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***Understanding elite commitment to social protection:
Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme***

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Abstract

This paper examines the political economy of Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) and argues that strong government commitment to the VUP has been shaped by the specific characteristics of the political settlement that was established around 2000. For the Rwandan government, the VUP has never been just a social transfer programme, but a key part of the development strategy that aims to promote social stability and the legitimacy of the ruling coalition. While donor social protection ideas have been influential, these are purposefully adapted by government, with a view to meeting its developmental and political goals.

Keywords: Rwanda, social protection, policy transfer, ideas, political settlements, process tracing

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Introduction

The Rwandan government introduced the Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) with donor support in 2008. The VUP comprises: public works; unconditional direct support for those unable to work; and a financial services component that promotes financial literacy and provides credit. The programme was gradually rolled out from an initial 30 pilot sectors.¹ By June 2014, public works were operating in 180 of 416 sectors and providing support to 104,310 households, while direct support reached 61,948 households in 330 sectors. At this point, total programme coverage was roughly 6 percent of the Rwandan population and the equivalent of 13 percent of those living below the national poverty line.² This paper analyses the political economy dynamics influencing the adoption and implementation of the VUP.

The framework guiding the paper is described in Lavers and Hickey (2016). The starting point is Khan's (2010) political settlements theory which focuses on the balance of power between contending elite and non-elite factions that underpins particular configurations of formal and informal institutions. Lavers and Hickey's (2016) 'adapted political settlements framework' extends Khan's work in several respects. First, Khan's (2010) observation that stable *political settlements* require compatibility between elites' holding power and the distribution of resources resulting from particular institutional configurations is extended by incorporating the concept of a *distributional regime* (Seekings and Natrass 2005). Within this distributional regime, social protection is one mechanism of resource distribution, alongside, for example, the development strategy, social services and tax policies. The premise is that social protection policy is not formulated in isolation, but in anticipation of, and in response to, this overall distributional regime. Second, we complement analysis of the political settlement with a focus on the social protection *policy domain*, in acknowledgement that different policy domains are of greater or lesser importance to the political settlement and have their own particular political dynamics. Within this policy domain, *policy coalitions* of domestic and transnational actors coordinate their activities to advocate for policy change.

Third, Lavers and Hickey's (2016) framework focuses on the interaction between ideas and interests, in contrast to Khan's (2010) purely interest-based analysis. From this perspective, interests – rather than reflecting the calculations of rational actors blessed with perfect information – are 'irredeemably ideational', based on individuals' perceptions of material reality in situations of limited information (Hay 2011: 67). Political settlements are, therefore, not solely based on the balance of power between contending factions, but also rest on a set of shared ideas. Furthermore, the balance of power between contending factions rarely, if ever, determines particular policy responses. However limiting structural constraints may be, decision-makers always have a degree of policy space within which ideas can be influential. To

¹ Administratively Rwanda is divided into (from largest to smallest): districts, sectors (s. *umurenge*/ pl. *imirenge*), cells and villages.

² Author's calculations, based on the average household size in the latest Rwandan census.

analyse the role of ideas in policymaking, we distinguish between three types: *policy ideas* that provide potential solutions to pre-defined social problems; *problem definitions* that provide ways of framing particular social issues, favouring certain types of policy solution over others; and *paradigms* that serve as overarching road maps. We propose that paradigmatic ideas are likely to influence the formation and maintenance of political settlements, while problem definitions and policy ideas are likely to be influential within policy coalitions.

The paper employs a process tracing methodology (George and Bennett 2004) to reconstruct the policymaking process, based on semi-structured, key informant interviews with senior politicians and technical staff within government (11 interviews), representatives of donors and international organisations (nine interviews) and foreign consultants (seven interviews). These respondents are detailed in the list at the end of the paper and constitute the majority of the key actors, past and present, involved in design and programme administration. These interviews were conducted during fieldwork in Rwanda in May 2015, and before and after this fieldwork by Skype with key people who had subsequently left the country. The aim of the analysis is to link this policymaking process to the underlying political settlement and policy context. For this purpose, the paper draws on the existing academic literature on Rwandan politics, official policy documents and statistics.

The paper finds that strong elite commitment to the VUP has been shaped by the specific characteristics of the political settlement. The VUP is a direct response to distributional problems – high rates of poverty and inequality – that were perceived in government to pose a threat to the political settlement. While the objectives and framing of the VUP have shifted over time, the government has never viewed the VUP solely as a social transfer programme, but as an integral part of the government's development strategy. Within this context, the government has actively sought to learn from outside expertise, including the social protection ideas promoted by development partners. However, these transnational ideas are purposefully re-interpreted and adapted by the government to fit existing policy ideas and framings, with a view to meeting its overall developmental and political goals.

The paper begins by analysing Rwanda's political settlement and the broader distributional regime within which the VUP operates. The analysis then turns to the VUP itself, focusing on, first, the design process and, second, programme implementation. The final section concludes.

2 The political settlement under the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)

Rwanda's current political settlement can be traced to the RPF's military victory in 1994 that ended the genocide and civil war. Following a period of post-conflict reconstruction, around 2000 there was a series of departures from the ruling coalition that led to a high degree of cohesion within the ruling coalition.

2.1 From post-conflict reconstruction to the current political settlement

Following victory in 1994, the RPF faced little in the way of elite opposition in the country. The RPF was undoubtedly the dominant force in the Government of National Unity (1994-2000); however, there were clear attempts to present an image of power-sharing between the political parties, as well as ethnic balance, with the new President, Pasteur Bizimungu being a Hutu from the RPF. Nonetheless, the RPF could not count on widespread support across Rwanda. The new government was ruling over a majority Hutu population that had been subject to extensive propaganda demonising the RPF (Golooba-Mutebi 2008), while a significant proportion of the population had taken part in massacres of Tutsis during the genocide. Furthermore, with government structures and infrastructure all but destroyed during the conflict, and opposition troops making regular incursions into Rwanda from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a direct threat to the ruling coalition remained. As such, the new government relied heavily on the military and security forces to achieve a quick restoration of social order and re-building of state capacity (Golooba-Mutebi 2008; Reyntjens 2013).

Arguably, the current political settlement was forged in the period between the late 1990s and the 2003 Constitution. At this time there were a wave of resignations, expulsions and defections from the ruling coalition, including the prime minister, president and speaker of the National Assembly, while the Mouvement Démocratique Républicain, the second largest party, was banned for promoting sectarianism. Although the government continued to rule as a coalition, these changes strengthened the RPF's position. Meanwhile, Paul Kagame – previously vice-President – became President in 2000 and comfortably won elections in 2003 and 2010.

As with so much in Rwandan politics, these events are subject to wildly diverging interpretations. For critics, the expulsions and defections constituted the centralisation of power by the RPF, and President Kagame in particular (Reyntjens 2013). In contrast, analysts more favourable to the regime argue that many of these expulsions can be traced to a lack of commitment by certain individuals and factions to core ideas of the ruling coalition (discussed below) (Golooba-Mutebi and Booth 2013). Either way, the result is that there is no significant elite competition to the RPF-led coalition within Rwanda, with opponents limited to an often vocal Rwandan diaspora and remnants of opposition forces in the DRC.

