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**Exploring the success and challenges of the *Girinka*<sup>1</sup> programme and the need for social work involvement: Southern Province, Rwanda**

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**Abstract**

This article discusses an indigenous approach labelled ‘girinka programme’ designed for reducing poverty and fighting against child malnutrition. The approach consists of providing a milk cow to poor households in order to ensure milk supply to children. The issued milk cows are not only for milk consumption but also for enabling beneficiaries to get out of poverty through selling surplus milk and using manure to increase land fertility for agricultural production.

The objectives of this article is to understand how girinka programme works, highlighting its success in empowering poor households and examining the challenges and obstructions it faces, and eventually put emphasis on the role of social work in coping with them. In addition to the 21 individual interviews with practitioners in Huye district, 18 more interviews with girinka programme beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries were conducted in both Huye and Gisagara districts, and during June-July 2016 annual workshop on social work in Rwanda held in

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<sup>1</sup> *Girinka* : a program of granting one cow per poor household as a way of fighting against malnutrition.

Huye, a group discussion with 7 advisory committee members was also conducted.

Though this programme was designed to decrease poverty and fight against malnutrition, challenges and obstructions such as unaffordable preconditions, insufficient training in animal husbandry and cooperative management, misappropriation of milk cows, cases of bribery, and poor follow up were observed. The article recommends the use of not only veterinary and agricultural technicians but also social work practitioners in addressing these challenges and obstructions to the success of girinka programme. The role of social work practitioners along with local public staff in charge of social services would for instance be that of using ‘strengths perspective’ to facilitate beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of the programme on the waiting list to find alternative solutions to their problems and build up their self-sufficiency through empowerment approach.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Empowerment, Girinka programme, Poor Household, Huye, Gisagara, Rwanda

## **1.Introduction**

In 2000, just after the period of emergency post genocide, the government of Rwanda has launched a long term framework for development called Vision 2020. The document comprised goals to be achieved by the year 2020. These goals embed a number of policies and programmes among which poverty reduction strategies aiming to empower poor people who were then more

than 60% of the national population (Republic of Rwanda \_ NISR, 2010).

The Government of Rwanda initiatives to address the issues of poverty is based on Rwandan cultural practices (Corry, 2012), and on the only valued resource it possesses – the Rwandan population. With a decentralisation system of governance, the government of Rwanda has strengthened the participation of its population in problem-solving and development process through participatory approach known as ‘ubudehe’ (OSSREA \_ Rwanda Chapter, 2006). The girinka programme is among many other indigenous empowering programmes initiated by the government of Rwanda (KIM, et al., 2012; Republic of Rwanda \_ MINECOFIN, 2007; Republic of Rwanda \_ RARDA, 2006).

The girinka programme also known as ‘One Cow per Poor Household’ programme was inspired by the Rwandan culture and initiated by the President of the Republic of Rwanda (RoR) in 2006 and is since then implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC).

The inspiration of the programme was based on the results from an Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey II, initially known in French as ‘*Enquête Intégrale sur les Conditions de Vie des Ménages II*’ (EICV2) conducted in 2005 by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) showing that the rate of rural poverty was substantial with 62.5% and the rate of childhood malnutrition extremely alarming (NISR, 2005).

The programme was considered an empowering approach for poverty reduction consisting of providing a milk cow to each selected poor household and in turn rotates in giving off their first calves *ad infinitum* among other neighbouring poor households.

The rationale behind this programme was that a cow produces milk and therefore handles the alarming high rate of childhood malnutrition; generates income for a family by selling milk; and provides manure to increase agricultural production. The exotic dairy cow with at least 50% of genetic makeup was privileged because of its high milk production compared to the local milk cows (Military, et al., 2013; Republic of Rwanda, RARDA, 2006; Republic of Rwanda, MINAGRI, 2015).

Based on the MINAGRI's criteria of selecting beneficiaries, potential beneficiaries must not own any cow; must have constructed a cow shed; must have at least between 0.25 – 0.75 hectares of land, of which some must be planted with fodder; must be an *Inyangamugayo* (person of integrity) in the community; must be considered poor by the community and must have no other source of income (Ibid.).

