

# **Fighting for Equality: Analyzing Inequality in Rwanda and South Africa**

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## ***Abstract***

*This article examines the inequality that exists within South Africa and Rwanda. Both countries have a history of genocide that have both stemmed and resulted in inequalities, some aspects are similar in both countries, and some are wildly different. This article looks at the inequality in South Africa and Rwanda regarding income and education. Both South Africa and Rwanda have spent the last 25 years trying to rebuild their countries after experiencing a genocide in Rwanda and overcoming Apartheid in South Africa.*

## **I. Introduction**

According to Oxfam International (2014), extreme inequality undermines economic growth. In the past, most economists believed that inequality had little to no impact on a country's growth prospects. The source for this belief was based on the fact that most countries suffering from low economic growth were newly independent countries. It was thought that it was mostly a shortage of capital that was holding these countries back.

The purpose of this article is to examine and discuss inequality, focusing mostly on income inequality and education inequality in Rwanda and South Africa. Inequality in incomes and education are intertwined and results of each other. In the case of Rwanda and South Africa, these inequalities are heavily influenced by racial discrimination, especially the 1994 Rwandan genocide and South Africa's Apartheid rule, which came to an end in the early 1990s.

This article is structured into six sections. Following this Introduction, Section II provides a literature review that discusses three articles related to each country. Section III summarizes some basic socio-economic background of the two countries, which is followed by an analysis of inequality in Rwanda and South Africa (Section IV). Section V provides some ethical discussion on the origins of inequality in the two countries, some differences and similarities across the two countries and the way forward. The last section provides some conclusions.

## **II. Literature Review**

There is a vast amount of literature regarding various inequalities existing in South Africa and Rwanda. Most of the literature discussing inequalities link the topic to income inequality, showing

that income inequality often leads to other forms of inequality. Most of the literature has been published following the Rwandan genocide and the end of Apartheid in South Africa. Uvin (1997), Muller (2002), and Finnoff (2015) analyze inequalities in Rwanda, while Spreen and Vally (2006), Leibbrandt, Finn and Woolard (2012), and Lehohla and Shabalala (2014) focus on South African inequalities.

- Uvin (1997) discusses the socio-economic inequalities that existed within Rwanda until the Rwandan genocide. Before the genocide, there was a longstanding idea among the inhabitants of Rwanda that there was a social class system based on the two major ethnic groups, the majority Hutus and the minority Tutsis, when in reality Rwandans as a whole were a single ethnic group. However, divisions existed between Hutus and Tutsis mostly in terms of political power. The consequences associated with the determination of whether you were Hutu or Tutsi also flooded other aspects of their lives.
- Muller (2002) discusses the relationship of the cost of living in Rwanda and how it connects to a negative association against the poor. They write about how to pay for the prices of goods in Rwanda, it is necessary to have an income, without one, families aren't able to participate in the consumer aspect of life. This article focuses on the rural area of Rwanda, where most of the poor are situated. In Rwanda, prices of goods fluctuate because of the seasons. Food prices are often also higher where there is worse income distribution. Often times, poor families will try to move where prices are cheaper, but the overall process of that is expensive. In conclusion, Muller finds a strong sense of discrimination against the poor because of the prices of goods. In addition, Muller tries to show that welfare would help to allow the use of different sources of prices for households with lower incomes.
- Finnoff (2015) discusses the inequality in Rwanda regarding gender, wealth, education, and location. The paper gives an overview of human capital, measured by education levels. Poor households were likely to have the head of the family to be without an education. In some instances, a household run by a woman does not have access to education because of her gender. Finnoff determined that in the early 2000s, education was a factor for how much income was made in a household. As time has passed, education has become a more important factor to limiting other inequalities. Finnoff concludes by providing ways to limit inequality by encouraging the importance of education.
- Spreen and Vally (2006) explore the future of education in South Africa by determining the existing inequality and creating policies to fix it. They highlight the importance of not just education but the quality of education a person has the right to receive. They emphasize that social injustice is still extremely relevant in society, therefore they link education with human rights. In conclusion, they discuss how education is the solution to aiding not only equality, but other issues such as eliminating poverty.
- Leibbrandt, Finn, and Woolard (2012) discusses the changes in income inequality in South Africa over the post-Apartheid period. They analyze income data from 1993 and 2008. Throughout their findings, they show an increase in income inequality, as most of the income goes towards the richest members of South Africa, while the poor community makes their money from social grants. Because of the income inequality, this also perpetuates racial inequality. The majority of the wealthy people in South Africa are white, while the middle and lower classes are African. In conclusion, there is rising inequality among the labor markets, as a result of unemployment and income, which also affects the

level of education. Most people who are making a low income did not receive a secondary education, which in South Africa is necessary to advance in the labor market, and therefore the cycle of inequality is a vicious cycle.