President Kagame is widely acknowledged to be enormously powerful and central to all key government decisions. This power derives in part from his strong support, both within the RPF and in the military. Indeed, the military remains key to state power in Rwanda (Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2011; Jowell 2014). Beyond the Ministry of Defence (MINADEF), probably the two most important ministries are the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN) and the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC). MINALOC's prominent position results from the radical

decentralisation reforms undertaken since 2000, with the result that all sectoral activities are supposed to be coordinated through MINALOC. Analyses of Rwanda's political settlement have also pointed to the prominent position of state, party and military-owned business conglomerates and the important role they play in financing the party, reducing the need to finance politics through corruption (Behuria 2015; Booth and Golooba-Mutebi 2011).

The RPF coalition received relatively little donor support immediately after the genocide (Golooba-Mutebi 2008; Pottier 2002). Since the late 1990s, however, DFID, the US, the World Bank and the European Union have provided large amounts of aid, constituting as much as 50 percent of the government budget in 2010, though declining to approximately 30 percent by 2014 (IMF 2015: 17). As such, foreign donors are themselves a key component of the political settlement, providing resources that are used to sustain the ruling coalition. Nevertheless, donor relations are problematic. The government views donors as unreliable, due to the failure of foreign governments to stop the genocide, the limited provision of support afterwards, and repeated conflicts with donors over human rights and Rwandan military intervention in the DRC (Hayman 2009). Indeed, donors play a dual role within the political settlement, supporting the ruling coalition with resources, but also periodically challenging it. Meanwhile, the government is frequently vocal about the need to move beyond aid dependence in the long term and has shown itself willing to set terms for donor engagement and to protect its policy autonomy in the short term (Hayman 2009).

Not only is Rwanda's political settlement characterised by relative elite cohesion and centralisation of power around the president, but the political elite has also established a governance system which enables domination over lower-level factions. Despite ostensibly constituting a means of enhancing local participation, the ambitious political, administrative and financial decentralisation implemented since 2000 is frequently noted as having enhanced central control over local administrations (Chemouni 2014; Ingelaere 2011). One of the main influences on implementation is the performance appraisal system established in 2006. *Imihigo* – a form of performance contract – detail specific targets to be met in the coming year by government officials. In principle, *imihigo* combine national priorities and community objectives. In practice, however, research concludes that national priorities dominate and that *imihigo* enhance accountability of local government officials upwards to the national government (Chemouni 2014). *Imihigo* provide strong incentives for officials to deliver on their targets as a result of the formal signing ceremonies held with the president and the use of *imihigo* as the basis for promotion and dismissal.

2.2 Developmental ambitions and the role of ideas in the political settlement

Analyses have pointed to the RPF's 'systemic vulnerability'³ as an explanation for the RPF's developmental outlook (Chemouni 2014; Mann and Berry 2015). From this perspective, the need to broaden the ruling coalition – which continues to be associated with a Tutsi minority (Ansoms 2009), alongside resource constraints and ongoing security threats, provides the ruling elite with little option but to establish a 'developmental state'. However, the interests of the ruling elite cannot be neatly separated from the paradigmatic ideas regarding Rwandan society and the role of the state that are the subject of consensus within the ruling coalition and that form that basis of a strategy to maintain the coalition going forward. Arguably, the changes in the ruling coalition around 2000 helped forge a more cohesive ruling coalition, with consensus on a set of key components (Golooba-Mutebi and Booth 2013) or paradigmatic ideas. These ideas can be traced directly to the 1998 Urugwiro process – a series of discussions on the future of Rwanda – and more broadly to the RPF's Eight Point Programme outlined in 1994. These ideas are core to the political settlement, in that there is no space either within or outside the ruling coalition to contest them, while they all constitute important influences on policy, as the paper will subsequently argue. Indeed, one rare area of relative agreement between opposing camps in the debate on contemporary Rwandan politics concerns the severely limited space for political mobilisation that contests these ideas or the dominance of the RPF (Golooba-Mutebi and Booth 2013; Reyntjens 2013).

The first paradigmatic idea is the need to move beyond the ethnic and regional divisions that dominated colonial and post-colonial administrations. According to the RPF, ethnicity is a purely colonial construction that introduced previously non-existent divisions into Rwandan society (Pottier 2002). The government's aim is to promote a unified national identity in place of ethnic and regional self-identification and thereby return to the supposed harmony of the pre-colonial era. This rationale translates into: the rejection of ethnicity or region as the basis for policy choices (Golooba-Mutebi and Booth 2013); an appeal to shared 'traditions' that date from this harmonious era through the promotion of re-vitalised customary institutions; and a complete intolerance for ethno-political mobilisation or even ethnic identification.

The second idea is that the principal means of transcending past divisions is the delivery of rapid and inclusive socioeconomic development that gives all sections of the population a stake in the political settlement (Golooba-Mutebi and Booth 2013). Furthermore, the ruling coalition is convinced that development partners and other external actors cannot be depended upon and, as such, rapid economic growth is essential to ensure national independence and autonomy (Chemouni forthcoming; Hayman 2009). The reference point for all government strategies since 2000 and an expression of the political settlement forged at that time is Vision 2020. Vision 2020 sets the targets of making Rwanda a middle-income country and eliminating extreme

³ Drawing on Doner et al's (2005) concept, used to analyse the origins of East Asian developmental states.

poverty by 2020. These targets reflect an acknowledgement that poverty, land shortages and population pressure were among the causes of the genocide and, consequently, that resolving these problems is key to ensuring it never happens again. As aptly summed up by former Minister of Local Government, Protais Musoni,

'The thinking in Vision 2020 and back to 1997 was that we believe we need a unified nation to achieve development and provide services to people. But singing about unity is not enough, we still need the cement that is an equitable distribution for everybody in order to cement the sense and pride of a nation With poverty, people can say "we have a nation that is unified, but what is in it for me?"' (int. respondent RG2)

The government's concern is therefore that the persistence of poverty and inequality in Rwanda – an undeniable feature of the current political settlement – could provide the motivation for those that lose out to return to divisionism and conflict. As such, poverty and inequality are seen by the government to pose a direct threat to its post-ethnic vision and, by implication, the legitimacy of the ruling coalition. Rapid development and poverty reduction are not just desirable, but essential.

The third foundational idea is the need to avoid political clientelism, which threatens to undermine developmental efforts and could lead to the resurgence of ethno-political mobilisation (Chemouni 2014; Golooba-Mutebi and Booth 2013). From this perspective, electoral competition provides incentives for government officials to resort to clientelism and corruption as means of securing elected office. Consequently, party competition in local government elections is prohibited and during the last 20 years the RPF has pursued a zero tolerance approach to corruption that has limited patronage politics.⁴

As such, the post-ethnic and developmental vision of the ruling coalition and its political legitimacy are closely intertwined. The possibility of resurgent sectarian divisions constitutes an existential threat for a regime that continues to be associated with an ethnic minority, while a combination of rapid development and poverty reduction, alongside the suppression of ethnicity and regionalism, is seen as the means to transcend these divisions.