The official reports reveal that though from 2006 to 2015, more than 203,000 families had benefited from the programme many more poor families still expect to benefit from it and apparently there is a possibility to increase the number of beneficiaries since the target is to reach 350,000 families by 2017 (Byumvuhore, 2015; Republic of Rwanda \_ MINAGRI, 2015).

Though the above description shows positive side of girinka programme, it has a number of problems. The scholarship on Rwanda in this particular matter of poverty reduction through girinka programme has raised some of the problems it faces but didn't explore them exhaustively and couldn't recommend alternative solutions.

The overall problem that this article intends to explore is about the challenges and obstructions to the success of girinka programme in eradicating malnutrition and reducing poverty among poor households who have received milk cows.

Explicitly, the article concentrates on how the MINAGRI's criteria of selecting the beneficiaries of a milk cow thwart the possibility to reach and serve a big number of poor households; discusses how girinka programme works highlighting the importance of such an indigenous practice in empowering poor households and examining the shortcomings and challenges it faces and eventually determine the role social work can play in coping with them to achieve an inclusive success.

## **2.Theoretical perspectives**

### **▪ Empowerment**

The idea of empowerment takes its roots in the 1960s with Paolo Freire's popular education and subsequently with feminist movement. Luttrell and co-authors reveal that feminist movement and the empowerment philosophy became a radical project of social transformation in the 1980s with the aim enabling excluded social groups to struggle for their rights collectively.

In the prospect of enabling the powerless or excluded social groups, both feminist theory and popular education put emphasis on personal dimension of power with implications such as increasing individual capacity and opportunities for access, increasing awareness and desire for change (Luttrell, et al., 2009, p. 2).

The concept of empowerment was defined by a number of scholars but in this article we limit ourselves on some of them. Social work dictionary for instance, considers it as “a process whereby individuals or groups attain personal or collective power which enables them to actively improve their living conditions”. Likewise but with more details, Solomon argues that empowerment is “a process whereby persons who belong to a stigmatized social category throughout their lives can be assisted to develop and increase skills in the exercise of interpersonal influence and the performance of valued social roles” (Solomon 1976 in Hardina, et al., 2007, p. 8).

As a renovated indigenous practice designed for transforming rural livelihoods and decreasing poverty in Rwanda for the promotion of individual and community wellbeing (Patel, et al., 2012; Mwabonimana & Habimana, 2015), the girinka programme is an empowering practice. In fact, poor households are among the powerless social groups in Rwanda who indeed need a certain power in order to improve their livelihood.

For instance, the categorization of poor households through ubudehe programme, which aims at identifying the most disadvantaged groups and design special programmes for them was one of the empowering approaches the government of Rwanda has

adopted (Government of Rwanda, 2002b). This kind of empowering programme was apparently designed to address the social and economic problems in post genocide Rwanda.

Luttrell and co-authors associate empowerment with three dimensions – social, economic and political. Although all these dimensions play an important role in empowering disadvantaged people, policy makers and other decision makers in developing countries have a tendency to pass over the political dimension pretending that empowerment of the poor and other disadvantaged groups engage social, human and economic dimensions only.

The motive behind this assumption is that in most developing countries, the purpose of empowering programmes is to alleviate poverty among a population experiencing permanent poverty. This is based on the fact that on the one hand, the economic dimension of empowerment “seeks to ensure that people have the appropriate skills, capabilities and resources and access to livelihoods” and on the other, the human and social dimension, which refers to “social process that helps people gain control over their lives... by being able to act on issues that they define as important” (Luttrell, et al., 2009, p. 1).

However, people are fully empowered when these two dimensions are complemented by the political dimension. The political dimension of empowerment is crucial insofar as, through it, the disadvantaged people gain the power to “exercise their rights ... and participate actively in the process of shaping society” (SDC, 2004 in Luttrell, et al., 2009, p. 16). For instance, along with the feminist movement, many development organizations including

those situated in the developed western countries rely on the philosophy of empowerment in their work of enabling disadvantaged people to be aware of and exercise their rights, to gain access to resources and participate actively in decision making (SDC, 2004).