- Lehola and Shabalala (2014) discuss the racial inequality and present segregation that was a result of the Apartheid era. All of the urban areas in South Africa during Apartheid were inhabited by white people, and the rest of the land was given to the rest of the population. They analyze the 2011 census of South Africa that shows that most of the land is still segregated. They determine that most of the white people still live in these urban settlements that are naturally associated with wealth and the overall well-being of the inhabitants. The traditional settlements remain the same racially, almost 100 percent African, proving there has been little done to end the racial inequality that still lingers after Apartheid.

### III. Socio-economic Background

Following the shooting down of a plane carrying then-President Juvenal Habyarimana and his counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi (both Hutus), 800,000 people (mostly Tutsis) were killed over a span of 100 days during the Rwandan genocide.<sup>1</sup> Twenty-five years later, Rwanda is one of the fastest growing economies in Central Africa, having grown at 8 percent per year between 2001 and 2014. Rwanda's goals are to reach the status of being a middle-income country by 2035 and being a high-income country by 2050.<sup>2</sup>

After the end of the Apartheid rule in South Africa, the political transition has been described as one of the most remarkable political undertakings in the past century. South Africa is considered to have a highly advanced political system, run by the African National Congress. South Africa has also made considerable strides toward improving the wellbeing of its citizens since its transition to democracy in the mid-1990s, but progress is slowing. Based on the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day, 18.8 percent of South Africans were poor in 2015, following a decline from 33.8 percent in 1996. However, high inequality has been perpetuated in South Africa by a legacy of exclusion and the nature of economic growth, which is not pro-poor and does not generate sufficient jobs.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1 shows purchasing power parity (PPP) adjusted GDP per capita for Rwanda and South Africa from 1990 to 2017, using the left vertical axis for Rwanda and the right vertical axis for South Africa. Given the difference ranges, it is clear that South Africa has a dramatically larger GDP per capita than Rwanda. In 1990, Rwanda's GDP per capita was less than one tenth of South Africa's GDP per capita: \$873 for Rwanda and \$9,696 for South Africa. Rwanda then experienced a sharp decline during the Rwandan genocide in 1994, but grew very strongly subsequently, reaching \$1,854 in 2017, which is more twice that of its value in 1990. South Africa on the other hand made very little progress. South Africa's GDP per capita declined moderately during the early 1990s, then grew moderately in the late 1990s, relatively strongly during the early 2000s, but stagnated basically since 2008, reaching \$12,295 in 2017.

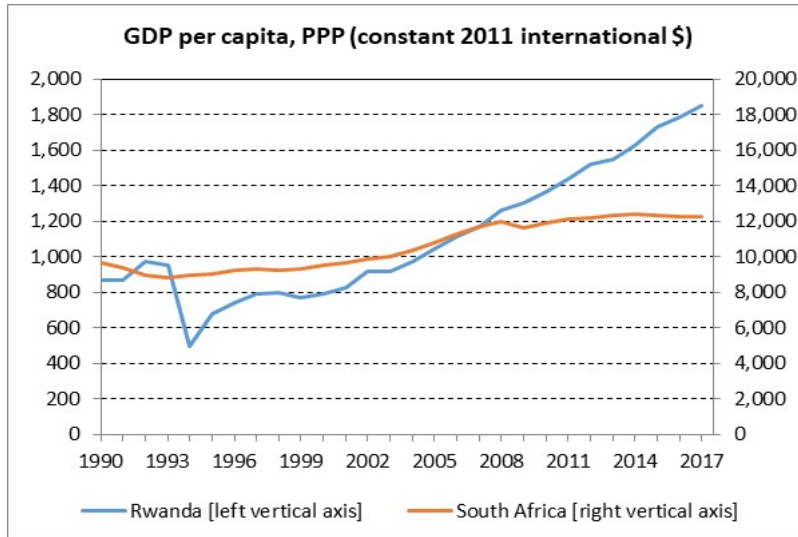
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<sup>1</sup> BBC (2019).

<sup>2</sup> World Bank (2020).

<sup>3</sup> World Bank (2019b).