3 Vision 2020 Umurenge within the distributional regime

Social protection in Rwanda dates back to the establishment of a pension scheme in 1962 in the late colonial era. However, social insurance only reached employees in the small formal sector.⁵ For the most part, under previous governments, support for

⁴ These ideas leave the coalition open to criticism, at least some of it justifiable. Critics argue that the restriction of ethno-political mobilisation has been used to cover up the domination of an ethnic minority (Ansoms 2009; Pottier 2002; Reyntjens 2013), while developmental progress conceals political repression and papers over the divisions that contributed to the genocide (Straus and Waldorf 2011).

⁵ The formal sector was just 6 percent of the working population in 2005-06 (ADB 2014).

the rural population took the form of agricultural subsidies, as well as health and educational provision, rather than social assistance. The Government of National Unity introduced programmes to respond to specific issues arising from the post-conflict context, including: the Rwanda Demobilization and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) in 1997 to reintegrate demobilised soldiers, including through the provision of short-term cash transfers; and the Genocide Survivors Support and Assistance Fund (FARG) in 1998 to provide financial support and advocacy for genocide survivors.

One of the most politically important challenges facing the ruling coalition in the 1990s was how to accommodate large numbers of return migrants to Rwanda. For the RPF, the right of return for those displaced in 1959 was the key motivation for the civil war, while accommodation of those displaced during the civil war was central to claims of promoting national unity. A programme of *umudugudu* or villagisation was conducted in the mid- to late 1990s to relocate scattered dwellings into consolidated settlements, in the expectation that this would make more efficient use of scarce land. However, the government's ambitions soon expanded from re-integrating migrants to relocating the entire rural population into planned settlements. In doing so, the programme's rationale expanded to service delivery, promoting reconciliation and improving security (Hilhorst and Leeuwen 2000).

3.1 Beyond reconstruction: Vision 2020

Vision 2020 outlined the overarching objectives that guided subsequent policies and strategies. However, the document is short on clear policy prescriptions. The first strategy to act on this Vision was the 2002 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which focused on the need to raise agricultural productivity and investment in infrastructure. The PRSP noted plans to develop a Social Protection Policy, but contained no discussion on social protection. Meanwhile, in the early 2000s, different government ministries launched a range of largely uncoordinated initiatives related to social protection, although many were not originally framed as such.

From 1999, the Ministry of Health piloted and then rolled out the *Mutuelles de Santé*, a community-based health insurance scheme for rural and informal sectors (Chemouni forthcoming), as well as formal sector health insurance schemes. Then, *Ubudehe* was launched as part of the 2002 PRSP and is one of several programmes that seek to revitalise 'customary' practices to address contemporary problems. *Ubudehe* involves identification of needs through community discussion and assignment of households to six wealth categories. The aim is to encourage communities to work together to achieve their goals, with the support of a €1,000 grant funded by the EU. The programme has subsequently been framed as a form of social protection.

In 2003, MINALOC initiated the Labour-intensive Local Development Programme (PDL-HIMO) with technical assistance from the International Labour Organization

(ILO), building on public works projects going back to 1978. Although it was never framed as social protection, PDL-HIMO constitutes a direct precursor of the VUP and, as discussed below, a programme with significant overlap, given its objective of combining employment creation with infrastructure development. Despite enormous ambitions, the programme suffered from insufficient donor funding and a lack of technical expertise and was limited to relatively small pilots. Labour-intensive public works have, nonetheless, been taken up by several other ministries.

In 2005, MINALOC produced the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP). This policy was advocated by the World Bank (int. respondent RG2) and closely followed its Social Risk Management framework. However, the policy was weak on details and, though it listed Ubudehe, HIMO and health insurance as part of social protection, it was not well integrated with other government policies. According to former Minister Protais Musoni, MINALOC lacked expertise in social protection at the time and by 2007, 'we were struggling with the ideas and the VUP came and took over' (int. respondent RG2).

3.2 Stalled progress and renewed efforts to meet Vision 2020

Following the devastation of the genocide, economic growth was strong in the 1990s and steady in the first half of the 2000s. However, it became increasingly evident that growth was leading to rising inequality and making little contribution to poverty reduction. The government's 2007 PRSP review raised major concerns. Comparison of the first two rounds of the Integrated Household Survey on Living Conditions (EICV) showed that despite average economic growth of 6.4 percent per year between 2000/01 and 2005/06 (MINECOFIN 2007: 5), the poverty headcount reduced by just 3.5 percent (NISR 2007). Furthermore, due to population growth, the poverty headcount actually increased, while inequality increased from an already high Gini coefficient of 0.47 in 2000/01 to 0.51 in 2005/06 (NISR 2007). EICV results also highlighted regional inequalities, with a significant reduction in poverty in the Eastern Province, moderate progress in the North and West, but an increase in the poverty headcount in the South.

The result of these discussions was the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction (EDPRS) strategy (2008-13), which introduced the VUP. The EDPRS aimed to reduce the costs of doing business through public infrastructure investment, to address low levels of 'human capital' through education and to improve governance. Evaluation of the EDPRS was in stark contrast to the first PRSP. The government hailed the achievement of a 'perfect developmental "hat trick" of sustained economic growth (8 percent average), poverty reduction (12 percentage points) and a reduction in income inequality' (MINECOFIN 2013: ix). These results appear to constitute a remarkable success, although inequality remained extremely high. Rapid poverty reduction is attributed to growth in agricultural productivity, diversification into off-farm activities and reduced fertility, though the impact of the VUP itself is unclear (World Bank 2015). These apparent successes led to renewed

optimism in government and even more ambitious targets for future progress. A revised version of Vision 2020 in 2012 set targets of 11.5 percent growth per year and a reduction of extreme poverty from 24 to less than 10 percent during the EDPRS2 period (2013-18). Initial EICV4 results for 2010/11-2013/14 show continued progress, with strong economic growth, and further reductions in poverty and inequality (NISR 2015).⁶

4 Adoption and design of the VUP

The VUP policy process can be loosely disaggregated into three phases, addressed in the following sections: the drafting of the original programme document during 2007; the detailed design phase and piloting in 2008; and the programme's evolution during rollout and discussions on the National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) from 2009.

4.1 Initial policy development

The VUP originated in the annual government leadership retreat in February 2007. The Minister of Finance, James Musoni, presented results of the EICV2 and the Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) to assess progress and plan for EDPRS1. Slow rates of poverty reduction and rising inequality clearly demonstrated a failing of the government strategy. The leadership decided that something needed to be done, with several observers pointing specifically to President Kagame himself, who demanded swift action (ints. respondents RG1, RG3).

Government respondents denied that the VUP was a response to specific demands made by interest groups or electoral pressures. Instead, persistent high poverty rates represented an emerging political problem that threatened to undermine the government's narrative of building national unity through socioeconomic progress. Meanwhile the high and rising rates of inequality, in particular inter-provincial inequality, challenged the idea that the government was delivering inclusive development. Continuing Protais Musoni's earlier analogy, the lack of progress threatened to erode the 'cement' that held together the government's strategy and even the political settlement itself.