Similarly, Oyeranti and Olayiwola, while studying suitable strategies for poverty reduction in Nigeria, recommended rights and empowerment that enhance the ability of the poor to influence the state institutions that affect their lives by strengthening their participation in political processes and local decision-making (Oyeranti & Olayiwola, 2005).

Their report emphasized that effort of poverty reduction strategies should be oriented to empowerment. Bebbington and co-authors also reveal that through its World Development Report of 2000–01, the World Bank has recognised the role of empowerment as a pillar in poverty reduction strategy.

In a study of development programme conducted in Bangladesh for instance, the World Bank reported that empowerment should be seen under the lens of community organization where different stakeholders including international and local institutions and the organisations of the poor interact in order to find ways of translating ‘textual commitments to empowerment into a range of diverse practices’ (Bebbington, Batterbury & Siddiqi, 2007).

▪ **Girinka as an indigenous empowering programme**

Though the theoretical discussions of this article privileges empowerment theories and as we are dealing with an indigenous practice of empowerment, it is crucial to clarify the meaning of the concept of ‘indigenous empowerment’.



Maloka and le Roux argue that the term ‘indigenous’ is not necessarily what is traditional but whatever the African masses regard as an authentic expression of themselves (Maloka & Le Roux, 2001, p. 19).

As we have seen earlier, the empowerment through the indigenous programme consists of both human and social empowerment on the one hand and economic empowerment on the other. However, as the developmental programmes are generally realized through policy practice (Midgley & Conley 2010, p. 4) the political dimension is definitely crucial.

The scholarship on the girinka programme reveals that it has contributed a lot to the shift from the traditional to the improved breeds which in turn contributes to poverty reduction through selling milk and the use of manure in agricultural production (Kayigema & Rugege, 2014).

Indeed, the exotic breed of cows produce more milk compared to traditional breeds (Argent, Augstburg & Rasul, 2014), and this contributes not only to the income generation as just mentioned but also to the fight against child malnutrition (MINAGRI, 2006). However, the success of girinka programme would depend on how beneficiaries and providers collaborate in managing its implementation.

Through the literature on girinka programme, researchers have identified obstructions that beneficiaries face. These include for instance, lack of veterinary services; the effects of water shortage and quasi-permanent drought and insufficient land to grow fodder

(Kayigema & Rugege, 2014); lack of or inadequate training of beneficiaries on how to manage the obtained cows (Argent, Augstburg & Rasul, 2014) and lack of training on manure management and use (Kim, et al., 2012).

According to Argent, Augstburg & Rasul, some providers of milk cows among the local social agencies working closely with the MINAGRI, do not provide training to beneficiaries because they believe that Rwandans are traditionally good in cattle rearing (Argent, Augstburg & Rasul, 2014).

Indeed, the cow is precious in Rwandan culture: for instance, the cow is of great importance since it symbolizes the dowry, the appreciation for a work well performed and above all it was a powerful means for the clientele system during the monarchy (Kanyamacumbi, 2001). Nevertheless, cow breeding through girinka programme is frustrating since the distributed cows are in general exotic breeds less resistant to tropical diseases and 'long dry seasons' caused by unfavourable climate change.

#### ▪ **Empowerment in social work context**

The empowerment approach needs professional practitioners enough skilled and guided by principles and values. In social work profession, empowerment is a suitable approach of 'helping people to help themselves' (Zastow 2003, 2009). For Payne "empowerment practice helps individuals or groups to overcome social barriers to self-fulfilment within existing social structures" (Payne, 2005, p. 297).

Nevertheless, Thomas and Pierson, clarify the function of empowerment practice as "not something which is done to

someone, or which someone do to him/herself, and then pass on to someone else”.

The authors explain this by specifying that, “it is not professionals who empower other people such as services users” (Thomas & Pierson, 1995). Instead, the role of social workers is to “respond to the needs and interests identified by the groups or communities in ways that will assist them to realize their hopes, dreams, and aspirations and builds on their strengths” (Hepworth, et al., 2010, p. 414).