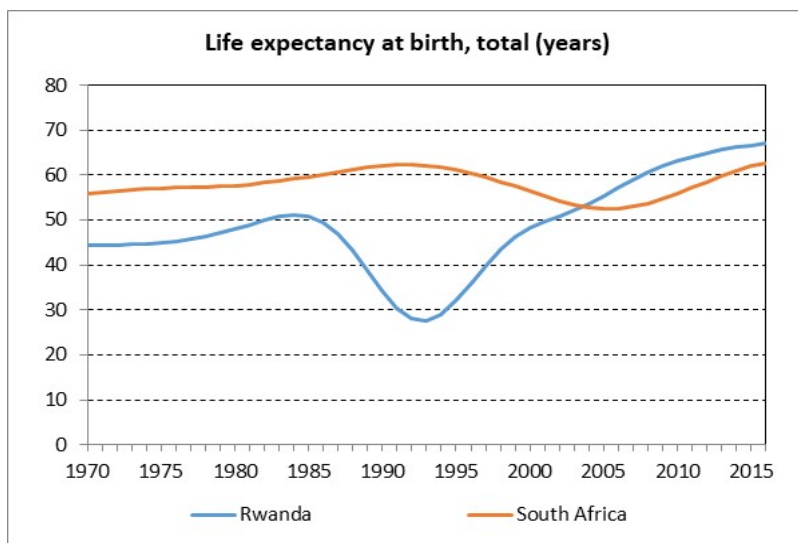
**Figure 1: Rwanda and South Africa's PPP adjusted GDP per capita, 1990-2017**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019a).

Figure 2 shows life expectancy at birth in Rwanda and South Africa from 1970 to 2016. In 1970, the life expectancy of Rwanda was 44.3 years, while it was 55.9 years in South Africa. Hence, like for GDP per capita, South Africa life expectancy has been much higher initially. And like for GDP per capita, life expectancy then collapsed in Rwanda during the genocide, but recovered very quickly and continued to grow, reaching 67.1 years in 2016. On the other hand, South Africa experienced a long though moderate decline in its life expectancy from 1993 to 2005, reaching an all-time low of 52.6 years. It then rose moderately during the last few years, reaching 62.8 years in 2016, which is however 4.3 years lower than that of Rwanda.

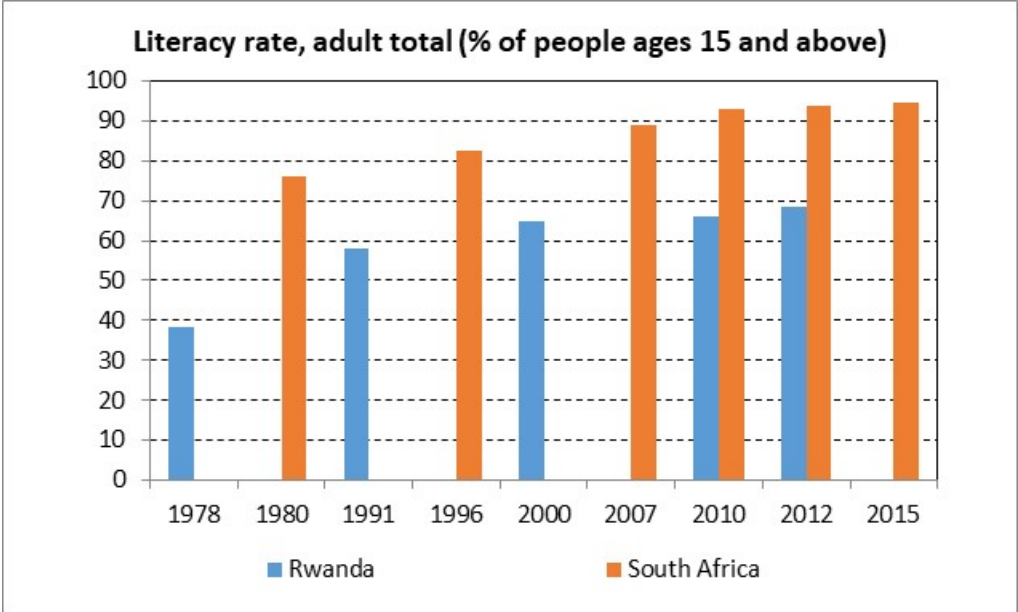
**Figure 2: Rwanda and South Africa's Life Expectancy, 1970-2016**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019a).