The outcome of the retreat was the formation of a committee comprising members of MINALOC and MINECOFIN, with the Minister of Local Government, Protais Musoni, given responsibility for developing a programme within six months to address the problems. Despite having no policy proposals at that stage, the president launched the initiative at the site of the Millennium Villages Project in March 2007 (int. respondent RG1). From the very beginning, the programme was conceived as one of

⁶ The EICV4 has provoked controversy, with claims that calculation of the poverty line was manipulated to give the false impression of progress (Reyntjens 2015). If correct, this would raise questions about the accuracy of official statistics more broadly.

three core pillars of the EDPRS, with the goal of ensuring 'that economic growth rapidly translates into poverty reduction' (MINECOFIN 2007: 75). As such, the responsibility came with considerable political pressure to deliver an ambitious programme in a very short timeframe (int. respondent RG11).

In the following months, Protais Musoni held discussions with an advisor seconded from MINECOFIN, representatives of the World Bank and DFID, and MINALOC staff. While the initial impulse for the VUP originated in an emerging threat to the political settlement, it was through the discussions in this policy coalition that the design of the VUP took shape. The World Bank and DFID proposed looking at Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) and paid for state ministers for the economy and local government to attend a study tour during 2007 (ints. respondents RG1, RG2, RD4). The state minister for local government also visited Zambia's Kalomo cash transfer pilot with donor support and the MINALOC team reviewed literature on other programmes. However, the PSNP – and the Food Security Programme (FSP) of which it is a part – was the main foreign policy model that influenced the Rwandan government (ints. respondents RG2, RG9).⁷

In the following months, the economic advisor seconded to MINALOC drafted the VUP programme document in close discussion with Protais Musoni, drawing heavily on the PSNP/FSP model. Ethiopia's FSP at that time comprised: the PSNP, including public works for households with an able-bodied adult and direct support for households without; a credit and extension programme; and a resettlement programme. The VUP has three main components: public works; direct support; and financial services, which includes credit for programme participants. The VUP was also originally intended to implement large-scale villagisation.

Among the reasons why the PSNP/FSP was attractive to the Rwandan government was that the model enabled them to build on existing policies and ideas. The state minister of finance who took part in the study tour reported that the PSNP was attractive because Ethiopia, like Rwanda, had already launched far-reaching decentralisation (int. respondent RG11). As such, the VUP was seen as a means of deepening the decentralisation started in 2000, also under Protais Musoni. The Vision 2020 *Umurenge* Programme, as the name suggests, was intended to build the capacities of each *umurenge* (sector). Furthermore, the public works component built on MINALOC's experience with PDL-HIMO. As Protais Musoni put it, 'the VUP was not starting from nowhere, we knew exactly how to do HIMO' (int. respondent RG2). Likewise, the VUP was integrated with *Ubudehe*, using its poverty classification to target VUP participants and building on the experience of the *Ubudehe* community

⁷ The ruling parties in Rwanda and Ethiopia are widely acknowledged to have close links, with President Kagame and former Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, thought to have been close. As such, direct inter-governmental links may have influenced the adoption of the PSNP model. While this hypothesis cannot be entirely discounted, however, respondents consistently pointed to donor facilitation of this policy transfer.

transfers, in which Minister Protais saw a precedent for direct support (int. respondent RG2, RG10).

In addition, many of the paradigmatic ideas that influenced the Ethiopian government regarding the PSNP resonated strongly with the paradigmatic ideas within Rwanda's ruling coalition. Principally, both governments worry about creating 'welfare dependency' among the poor (int. respondent RG11, Lavers Under review). In Rwanda, this concern relates not only to individual work incentives, but also to key paradigmatic ideas within the ruling coalition regarding the need for rapid development to limit national dependence on foreign aid. The result is the VUP's emphasis on ensuring that all recipients who are able to work should do so, rather than being given 'handouts' and a need to provide clear paths to 'graduation' for programme participants.

Furthermore, despite the donor framing of the VUP as a social protection programme, for Protais Musoni and his team the VUP was never seen merely in those terms. Instead, for the Rwandan government, the VUP was an integrated 'Local Development Programme' that aimed at a broader process of agrarian and societal transformation in line with the prioritisation of rapid socioeconomic development within the ruling coalition. The original programme document reserved the phrase *social protection* for direct support for 'the neediest people who are landless and unable to work', excluding public works, which was instead intended to 'revive' the previously underfunded PDL-HIMO programme (GoR 2007: 22). As such, right from the start the VUP was expected not just to reduce poverty, but also to contribute to another key EDPRS priority: rural infrastructure. In doing so, the programme design raises important definitional questions regarding the grey area between public works as a form of social protection and as an infrastructure development programme (McCord 2008).

The VUP, as originally conceived, was also intended to contribute to 'umudugudu-isation' or villagisation (GoR 2007). Protais Musoni's visit to the Millennium Villages project in Mayange several years earlier had been influential in his thinking, but he had remained unsure as to how to scale up the Millennium Villages approach (int. respondent RG2). The influence of the Millennium Villages is evident in the VUP programme document that envisages using public works to construct planned 'model umudugudu' with improved access to services (GoR 2007). Attempting to learn from problems with the original villagisation programme, which tended towards coercion in its implementation and faced resistance from local populations (Hilhorst and Leeuwen 2000; Newbury 2011), the VUP aimed to pursue an 'incentive-based' villagisation, creating infrastructure and services first to encourage people to relocate (int. respondent RG5; GoR 2007).

The importance that political elites placed on the VUP translated into strong pressure on the team designing the programme regarding the pace of the rollout and expected impact of the programme. VUP targets were derived from the gap between Vision

2020 targets and the slow progress by 2007 (GoR 2007: 6), rather than a realistic assessment of what the programme might be able to achieve. The plan was for an exponential expansion from 30 pilot sectors to nationwide coverage within five years. The expectation was that after involvement in the programme for just six months, all participants, potentially including direct support beneficiaries, would be ready for graduation (ints. respondents RD1, RC2, RC4).

4.2 From huge ambitions to designing a social protection programme

Following cabinet approval in August 2007, a programme coordinator was hired and the VUP was placed within MINALOC's Common Development Fund (CDF) that was used to finance community infrastructure projects. At that stage it was necessary to translate the huge ambitions and sweeping assumptions in the programme document into an implementable plan. Given the lack of technical expertise within the ministry, MINALOC sought assistance from the World Bank and DFID. Donor representatives from that time acknowledge that the programme document had 'severe limitations' from a social protection perspective (int. respondent RD1), and in early 2008, hired a team of foreign consultants, including several social protection experts, to produce programme guidelines. This design process at the level of the policy coalition introduced a greater degree of realism and strengthened the programme's focus on social protection as a means of reducing poverty, while downplaying the links with villagisation.

In selecting consultants the donors turned, in the words of one of the team, to 'their PSNP stalwarts' (int. respondent RC6), deliberately selecting several people who had worked on the PSNP (ints. respondents RD4, RC3, RG9). The VUP coordinator described how he sat down with these consultants to examine in detail the activities conducted by Ethiopia's regional, *wereda* (district) and *kebele* (sub-district) governments and how these responsibilities might be best distributed across Rwanda's decentralised governance system (int. respondent RG9). At this stage, discussions were focused on technical details. Nevertheless, one of the consultants was told repeatedly by Protais Musoni that he was in regular communication with 'the boss' – President Kagame – about the design (int. respondent RC5), again highlighting the strong political importance assigned to the VUP.