Empowerment is among many developmental social work functions. For instance, the literature shows that contrary to the remedial function, which relies on intervening to individuals on a one-to-one basis, the empowerment refers to developmental function and is realized through advocacy, lobbying and policy practice (Midgley & Conley, 2010, p. 4).

As our article also deals with the role of social work practitioners in coping with the shortcomings and challenges the girinka programme faces, we will particularly take into account the social work ‘advocacy’ role of influencing stakeholders for the ‘interests of their clients’, particularly the potential beneficiaries unable to meet the required criteria to benefit from the programme and the beneficiaries of the programme with difficulties to care for the received cow.

### **3.Method and Data**

#### **▪ Method**

This article presents the research which started in May – June 2014. The data were collected by Rwandan social work students who were trained in qualitative research for ten days prior to conducting 21 individual interviews with Social Work Practitioners (SWP) in Huye district. Two Canadian students were also hired to make a list of literature in relation to the topic. Targeted settings for individual interview were: Hospitals, health centres, gender and social protection public agents in local governments, social services agents in international and national Non-Governmental Organizations and the central prison located in Huye.

Additional data were collected in Huye and Gisagara districts by ourselves – the researchers – through group discussions with on the one hand, seven Advisory Committee Members (ACM) representing local social agencies and public social service departments on the occasion of annual workshops (held in 2015 and 2016) and on the other, in June – July 2016 we carried out interviews with the community members composed of six beneficiaries of girinka programme (BGP), six beneficiaries grouped in girinka programme cooperatives (BGPA) and six potential beneficiaries (PBGP) who were on the waiting lists.

All were selected through purposive sampling (Creswell, 1998). Each participant was given a code as follows: ACM<sub>1</sub>, ACM<sub>2</sub>... for advisory committee members; BGP<sub>1</sub>, BGP<sub>2</sub>... for beneficiaries; BGPA<sub>1</sub>, BGPA<sub>2</sub>... for beneficiaries in cooperatives; and PBGP<sub>1</sub>,

PBGP<sub>2</sub>...for potential beneficiaries of girinka programme on the waiting lists.

The data were analysed through an inductive approach where research team met to review and discussed major themes that emerged from collected data, and identified the implications of what the data delineate. At each team meeting, new directions from the data were discussed (Martinez-Brawley, 2001) and analysed in relation to previous researches. This allowed researchers to go beyond the conclusions of other researchers (Mendras, 1976, p. 9) and reached a consensus about findings (Moustakas, 1990).

The validity of data was assured through peer debriefing, and researchers' varied perspectives (Kvale, 1996). The data analysis and interpretation followed the patterns and uncovered practices discussed and critically examined by participants. Names of respondents were kept confidential and codes were used when citing them.

The empirical results were discussed in reference to the following objectives: (i) to identify the motives and relevance of the initiation of girinka programme; (ii) to examine how the girinka programme is beneficial to poor households and; (iii) to determine the shortcomings and challenges of the programme and the role of social work practitioners in coping with them.

#### ▪ **Empirical Data**

##### *Why girinka programme initiative?*

Because of their position in community development and the important role they play in the implementation of government policies, we firstly interviewed social work practitioners. This was

motivated by the fact that a number of scholars consider girinka programme a promising programme in poverty reduction but also ineffective in terms of management and implementation (see Kim, et al., 2011; Argent, Augstburg & Rasul, 2014; Kayigema & Rugege, 2014). In this regard, social work practitioners give us the overview of how they perceive the programme in their specific settings. Two among others said:

*...the implementers of government social policies do mobilise poor people and make them aware of the policies and programmes like VUP, Ubudehe and Girinka programme. Generally, the selected poor people implement those programmes enthusiastically in order to address their socioeconomic problems.*

*Generally, poor people consider girinka programme a means to uplift their lives and not a simple gift they receive generously and manage it as they wish. They seriously take care of the received cows expecting that it will reproduce, provide milk to feed their children and generate income through selling the surplus milk to their neighbours.*

As it appears in these quotations, the main reasons for the initiation of girinka programme were among others the economic recovery and social reconstruction of a devastated nation due to war and 1994 genocide against Tutsi. Indeed due to these disastrous events, the majority of Rwandans became destitute and thus deserved support for basic needs and self-sufficiency.