Figure 3 shows the literacy rates in Rwanda and South Africa. In 1980, South Africa had a literacy rate (among its people ages 15 and above) of 76.2 percent. By 2015, it increased to 94.4 percent, which is much higher than Rwanda’s literacy rate, which increased from 38.2 percent in 1978 to 68.3 percent in 2012 (the last year such data is available for Rwanda). Hence, while Rwanda has overtaken South Africa in terms of GDP per capita and life expectancy, Rwanda is still far from reaching South Africa’s literacy rate based on the currently available data.

**Figure 3: Rwanda and South Africa’s Literacy Rates**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019a).

**IV. Inequality in Rwanda and South Africa**

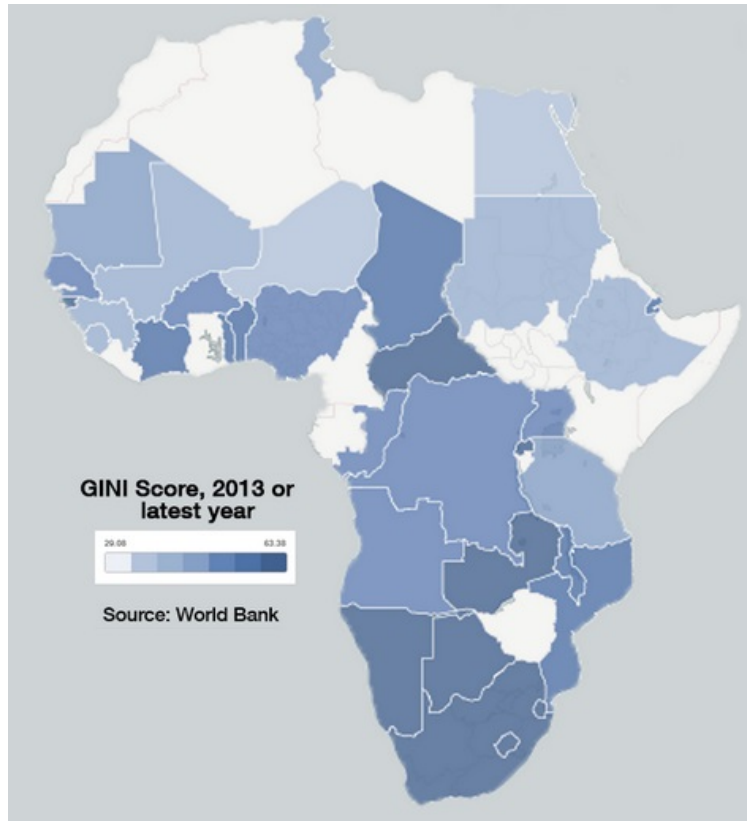
**IV.1. Income Inequality**

Figure 4 shows the Gini coefficient for income inequality for the African continent. It shows both Rwanda and South Africa in the darkest blue shade, indicating the highest level of inequality, even though as Figure 5 shows, Rwanda is less unequal than South Africa. As of 2018, the World Bank placed South Africa as the most unequal country in the world, Rwanda was ranked as the twelfth most unequal country.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the limited data available for income inequality, Figure 5 shows clearly that South Africa’s inequality has actually increased since the end of the Apartheid rule. Measured from 0 to 100, the Gini reached an all-time high of 64.8 in 2005. It has nearly remained at that high level during the last decade, reaching 63.0 in 2014. Compared to South Africa, Rwanda has a considerably lower level of inequality for most of the years we have data, though Rwanda was relatively close to catch up with South Africa in 2005, which was also the year Rwanda had its highest level of inequality, with a Gini coefficient of 52.0. Rwanda’s Gini then decreased to 45.1 in 2013, which is the last year such data is available.