During this design phase and early stages of implementation, relations between donors and some government officials appear to have been somewhat strained, especially regarding the original coordinator. The main issues related to the government's ideas about dependency and the importance of self-reliance. DFID, in particular, placed great importance on direct support for the poorest and most vulnerable. In return, the programme coordinator repeatedly criticised the negative effects of European welfare systems on work incentives, while arguing that some donors were bringing European experiences that were irrelevant to Africa (ints. respondents RG9, RC4, RD1). Nevertheless, certain concessions from the government were achieved, including an acknowledgement, absent from the

programme document, that some of the most vulnerable households 'will never graduate and will continue to require a level of direct financial support' (MINALOC 2009).

Public works design also has important implications for the VUP's contribution to poverty reduction. In Ethiopia, several donors insisted on an initial agreement regarding the 'primacy of transfers': that participants are entitled to payment for a certain number of workdays, regardless of government capacity to organise public works (Lavers Under review). No such agreement exists for the VUP, with the result that, like PDL-HIMO, the number of workdays and, consequently, the transfer of resources to the poor, depend on the government's capacity to organise projects. By design, therefore, the programme is driven by infrastructure priorities, not only social protection objectives.

MINALOC introduced public works in May 2008, direct support in January 2009 and financial services in January 2010. This rollout reflected CDF's experience in public works, as well as a desire to manage participant expectations; for the programme coordinator, it was important to introduce public works first, rather than direct support, to avoid participants viewing the programme as a government hand-out (int. respondent RG9). In the first year, 30 sectors were selected, the poorest in each district across the country, with another two or three sectors per district to be added in each of the following years (int. respondent RG2). In hindsight, rollout plans were entirely unrealistic, given resource and capacity constraints (ints. respondents RG2, RC2). The rollout plan was adapted to add just one sector per district each year – still a significant logistical challenge – that implied a very long-term process. The selection of one sector per district also set aside clear evidence at the time that poverty, though present throughout the country, was concentrated in the Southern Province. As argued above, an important element of the current political settlement is a commitment to transcend past divisions, both ethnic and regional, through inclusive development. This translates into a rejection of regional criteria as the basis for policymaking, preventing the prioritisation of the poorest province that might have maximised the impact on poverty (ints. respondents RD1, RD4).

The original VUP programme coordinator left after seven months and the PDL-HIMO coordinator took over in late 2008. At the end of 2008, DFID also funded three foreign technical assistants, including a social protection specialist, to help administer the programme, given the shortage of technical capacity in the ministry. Although the new coordinator had previously worked on PDL-HIMO, several donor representatives and consultants argued that the original coordinator did not understand the idea of social protection, as the donors saw it, and that bringing in new management who 'got it' was a key step (ints. respondents RC5, RD1). It was therefore during 2008 through the detailed design phase carried out within a policy coalition of government and donor technocrats – but with strong oversight from key political figures within the ruling coalition – that the VUP began to more closely resemble a social protection programme, as is understood within the development industry.

World Bank decentralisation funds were used to hire programme staff, and CDF's own funds were used to finance public works in the initial 30 sectors. DFID started funding the programme in 2009 and SIDA joined in 2010.⁸ UNICEF also provided technical assistance and the EU provided sector budget support. However, government funding remained a large proportion of programme expenditure throughout, averaging 69 percent over the first three-and-a-half years (OAG 2012). Several respondents argued that MINECOFIN and, in particular, Minister James Musoni, were sceptical about the VUP in the early stages (ints. respondents RC2, RC4, RC5, RD1, RD4). That said, however, there are no suggestions that MINECOFIN sought to block funding altogether. While some efforts were made to limit financial exposure, there was commitment to funding the programme. It is unclear to what extent this was the result of the president's strong support in the face of resistance from MINECOFIN or of a basic level of cautious support from MINECOFIN.

Political elites therefore retained a strong interest in the design process throughout, and committed to financing the programme and expanding it. As such, VUP design was strongly influenced by key ideas within the political settlement, in particular related to the importance of self-reliance. Nonetheless, a shortage of technical capacity in government also opened up space for donors to shape the problem definition and policy design at the level of the policy coalition, strengthening the VUP's credentials as a social protection programme.

4.3 Reform and continuity within the social protection strategy

At the end of 2009, a cabinet reshuffle replaced Protais Musoni with James Musoni as minister of local government. Whatever James Musoni's earlier concerns about the VUP, he became a strong supporter at MINALOC (ints. respondents RC2, RD4). James Musoni oversaw the expansion and consolidation of the VUP and attempts to integrate it into a coherent National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS).

By 2008, the 2005 NSPP was already seen as out of date and surpassed by the VUP. As such, there was a need to bring together the VUP, as the new centrepiece of the NSPS, with FARG, RDRC, Ubudehe and social insurance into one integrated approach (int. respondent RG6). A consultation process was held, involving different levels of government, development partners and other interest groups. This NSPS process followed the 2008 African Union Social Policy Framework (AUSPF). While the AUSPF is noted in the NSPS, however, it was not discussed at all during Rwandan policy discussions (int. respondent RD4) and was not mentioned by any respondents as an influence. Instead, the NSPS was solely attributed to the need for domestic policy coherence.

⁸ Until 2012, when it cut funding based on allegations of Rwandan support for M23 in the DRC.

The consultation process contrasted with the consensus between key donors during VUP design. The government's decision to invite discussion, and the apparent uncertainty within government, opened up space for advocacy. UNICEF, Save the Children and HelpAge advocated a lifecycle approach, with specific grants targeting children and the elderly, drawing in part on the Social Protection Floor concept; while the World Bank opposed such an approach, preferring to build on the VUP (int. respondent RG6). In addition, UNICEF, the World Bank and the ILO paid for government officials to attend training courses advocating their favoured types of social protection.

An initial draft strategy drew on the lifecycle approach of the Social Protection Floor, advocating the replacement of VUP's direct support with categorical cash transfers for children, the elderly and disabled. The public works component, meanwhile, would be transformed into an Employment Guarantee Scheme, providing a guaranteed number of workdays to participants. While the foreign consultant drafting the strategy apparently gained the support of the state minister for this change, it was dismissed in pre-cabinet discussions for being too expensive and a poor fit for Rwanda. In particular, Protais Musoni, now minister for cabinet affairs with responsibility for reviewing all policy proposals, felt this new strategy threatened to 'distort' the VUP and undermine its good work (int. respondent RG6). The strategy argued that universal grants for vulnerable groups would make them easier and cheaper to administer. However, cabinet expressed concern that universal grants would foster dependency and undermine fertility policy (ints. respondents RG6, RD6). A new consultant was brought in to revise this draft, and a more modest proposal built around the VUP was approved by cabinet in 2011 (ints. respondents RG6, RC1). In contrast to the original VUP proposal, which clearly resonated with core paradigmatic ideas within the ruling coalition, the proposal to transform the programme was rejected because of the tensions between this new approach and these core paradigmatic ideas.