#### ***The benefits of girinka programme & challenges***

As mentioned above, the second objective of the study was to establish how the girinka programme is beneficial to poor households. The participants to a group discussion identified the following benefits:

***Ability to meet basic needs, a multidimensional empowerment approach***

Overall, participants in the study revealed that the programme is crucial to addressing their fundamental needs. They indicated that progressively, they have been able to pay school fees for their children, health insurance and to access lump-sum cash which they use to buy small but important domestic things like salt, soap, sugar and affordable clothes. This is illustrated by one of the beneficiary of girinka programme as follows:

*It is not so simple to take care of a cow but when you take time and feed it adequately, you are proud of its production and it helps you solve many problems. When I consider how much I can afford to different needs such as food, school fees for my children, contribute for savings and credit [through tontine], that I could not afford otherwise. I find girinka programme as an amazing programme and I thank President Kagame who initiated it!*

This declaration corroborate with what Kalinganire and Rutikanga witnessed during their research on social development in Rwanda. They revealed that social work practitioners, employers and clients recognize that girinka programme has multiple advantages including providing milk and other related products, generating income through selling milk and providing manure that famers use to increase agricultural production (Kalinganire & Rutikanga in Spitzer, Twikirize & Wairire, 2014, pp. 241–242).

### ***Fighting against child malnutrition, a social and economic empowerment***

The girinka programme helped to eradicate child malnutrition within recipient families not only through milk consumption but also by preparing a rich diet from ingredients acquired with generated income. Through manure use the girinka programme also contribute to undertake various activities such as upkeep ‘akarima ki igikoni’ (or a kitchen garden).

This is another government programme consisting of mixing soil with manure or other kind of compost (within the compound or near the residence) where various vegetables are grown to complement the main foodstuff such as food grains or tubers in order to fight against imbalanced diet among low income rural households.

### ***Women empowerment***

Participants declared that the provision of cows has contributed to women empowerment. Destitute women headed household are among the beneficiaries of milk cow; they receive cows either individually or through women associations. Women beneficiaries of Girinka programme expressed their satisfaction with it because it empowered them to the extent that they no longer feel underestimated in their respective families. In fact they feel proud when they are no longer 100% economically dependent on their husbands. One of them illustrates this as follows:

*There are lots of benefits from girinka programme because with a cow I generate income that supplement my husbands' income. Of course it is not easy to take care of a cow but as it decreases economic dependance of women on their husbands, I make great efforts and struggle to keep my cow healthy for more productivity.*



***Self-help and mutual support as a social and economic empowerment***

The girinka programme contributes to the revival of traditional values that promote social cohesion including among others the covenant, solidarity, conviviality, assistance, integrity, etc. The programme helps rebuild trust amongst divided family and community members due to the effects of interethnic conflicts.

Drawing on these fundamental values, people who received cows from their neighbours through the rotating scheme have developed strong relationships. Beyond the mutual support built among the beneficiaries, there is also a strong relationship between other people in the community who generously or in exchange with milk or manure, provide the peelings of foodstuffs (mainly green banana) to feed the cows or allow them grazing in their fallowed plots (see also Hahirwa, 2014, pp. 244–246).

Such actions strengthen the bonds between people and rebuild the social fabric destroyed by the 1994 genocide against Tutsi. Through this spirit of mutual assistance and self-empowerment, people establish progressively informal ‘ibimina’ (Rotating Savings And Credit Associations in Kinyarwanda) or formal financial projects (microfinance institutions or cooperatives) to improve their livelihood. One of the participants illustrates this as follows:

*To me, a cow is invaluable! The cow that I benefited through girinka programme has incredibly changed my life. By selling milk, I earn a little amount of money and make savings in one of the village’s savings and credit associations called ‘Twunganirane’ [or let’s put efforts together to empower ourselves]. Before I joined it I was*

*totally isolated in my village, but today I really feel delighted.*

In fact, the government of Rwanda uses a multifaceted approach in empowering poor people. In addition to girinka, ubudehe and other programmes, it has established savings and credit associations as a way of familiarizing people with the practices of saving for the future and taking a risk of investing in income generating activities. Based on the above statement, girinka programme was a starting point that helped her to reach the next step of saving.

