagreed as to the possibility of elite capture or corruption related to the project. They felt that if it was transpiring, it was occurring indirectly; local leaders are among the first to hear about programs, such as loans, and can be among the first to benefit.⁸⁰ An equally common answer to the question of who is gaining the most from the MV was those who change their “ideologies”; those who are quick to adapt to what the project is telling them. Respondents recounted that those who best followed the mobilization won “European cows”. Other answers included women, pregnant women (who gain from the ambulance), those who know how to do commerce, and those who have the means to pay back loans. While many participants could name particular “winners” from the project, those gaining more than others, no one suggested that anyone was a “loser” in the sense of being negatively impacted by the project.

Near the end of the conversations, I asked local staff and community members for **suggestions on how to improve the project**. First, a repeated suggestion was for more community consultation in the project. As one woman told me, “The MV has to meet with local community to learn more about what people really want because sometimes the MV brings things that the community doesn’t need or want. People may have good ideas”.⁸¹ Some staff also complained that flexibility and responsiveness to community needs is limited by the fact that much funding is ear-marked by donors (especially in-kind

⁷⁵ Focus group.

⁷⁶ Interview 20.

⁷⁷ Interview 2.

⁷⁸ Interview 22.

⁷⁹ Interview 32.

⁸⁰ In other Millennium Villages, Buse et al. similarly found that “the modality of project input delivery has, in some cases, perpetuated or exacerbated social divisions, for example in relation to control over assets”... See: Buse, Ludi, and Vigneri, *Beyond the Village*, x.

⁸¹ Interview 3. Also mentioned in interview 2, 4, 15.

donations). A second suggestion was the repetition of projects that did not succeed, such as fruit tree, maize, and bean seed distribution, whose growth was hampered by drought. A third related to reforming inefficient committees that were duplicating government roles thereby causing some discord. Others suggested improved infrastructure and more electricity distribution and some youth and elderly villagers each suggested that they would like to see special projects for their demographic group. What a local official called “a relief mentality” was evident among some people who asked for the free distribution of electricity or cows to all villagers. Finally, another relatively common suggestion was payment for attendance at meetings and training sessions. One man explained that “the Millennium training takes time and doesn’t replace the work that you could have been doing”.⁸² He said that training sometimes takes up to four days and that other organizations would pay for lost income. In a focus group, the participants explained that they appreciated that lunches are often provided during training, but felt this was unfair to their families who lost out on their labor for the day. In general, there was a high level of awareness that the project is coming to an end, prompting one to say that it is too late for suggestions. One woman, who recognized the coming end of the project, suggested that the MV “should move to other neighborhoods and form cooperatives and help vulnerable women from other places.”⁸³

What about people outside of the MV? I was curious as to whether people from neighboring villages knew about the MV and if this caused any tensions. Providing resources to one group to the exclusion of another can sometimes prompt conflict.⁸⁴ Exclusion has also been a critique of the MV: “the international community cannot neglect the moral implications of selecting a happy few to receive medical care, education, sanitation, and the like while leaving the large majority outside the fence.”⁸⁵ I did not have the opportunity to pursue this line of research. Staff told me that people in nearby Nyamata recognized the value of the project, anecdotally reporting that they often heard things like “the people in Mayange don’t know how good they have it.” While the staff did not believe that people beyond Nyamata would have heard of the project, I spent one day in Gashora, nearly an hour away, and learned that several people were familiar with the name of the project and some of its principal components. This area of social impacts requires further investigation.

Conclusion

Based on 35 qualitative interviews conducted in Mayange sector in October 2009, this paper provides a sketch of social life in Mayange and how it is being impacted by the Rwanda Millennium Village project. According to villagers, there are several positive social impacts of the project, such as an increase in group membership, especially in cooperatives; cooperative members working together with new people and across important cleavages; and some perceived improvements in women’s position in the household and community. Some potentially negative social impacts of the project include exclusion of the poorest from cooperatives; suspicions of elite capture; and sentiments of inadequate participation in the project. Development projects are never socially neutral. Despite an important focus on scientific innovation, development involves “chang[ing]...whole societies and the behavior and attitudes of the

⁸² Interview 13

⁸³ Interview 12

⁸⁴ Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm : How Aid Can Support Peace--or War* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).

⁸⁵ Michiel Keyzer and Lia Van Wesenbeeck, “The Millennium Development Goals: How Realistic Are They?” in *The Poorest and Hungry: Assessments, Analyses and Actions*, Joachim von Braun, Ruth Vargas Hill, and Rajul Pandya-Lorch (editors), Washington, International Food Policy Research Institute, 2009), p.498.

people within them.”⁸⁶ It is important to continually monitor the social impacts of development, especially in post-conflict contexts such as Rwanda.

Appendix A: Respondent Demographics

Respondent	Interview Date	Cell	Gender
1	16/10/09	Kagenge	Female
2	16/10/09	Kibenga	Male
3	16/10/09	Kagenge	Female
4	19/10/09	Kagenge	Male
5	19/10/09	Kagenge	Male
6	19/10/09	Kagenge	Male
7	19/10/09	Kagenge	Female
8	19/10/09	Kagenge	Female
9	20/10/09	Kagenge	Male
10	20/10/09	Kagenge	Female
11	20/10/09	Kagenge	Female
12	21/10/09	Kagenge	Female
13	21/10/09	Mbyo	Male
14	21/10/09	Mbyo	Female
15	21/10/09	Mbyo	Male
16	22/10/09	Mbyo	Female
17	22/10/09	Mbyo	Female
18	22/10/09	Kiborizi	Female
19	23/10/09	Kibenga	Male
20	23/10/09	Kagenge	Female
21	23/10/09	Kibenga	Male
22	26/10/09	Kiborizi	Female
23	26/10/09	Gakamba	Female
24	26/10/09	Kiborizi	Female
26	26/10/09	Gakamba	Male
27	27/10/09	Kibenga	Female
28	27/10/09	Kibenga	Female
29	27/10/09	Kibenga	Male
30	28/10/09	Gakamba	Male
31	28/10/09	Kiborizi	Male
32	28/10/09	Kiborizi	Male
33	28/10/09	Gakamba	Male
34	28/10/09	Gakamba	Male
35	28/10/09	Gakamba	Female
36	28/10/09	Kiborizi	Male

⁸⁶ Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001), 42.