In 2013, the NSPS was revised for consistency with the EDPRS2, which focused on progress towards the ambitious, revised Vision 2020. Headline targets on growth and poverty reduction provided a strong influence on the challenging targets set for the VUP for 2013-18. First, the annual addition of one sector per district was ended and the decision made to target the poorest remaining sectors from 2012/13. Though facilitated by improved data availability in EICV3 (ints. respondents RG6, RG7, RD2), this change signifies a shift from previous political concerns with geographic impartiality to maximising resources for the poorest parts of the country to achieve Vision 2020. Second, direct support has been fast-tracked and is planned to reach every sector in the country by mid-2016, while the more logistically challenging public works component will continue to expand more slowly. Respondents expressed a range of opinions as to the origins of these changes, including: discussions in the Social Protection Sector Working Group (ints. respondents RG6, RG7, RD2); a specific request by some MPs (int. respondent RC2); and MINECOFIN demands to ensure that resources had the biggest possible impact (int. respondent RG10).

Third, EDPRS2 has a renewed focus on graduation with the VUP expected to contribute to poverty reduction targets. Although the original programme document envisaged graduation within six months, over time the approach had become more realistic, gradually extending intervals between re-targeting exercises to three years (int. respondent RC2). MINECOFIN pushed MINALOC to commit to specific graduation targets (ints. respondents RC2, RD2, RG7) due to the escalating costs of the rollout and what they considered to be the VUP's minimal impact in its first five years (int. respondent RG10). As the chief economist in MINECOFIN argued,

'You cannot have people receiving support for three to five years, it is too much ... a person who is 30-40 years old who is not disabled, they cannot be in a social protection programme for five years. A success story is when after three years someone graduates from poverty and we do not need to support them any more' (int. respondent RG10)

4.4 The policy coalition, the political settlement and the role of ideas

Respondents from government, development partners and consultants were unanimous that the government drove the VUP policymaking process. The original initiative can be linked to core paradigmatic ideas within the RPF and the understanding that poverty and inequality constitute a threat to the political settlement.⁹ Donors certainly exerted influence on the programme through the policy coalition by suggesting the PSNP as a policy model and strengthening the programme's problem framing regarding social protection. However, the VUP is very much an example of existing elite commitment in search of a policy idea, rather than donors advocating a policy and trying to generate government commitment. Unlike the situation prevailing in some other countries, interviews suggest that there was no concerted push from donors to promote social assistance in Rwanda before 2007.¹⁰ Furthermore, this policymaking process was 'top-down' and triggered by government data that showed distributional problems. None of the interviews provided any indication that the VUP was influenced by 'bottom-up' electoral pressures or interest group demands.

The VUP policy coalition was very closely aligned with the balance of power in the political settlement as a whole. President Kagame appears to have been the leading voice insisting that a specific programme had to address the disappointing EICV2 results, while his involvement continued during the design phase. Furthermore, the two key ministries – MINALOC and MINECOFIN – are among the two most powerful.

⁹ While inequality may have been a government concern, it would be hard to argue that the VUP was specifically designed to address inequality. The modest size of the transfers and employment opportunities constitutes, at best, an attempt to ensure that the poorest meet basic consumption needs.

¹⁰ The reasons for this are not entirely clear, but appear to have been linked to turnover of social development advisors in DFID Rwanda and the absence of senior, in-country social protection staff at the World Bank during the period.

While MINECOFIN may have been less enthusiastic, there is no indication that the ministry ever sought to block the programme, but was instead concerned to limit financial exposure. Indeed, this elite level political commitment was a key factor that provided legitimacy and space for government and donor officials to work together on the VUP design. This policy coalition does, though, differ in important respects from those in some other cases. The policy coalition was not bound by a shared set of ideas or the goal of advocating any particular policy proposal as described in the literature (Sabatier 1988). Rather, the coalition operated more like a working group to examine different policy proposals.

The influence of paradigmatic ideas that are central to the political settlement is also evident in this design process. For the ruling coalition, rapid socioeconomic progress is essential to stability and political legitimacy. This imperative is reflected in the integration of the VUP into the development strategy – rather a standalone anti-poverty programme – and the expectation that the programme should have a range of productive impacts, as well as providing protection for the poor. Indeed, these multiple objectives appear to have been key to securing elite commitment to the programme. Linked to this productive focus are concerns about dependency and the resulting emphasis on public works. Self-reliance – both of individuals and the country – is a key objective of the ruling coalition and one that requires rapid developmental progress and the contribution of every Rwandan to productive activities.

The VUP also provides interesting instances of donor-government and inter-donor relations. First, despite similarities between the programmes, there is a clear contrast between donor support for the VUP and indifference regarding PDL-HIMO. In part, the VUP's success reflects changing donor fashions and the rise of social protection on the global development agenda (int. respondent RG2). The VUP was a programme that fit a specific moment, in contrast to the limited funding available for public employment programmes. Second, the VUP is notable for relative consensus between the World Bank and DFID, rather than an attempt to advocate competing social protection models, as in some other countries. This may reflect the attitude of individual organisational representatives. One donor respondent explicitly noted that she had tried to learn from past experiences in other countries where donors had been in competition (int. respondent RD1). It is also clear that with strong government ownership of the policy agenda, space for donors to influence is limited in Rwanda (ints. respondents RD2, RD6). However, it may also be that the PSNP/FSP model aided consensus between the World Bank and DFID. These two are also the main PSNP donors and this model constituted a ready-made compromise that would have been familiar and acceptable to each.

5 Beyond policy choices: Political incentives and implementation

This section reviews evidence on how VUP implementation is influenced by the incentives flowing from the political settlement. The adapted political settlements

framework hypothesises that Rwanda's dominant coalition should have effective implementation capacities based on the strong control of political elites over lower-level factions. Where a programme is seen as a high political priority, elites have incentives to limit clientelist pressures that would likely undermine implementation. The analysis focuses on organisation and financing; the competing priorities of poverty reduction and infrastructure development; and targeting of programme participants.

5.1 Organisation and financing

Committing sufficient resources to a programme and establishing the institutions required to implement it are both important indicators of elite commitment and essential elements of an implementation strategy. Social protection administration in Rwanda was reformed in 2011, following approval of the NSPS. The Community Development and Social Affairs directorate (CDSA) was created within MINALOC in 2011 to coordinate social protection policy, while CDF was reformed and re-named the Rwandan Local Development Support Fund (RLDSF) as a separate implementing agency within MINALOC. Within RLDSF, a specific division was created for social protection, including the VUP and Ubudehe (ints. respondents RG8, RC2). The implied division between policy formulation (in MINALOC) and implementation (in RLDSF) is not so clear in practice, however, with CDSA capacity limited and RLDSF staff clearly involved in policy debates as well as administration. In 2014, RLDSF was re-named the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency (LODA). LODA, like CDF before it, receives a minimum of 10 percent of the government budget by law. Of this statutory funding, social protection accounts for 40 percent, the majority of which goes to the VUP (ints. respondents RG8, RC2). However, the VUP remains subject to significant financial constraints that intensify as the programme is expanded. Although MINALOC has attempted to negotiate an increase of five percent of the government budget, this has not been sanctioned by MINECOFIN (int. respondent RG8).