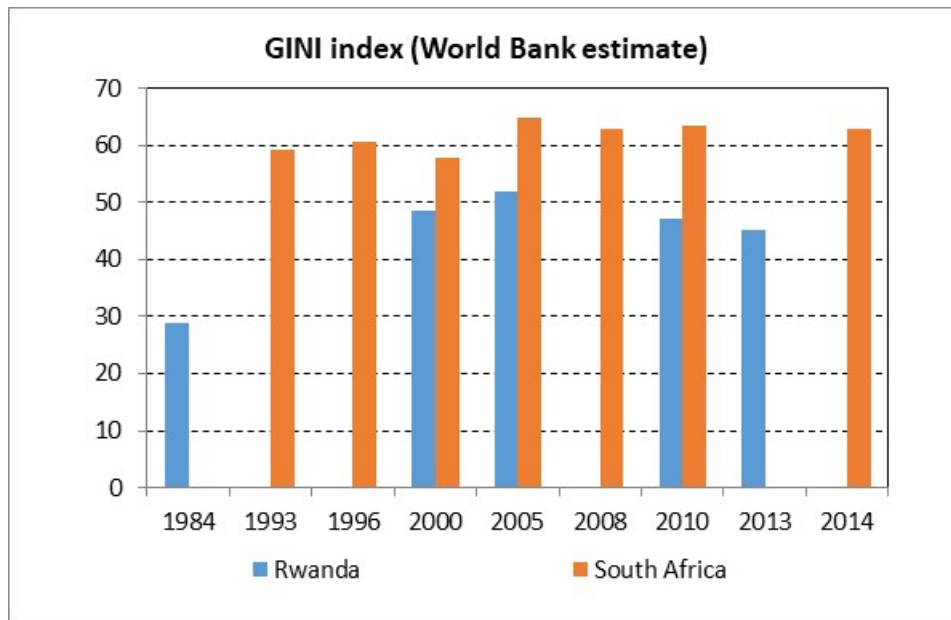
<sup>4</sup> Scott with Pattersson (2019).

**Figure 4: Mapping of Income Inequality in Africa**



Source: Myers (2015), based on World Bank data.

**Figures 5: Gini Coefficient for Rwanda and South Africa (all available years)**

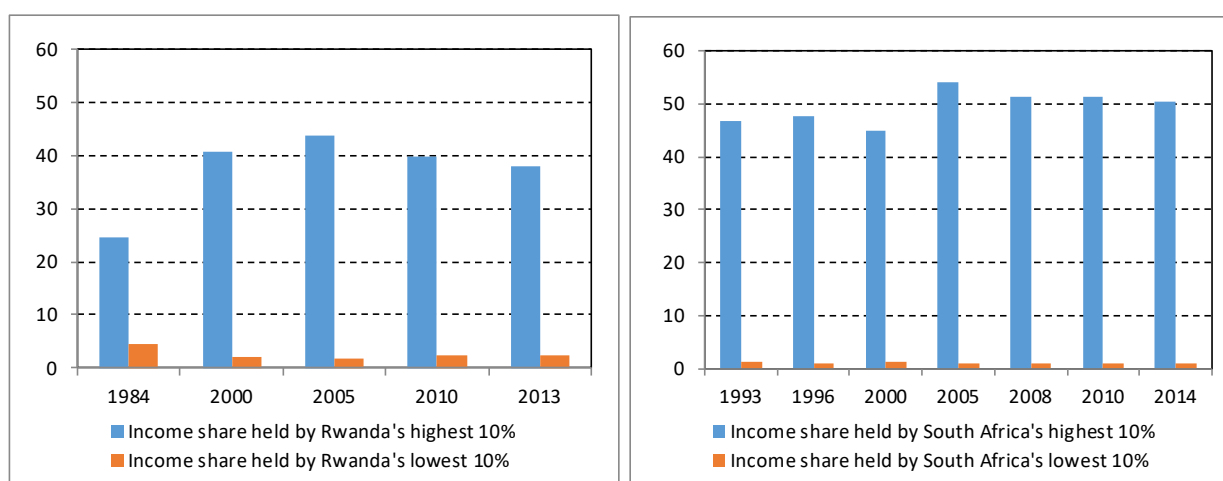


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019a).

Figures 6 and 7 show the income shares of the richest and the poorest 10 percent of the population, respectively for South Africa and Rwanda and South Africa. There is a clear disparity between the wealthy and the poor classes in both countries, especially in South Africa. Figure 6 shows that the disparity in income has increased significantly in Rwanda since 1984, when the highest ten percent earned 24.6 percent of total income, while the lowest ten percent earned 4.4 percent of total income.

On the other hand, as Figure 7 shows, income disparity was always very high in South Africa. The lowest income disparity of South Africa was in 2000, when the highest ten percent earned 44.9 percent of total income, while the lowest ten percent earned 1.3 percent of total income. Five years later, South Africa reached its highest level of income disparity, with the highest ten percent earning 54.2 percent of total income (i.e., more than half), while the lowest ten percent earned only 1.0 percent of total income.<sup>5</sup> While data for wealth inequality is even less sparse than for income inequality, based on data provided by the World Bank (2019b), the richest 10 percent of the South African population held about 71 percent of net wealth in 2015, whereas the bottom 60 percent of South Africa held 7 percent of the net wealth.