One of the VUP's main objectives is to pursue decentralised implementation. As such, while LODA provides implementation guidelines and monitors performance, local governments administer the programme and, indeed, have taken an increasing role over time. The initial rollout involved hiring two administrators for each sector. However, in 2011-12 the government decided that this model was too expensive and instead transferred the responsibilities of what were by that stage six staff per district to cover all sectors in a district (int. respondent RC2). The significant expansion of the VUP since has resulted in serious resource constraints, although there are now plans to hire additional staff to ease this burden. Furthermore, the VUP has faced a considerable training challenge. Notably, there is little existing knowledge of social protection at local government level, with the result that increased staff numbers do not necessarily translate into greatly increased capacity (int. respondent RC2).

A number of institutions provide oversight on programme implementation. The Office of the Auditor-General regularly audits all government agencies and carries significant weight within government, in line with concerns about corruption. The 2011 VUP report, though on the whole quite positive, identified numerous problems ranging from a few instances of embezzlement that were leading to legal cases, to the slow pace of the rollout and poor implementation of public works and financial services (OAG 2012). Such instances of corruption are certainly not brushed under the carpet, but are regularly highlighted in government-controlled media (Karuhanga 2012; Rugira 2015). Furthermore, implementation problems – including corruption – were recently highlighted at the 2015 leadership retreat, suggesting that, far from being an accepted part of the system, the need to limit clientelist pressures is taken seriously.

5.2 The VUP caught between social protection and infrastructure development

The potential for the VUP to contribute to multiple government objectives was a key feature of the original policy proposal and, it would seem, one reason for the high degree of elite commitment to the programme. Nonetheless, this raises the question as to whether social protection is really the main priority and whether the VUP actually provides an effective form of social protection in practice. There has been a recurrent tension within the VUP between the relative importance of poverty reduction and infrastructure development. The key variable in this respect is the labour-intensity of public works and, consequently, the proportion of programme resources transferred to participants.

The VUP has never come close to the target of spending 80 percent of the public works budget on wages. Indeed, over time the labour intensity of public works has reduced and, in 2013-14 was less than half this target: 38 percent. The low labour intensity of public works and their supply-driven nature is one reason why programme participants have consistently received fewer workdays than government targets, while only 54 percent of eligible households actually participated in public works in 2011-12 (MINALOC 2013: 53).¹¹ Consequently, one respondent questioned whether VUP public works could accurately be characterised as social protection at all (int. respondent RC7). The VUP was originally located in CDF, which has a mandate to deliver value for money in community infrastructure projects. The programme coordinator in 2008 noted that he was continually asked to justify the value for money of the VUP, and CDF management pushed him to use contractors and capital-intensive production techniques that would undermine the protective function of the programme (int. respondent RG9). The conflicting objectives within the implementing agency eased when CDF was transformed into RLDSF with a broader mandate, including social protection (ints. respondents RG8, RC2).

¹¹ This contrasts with the experience in Ethiopia, where the 'primacy of transfers' guarantees participants payment regardless of the government's capacity to organise public works (Lavers Under review).

Respondents in LODA and MINALOC argue that, from that point, the top priority was to support the poor and infrastructure development was a secondary concern.

Whatever the intentions within LODA, however, the VUP remains subject to competing pressures at local government level. While public works projects are supposed to be selected by communities, there has long been evidence that government priorities dominate decision making (Devereux and Ndejuru 2010). *Imihigo* for local government officials contain a wide range of targets across different sectors, including infrastructure development. The inflow of significant VUP resources, therefore, provides strong incentives for local governments to use these funds to meet infrastructure targets, undermining the protective role of the programme (ints. respondents RC2, RC4). Indeed, this problem has grown in importance as local governments have taken on increasing responsibility for identifying and planning projects (ints. respondents RC3, RC4). This focus on infrastructure development provides a partial explanation for the low and falling labour-intensity of public works.

As such, while there is some complementarity between the protective and productive objectives of the VUP, this can easily be over-estimated. While the productive goals of the programme may have been essential to securing elite commitment within the context of a dominant coalition settlement, they also present a challenge to the implementation of social protection.

5.3 Targeting the poorest? The links to Ubudehe

For a targeted programme, a vital element of implementation is the design and operation of the targeting system. Not only this, but the targeting system is particularly prone to clientelist pressures, providing a good test for the effectiveness of implementation expected in a dominant coalition.

VUP's use of Ubudehe to identify programme participants mirrors a broader process whereby government programmes – subsidies for health insurance premiums, school bursaries and exemption from land registration fees – are allocated to the poorest Ubudehe categories. As such, Ubudehe has transformed over time from a community-based poverty mapping tool into a mechanism for resource allocation (Gaynor 2014). Consequently, many people involved in the programme are concerned that these increasingly significant benefits have resulted in perverse incentives for individuals and groups to try to ensure their classification in the lowest categories. Respondents believe that this is the result of a combination of individual incentives and attempts to help fellow community members, rather than an instance of political capture. However, MINALOC (2012) notes that in light of plans for integration of FARG payments into VUP's direct support, genocide survivors in certain places had planned to act collectively to ensure that all genocide survivors are placed in categories 1 and 2. Respondents noted occasions in which MINECOFIN had ordered revision of the classification as they felt the numbers

included in the direct support were inflated (int. respondent RD4), while LODA regularly checks classifications and has conducted audits when concerns are raised (int. respondent RC2).

A recent study by Sabates-Wheeler et al. (2015) matched individuals' Ubudehe classification with their wealth ranking in EICV3 – the quantitative assessment used to assess national progress in poverty reduction. The results suggest that there is virtually no relationship between the two, with Ubudehe categories evenly distributed across consumption quintiles. Not only does this represent a significant challenge for assessing graduation, but it also raises serious questions about the VUP's objective of targeting resources to the poorest: 62 percent of the poorest quintile in the EICV are probably excluded from the VUP as they are not included in categories 1 or 2 (Sabates-Wheeler *et al.* 2015: 108).

The World Bank has repeatedly expressed concerns about Ubudehe and has advocated a proxy means test in its place, without success (ints. respondents RD1, RD4, RC4, RC7). While critics have also questioned the effectiveness of proxy means tests, government opposition is instead based on Ubudehe's claims to be community-based and rooted in tradition. Growing evidence of problems, however, prompted the 2014 government leadership retreat to demand MINALOC 'expedite revision of Ubudehe categorization' (RoR 2014: 1). MINALOC piloted a new Ubudehe scheme in five districts from late 2014 and the new scheme was approved for nationwide use in 2016. Although the initial five districts were notionally a pilot, the rollout was apparently set in motion before pilot results were available (int. respondent RD9).

Among the changes are the reduction of the number of categories from six to four and the removal of the category labels, with the term 'abject poverty' considered demeaning and stigmatising, particularly in Kinyarwanda (int. respondent RC2; Sabates-Wheeler *et al.* 2015). Most significantly, community assessments are complemented by a 13-question household asset survey intended to add an objective dimension. Implementation of this new survey apparently went ahead without donor consultation, and several respondents expressed doubts over whether the new questions would provide any basis for identifying the poorest households.