**Figures 6 and 7: Income Shares of the richest and poorest ten percent (all available data)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019a).

In South Africa especially, the ten percent with the highest income are mostly white. This shows that income inequality exists racially as well. The labor markets in both South Africa and Rwanda rely heavily on agriculture for their income. Income in South Africa is hard to measure because of the many factors that are associated with the labor markets. Recently, income inequality in South Africa has been measured by a questionnaire regarding expenditure. One of the questionnaires is completed for each household. In the past, the majority of income has been from the agriculture market, but as of late that income has now been removed from the questionnaire.<sup>6</sup> There is some controversy regarding these questionnaires and how accurate they are within the community.

<sup>5</sup> South Africa's income inequality is covered in more details in Odusola, Cornia, Bhorat and Conceição (eds.) (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Leibbrandt, Finn and Woolard (2012).

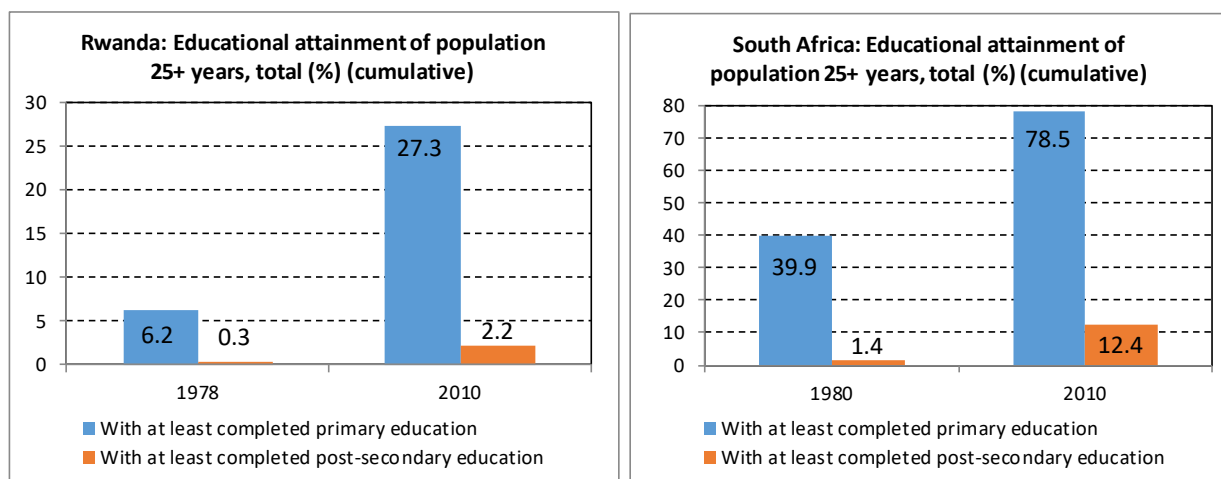
## V.2. Inequality in Education

We already had shown in Figure 3 above that Rwanda has very low literacy rates compared to South Africa. Looking at the educational attainment of the total population of age 25+ years in Figures 8 and 9, respectively for Rwanda and South Africa, we see once again a huge difference between Rwanda and South Africa. However, right now we are more interested in educational inequality in these two countries.

As Figure 8 shows, that despite progress in Rwanda in increasing educational attainment, the inequality in educational attainment has barely changed from 1978 to 2010. In 1978, the ratio of people having at least completed post-secondary education among those who have at least completed primary education was 0.05 (i.e., 0.3 percent divided by 6.2 percent). In 2010, the percentages of people having completed at least primary and at least post-secondary education has gone up significantly, yet the ratio of people having at least completed post-secondary education among those who have at least completed primary education has increased to only 0.08 (i.e., 2.2 percent divided by 27.3 percent).

Comparing Figure 8 (Rwanda) with Figure 9 (South Africa) shows that the educational attainments have been much higher in South Africa. However, looking again at the ratio of people having at least completed post-secondary education among those who have at least completed primary education, that ratio has increased from 0.04 in 1980 to 0.16 in 2010. Hence, not only does South Africa have higher levels in educational attainment than Rwanda, South Africa has also been able to reduce the educational inequality more than Rwanda.

**Figure 8 and 9: Educational Attainment in Rwanda and South Africa (limited to around 1978 and 2010, which are the only years this data is available for Rwanda)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019a).