5.4 Implementation and the political settlement

The discussion in this section suggests that the expectations of a dominant coalition are partially realised in VUP implementation. While there have undoubtedly been cases of corruption and attempts by individual local government officials to manipulate the programme as a resource for patronage, there is no evidence that this is a widespread practice. Indeed, there is a clear intolerance for such activities within government. Both LODA and the OAG flag up corruption cases, frequently leading to prosecutions, and these are highlighted in the media. Furthermore, the government is committed to financing a significant proportion of the programme,

hiring staff, reforming programme management and institutionalising it within LODA. It is also clear that when there is clear evidence of implementation problems – such as the limitations of Ubudehe – action is taken to try to improve the functioning of the programme. The limited influence of patronage as a driver of implementation and the commitment to make the programme work better are therefore consistent with the expectations of the framework (Lavers and Hickey 2016).

This does not, however, mean that implementation has always been effective. There have been numerous problems with targeting, budget constraints, a shortage of work opportunities and competing objectives that undermine the focus on poverty reduction. This implementation gap can partly be explained by the political elite's huge ambitions for the VUP and resulting strong pressure for rapid expansion, as discussed above, in the context of limited state capacity. Rwanda is a low-income country whose human capacity was devastated during the civil war and genocide, and which continues to suffer budget constraints in relation to its hugely ambitious developmental goals. The government's decentralisation programme is placing enormous demands on limited local government capacity and, specifically in terms of social protection, the VUP started from scratch in 2008 with no existing expertise in delivering large-scale social protection programmes. Implementation problems can only be expected. The implementation failings do, however, also raise questions about elite commitment to social protection. While poverty reduction was undoubtedly a core concern driving the original adoption of the VUP, the ongoing tension between poverty reduction and infrastructure development in implementation also points to competing priorities within the ruling coalition.

Finally, the analysis highlights the limitations of the political settlements framework for understanding implementation. While the general insight that dominant coalitions are likely to be able to limit clientelist pressures is an important one, this is only one aspect of programme implementation. A more complete reading of the politics of implementation therefore requires greater consideration of the range of incentives for local government officials, the ways in which these actors are embedded in state-society relations and how they interpret the guidelines and discourse provided by policymakers.

6 Conclusion

The analysis in this paper shows that the adapted political settlements framework guiding this research provides valuable insights into the Rwandan government's motivations for the adoption and – to some degree – implementation of the VUP. Social protection does not yet constitute an integral feature of the bargains that underpin the Rwandan political settlement. However, the political settlement has shaped commitment to and design of the VUP in vital ways. First, the VUP is an example of an elite-driven, top-down initiative to address a perceived emerging threat to the political settlement and, as such, is inherently intertwined with the political legitimacy of the ruling coalition. Slow progress in poverty reduction and rising

inequality constituted threats to the core ideas underpinning the political settlement and prompted action. The strong political commitment to the programme is evidenced by the close alignment between the policy coalition and the ruling coalition, with key ministries and powerful ministers assigned responsibility and the president demanding the development of a programme and following up throughout the design process. Meanwhile, the relatively centralised nature of decision making power in Rwanda within a narrow ruling coalition facilitated the rapid design and initiation of the programme. Finally, in keeping with the expectation of long time horizons in dominant party settlements, the VUP was carefully integrated into the government's overarching development strategy, the broader policy context and the long-term goal of the ruling coalition: Vision 2020.

The influence of the political settlement is also evident in the initial design of the VUP rollout, which was equally applied in all districts to avoid any perception of bias, and the implementation of the programme, where corruption cases are highlighted and addressed rather than accepted, and there remains a commitment to improving the programme's functioning. Overall, elite commitment to the programme has translated into political pressure from the highest levels for meeting ambitious targets and quick action on implementation. It may well be that this haste, in the context of limited capacity, has contributed to the numerous implementation problems discussed, but it is also evidence of the political importance assigned to the programme at the highest levels. Nonetheless, the result is that VUP implementation falls short of the expectation that dominant coalitions ensure effective policy implementation. Notably, the VUP has consistently fallen short of its targets regarding the provision of workdays, limiting its contribution as a social protection programme. These implementation weaknesses raise important questions regarding the VUP's prioritisation of poverty reduction versus infrastructure development, while also highlighting the limitations of the political settlements framework for understanding the full range of factors that shape implementation.

However, a sole focus on interests – as in Khan's (2010) political settlements framework – would be unable to explain the adoption of the VUP. Ideas at all levels were highly influential on the programme's orientation and design. First, core paradigmatic ideas within the political settlement are clearly evident in the government's commitment to economic growth and poverty reduction, and the importance of avoiding regional bias. Second, the influence of problem frames can be seen both in government concerns about welfare dependency and work incentives, as well as competing framings of public works as social protection versus infrastructure development. Finally, the VUP drew heavily on the policy model of Ethiopia's PSNP, albeit that there was a clear attempt by the Rwandan government to integrate the basic framework of the PSNP with existing policies and ideas in Rwanda, considerably adapting the PSNP model in the process.

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Interviews conducted

Government officials

RG1, Deputy Director-General for Social Protection, LODA, Kigali, 19 and 21 May 2015.

RG2, former Minister of Local Government, Kigali, 28 May 2015.

RG3, former Minister of Health, Kigali, 29 May 2015.

RG4, Director-General, Community Development and Social Welfare Department, MINALOC, Kigali, 26 May 2015.

RG5, Head Human Settlement Planning and Development Department, MININFRA, Kigali, 21 May 2015.

RG6, former monitoring and evaluation specialist, MINALOC, Kigali, 27 May 2015.

RG7, VUP director, LODA, Kigali, 22 May 2015.

RG8, Director-general, LODA, Kigali, 22 May 2015.

RG9, former VUP programme coordinator, CDF, Kigali, 20 May 2015.

RG10, Chief economist, MINECOFIN, Kigali, 20 May 2015.

RG11, Vice-governor, National Bank of Rwanda, Kigali, 7 July 2015.

Development partners

RD1, representative of a development partner, by Skype, 20 March 2015.

RD2, representative of a development partner, Kigali, 27 May 2015.

RD3, representative of a development partner, by Skype, 1 July 2015.

RD4, representative of a development partner, by Skype, 24 March 2015.

RD5, representative of a development partner, Kigali, 22 May 2015.

RD6, representative of a development partner, Kigali, 27 May 2015.

RD7, representative of a development partner, Kigali, 27 May 2015.

RD8, representative of a development partner, Geneva, 14 May 2015.

RD9, representative of a development partner, Kigali, 20 May 2015.

Foreign consultants

RC1, consultant on NSPS, by Skype, 25 November 2014.

RC2, technical assistant to RLDSF / LODA, by Skype, 16 April and 25 May 2015.

RC3, consultant on VUP design, by Skype, 16 March 2015.

RC4, technical assistant to RLDSF / LODA, by Skype, 18 March 2015.

RC5, consultant on VUP design, by Skype, 27 April 2015.

RC6, consultant on VUP design, by Skype, 27 March 2015.

RD7, consultant on NSPS, by Skype, 2 July 2015.

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