Finally, there is also a rural/urban educational inequality. Schools in both countries vary between regions, schools in rural and farm areas do not provide the same education as to those in urban areas.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Spreen and Vally (2006).



## **V. Ethical Discussion**

### **V.1. Origins of Inequality**

As a result of the dispossession of land in South Africa, many of black South Africans were forced to work in cheap labor markets, which helped create the income inequality gap between South Africans. As shown in Philip, Tsedu and Zwane (2014), social grants play a critical role on helping lessen inequality in South Africa. These social grants give students school uniforms and in the long term, has help lessen income inequality. There is no doubt that race has an effect on income share inequality in South Africa. In 2012, 51 percent of the middle class were black people, as opposed to in 2004, when 52 percent of the middle class was white people.<sup>8</sup>

Within that middle class, 57 percent of black people work in the public sector. Because of this, there is a divide in income between those who work in the private sector and make higher wages.<sup>9</sup> Through the creation of social grants in South Africa, these are not only helping fix income inequality, but through this, this is helping families pay for a child's education, therefore, increasing education inequality that is often associated with the income inequality.

A significant gap exists between those who are unemployed. Only three percent of people are supported through the South African Unemployment Insurance Fund.<sup>10</sup> The rest of the unemployed population has no form of support, except for their families and friends. This is seen as very disempowering and stalls people from pursuing another job. Aside from the creation of social grants, South Africa invested in large-scale public employment. This explains why most people are often seen working in the public sector. Through these programs, income is earned, and social benefits and economic benefits are gained.

In Rwanda income inequality and education inequality go hand in hand. When one increases, so does the other and vice versa. A new policy regarding an increase in primary school enrollment has been put in place and the overall inequality index has decreased slightly. The ethics of income inequality stem from the genocide, geographical disparities, and access to education. The World Bank (2015) poverty assessment of Rwanda states that the population has shifted toward non-farm occupation, and because of this, people have more access to education, which has increased in the past couple of years. Public subsidies play a large role in helping families access education services, especially the poor. As opposed to South Africa, agriculture has helped many Rwandans through reducing their inequality seen in their income and education. Many jobs in Rwanda are centered around agriculture, and surprisingly, agriculture has held the key for sustaining poverty for the short term. Although this is only a short term, it has helped families gain a steady income to help their children get an education and succeed further in life.<sup>11</sup>

### **V.2. Some Similarities and Differences**

When looking at countries who have both suffered atrocities such as genocide it is important to remember one of the effects was the mass reconstruction of each country's political and economic structures. As a result of this, both Rwanda and South Africa had to rebuild their economic and social system. It is evident that many of the institutions in Rwanda and South Africa have suffered

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<sup>8</sup> Philip, Tsedu and Zwane (2014).

<sup>9</sup> Philip, Tsedu and Zwane (2014).

<sup>10</sup> Philip, Tsedu and Zwane (2014).

<sup>11</sup> World Bank (2015).

because of the income share inequality, and this inequality has then also trickled into other aspects of life.

A difference between South Africa and Rwanda is the existence of different markets to help increase income shares. In South Africa, the main driver of the change in inequality regarding income was because of the increase of government grants given to those in a low-income household.<sup>12</sup> Rwanda, has not been known for given grants to low-income households. To help those who are in a low-income household, Rwanda provides jobs in the public sector. There is also a difference in South Africa regarding races and the labor markets. Leibbrandt, Finn and Woolard (2012) show that South Africa's labor market is not helping the equalization of income across racial groups. Although there is an increase in formal labor markets, it is still difficult to help all races in income equality.

As opposed to South Africa, Rwanda's inequality is geographically rooted. Those in rural areas often make less money and receive less of an education compared to those in urban areas. Muller (2002) portrays the inequality in commercial markets: goods are often more expensive in rural areas. Muller discovers that the price index in rural Rwanda is negatively related to the real living standards and discrimination against the poor is constant.<sup>13</sup>

When looking at income inequality in Rwanda, Schiel, Leibbrandt and Lam (2014) also examine inequality by looking at who is at the head of the household. Finnoff (2015) noticed that in Rwanda, widows were increasingly less likely to be poor, but when the widows were females, they were more likely to be poor.<sup>14</sup> This knowledge simply strengthens the idea that income inequality in Rwanda is intertwined with education. When a female would run the household, she is most likely to be poor because of the lack of her education. Males are more often able to receive an education and they also get a job much more easily than women.

There is a similar situation in South Africa, as there is not always an equal household regarding gender. Another difference was the duration of racial conflicts in South Africa and Rwanda: In South Africa, Apartheid lasted a long period of time and was severely implemented into citizens' everyday life. In Rwanda, the genocide happened across the span of a summer, but with mass casualties. Inequality in Rwanda increased in the decade following the genocide, though Rwanda has made some progress in reducing inequality in more recent years. On the other hand, South Africa has made very limited progress since post-Apartheid.

### **V.3. The Way Forward**

After looking at the data regarding the severity of income inequality and education, it is clear that changes need to be made at local levels. In a recent speech by UNDP's Resident Representative, reference has been made to the importance of Rwanda's agenda to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>15</sup> This agenda, includes reducing inequalities, emphasizing as before, investing in education and fixing the way labor and capital are rewarded in the economy. Fixing income inequality is addressed in Rwanda's Agenda 2030 by suggesting creating solutions such as appropriate labor laws and minimum wages.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Leibbrandt, Finn and Woolard (2012).

<sup>13</sup> Muller (2002).

<sup>14</sup> Finnoff (2015).

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Rwanda (2019).

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Rwanda (2019).

With regards to South Africa, according to Schiel, Leibbrandt and Lam (2014), social grants are the main way in which South Africa addresses its income inequality. The purpose of the study was to observe the role of social grants in reducing income inequality during post-Apartheid. Although inequality levels have decreased in some sectors of life in South Africa, the inequality has remained stagnant and the racial association seen with Apartheid remained. South Africa measures income inequality in four categories: labor, old-age pension, other government transfers, and other income. Schiel, Leibbrandt and Lam (2014) conclude that overall, social grants have led to a decrease in inequality. Some programs that have failed were the social assistance to the elderly and changing the state pension. The one program that has proved to be the most successful in reducing income inequality was the social protection programs that were started after the Apartheid rule.

Similarly, Verpoorten (2014) looks at inequality from the post-war lens and studies the economic and social mobility of human development in Rwanda. After the war, Rwanda was able to get out of such intense poverty through the help of massive aid that was given to them, and the increased budget shares for health, education, and agriculture. Basically, after the war, Rwanda had a complete restructure of all of their sectors, helping them for future success, as now their economy is one of the fastest growing in Africa. There have been many campaigns that help get children educated through the mandatory primary education program. This is beneficial but only applies to children in certain areas. When looking at the background of education in Rwanda, it is clear that those in rural areas are severely under-privileged.

Turning away from the focus of education, there is then a focus on economic mobility. Because of how heavily income is based outside of agriculture, there is a push to create more jobs in non-agricultural sectors in Rwanda. As a part of the program that gives low income household jobs, there is work in construction and rebuilding. Parts of Rwanda are still underbuilt and there is much to be done after the genocide. This gives civilians the opportunity to improve Rwanda. Through these programs, low income households can gain a feeling of empowerment that some other nations lack. If a person is out of a job and struggling financially, they are less likely to go out and look for a job because of their state of being. But in this case, Rwanda has implemented a program in which people can secure a job in the public sector and slowly inch their way out of the income inequality they are suffering.<sup>17</sup>

Overall, according to the various studies, income inequality and education are addressed most successfully through empowerment programs (including grants), as seen in Rwanda and South Africa. According to the trends given by Schiel, Leibbrandt and Lam (2014), it appears that social grants will help to further eliminate income inequality in South Africa. On the other hand, as the Rwandan economy grows, there will be more access to grants given to low-income families by the government, eventually helping to eliminate all income inequality. Hence, it appears as that South Africa and Rwanda have very similar ethical concepts, they have just been implemented at different times and through different ways.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This article analyzed the evolution of income and education inequalities in South Africa and Rwanda. These inequalities are results of a long-standing racial and social class inequalities. Through looking at income inequality through the lenses of education and race, it is clear there is

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<sup>17</sup> Verpoorten (2014).

a vicious cycle of a division between the rich and poor, and sometimes even between the races living in each respective country.

There are a variety of social policies in South Africa that aim at decreasing inequalities, but they have not been very effective. In Rwanda, there is empowerment seen through the jobs offered to low income individuals in the private sector. As Rwanda's economy continues to successfully grow, one can only hope that there will be more grants accessible to help everyone in each geographic region the chance to equal job opportunities and education. Given the theoretical knowledge we have on how to tackle inequality, much more can be done than is currently done for people living in both South Africa and Rwanda to gain more equality in every aspect of their life.

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