### ***Challenges and the need for the involvement of social work practitioners***

In addition to the obstructions, as identified by other researchers, *inter alia* lack of veterinary services, the effects of water shortage and drought in some regions and insufficient land to grow fodder (Kayigema and Rugege, 2014); lack of or incomplete training on how to manage their cows (Argent, Augstburg & Rasul, 2014) and inadequate training in managing manure use (Kim, et al., 2011), particular obstructions associated with the need of social work advocacy and other kind of social work intervention were noticed. Both practitioners and girinka programme beneficiaries have expressed their feelings:

*I received a milk cow from girinka programme two years ago [then 2014] but couldn't manage to feed it because my plot is not big enough to grow foodstuff for the family and grasses to feed the cow that I have received from the girinka programme. To handle the problem of feeding the cow, which generally needs too much fodder per day, we used to collect grasses from neighbouring bushes and fallowed land but since this was not enough during*

*long dry seasons I was tempted to give up and return it to the providers.*

*...beneficiaries with limited resources and with small plot are generally encouraged to form a livestock cooperative so that together they feed and care for their cows and facilitate veterinary visits, but this option also failed due to lack of enough skills in animal husbandry and cooperative management.*

Beneficiaries of girinka programme are aware of its importance in reducing poverty and eradicate malnutrition among poor households. Though they do their best to sustain their projects individually or in cooperatives, they still need support to handle their problems in order to achieve what girinka programme was designed for. Training in animal husbandry and the management skills of cooperative are above all their needs but ‘additional financial support in odd environmental constraints like long dry seasons would also be of great importance’. Other participants raised the issue of limited support from veterinary technicians and other practitioners:

*We rarely get advice from the veterinary and the community development agents are rarely available. These are generally fascinated by other commitments prioritizing social protection, services to vulnerable groups, health, education, etc. and leave the girinka programme to veterinaries.*

*When we call for trainers in cooperative management for instance, we don't get any because they are always busy. We do not see them when we need their advices. They occasionally provide information during 'Umuganda' [the monthly community work] but this is not enough. We really need trainings.*

Though poor citizens count on girinka programme to generate income and fight against malnutrition, the above statements show that the role of stakeholders in empowering them is limited. Besides the above concerns, discussions were also around the following themes: ‘lots of responsibilities and limited facilities’, ‘the ubudehe or participatory approach manipulated’ and ‘unsuccessful associations’.

### ***Lots of responsibilities and limited facilities***

Social work actors and other community development agents serving in public sector declared having lots of responsibilities and thus their time was not enough to concentrate on all individual and community problems. They are mostly preoccupied by the provision of general psychosocial services and according to them, the management of other cases remains quite limited.

They mentioned the challenges they face as follows: ‘We are very often overloaded and we do not have enough time to make field visit for particular assistance to all our clients’. ‘We generally concentrate on the agency’s mission and it is not always easy to have time for any particular emerging problems of girinka programme beneficiaries’.

*Though to visit our clients in their respective localities is needed, this is not so simple unless the institution we work for possesses enough facilities, transportation means in particular. In the past this was done by assistant social workers who were appointed especially for field practice but nowadays the staff number has significantly decreased and the volunteers scattered in remote areas that we count on are not professionally trained.*

Indeed, just like other civil servants in Rwanda, social work practitioners are always busy. However, as the main duty is of

remedial services (Midgley and Conley, 2010), they are not supposed to disregard beneficiaries of girinka programme in difficult. Training of trainers among the beneficiaries of girinka programme in animal husbandry, the importance of milk in fighting malnutrition and income generation, the management of cows' associations or cooperatives, the importance of savings and credit, learning the basic notions of writing, reading and calculation skills, veterinary medicine first aid, etc. can facilitate the work of practitioners and make girinka programme successful.

***The ubudehe or participatory approach manipulated***

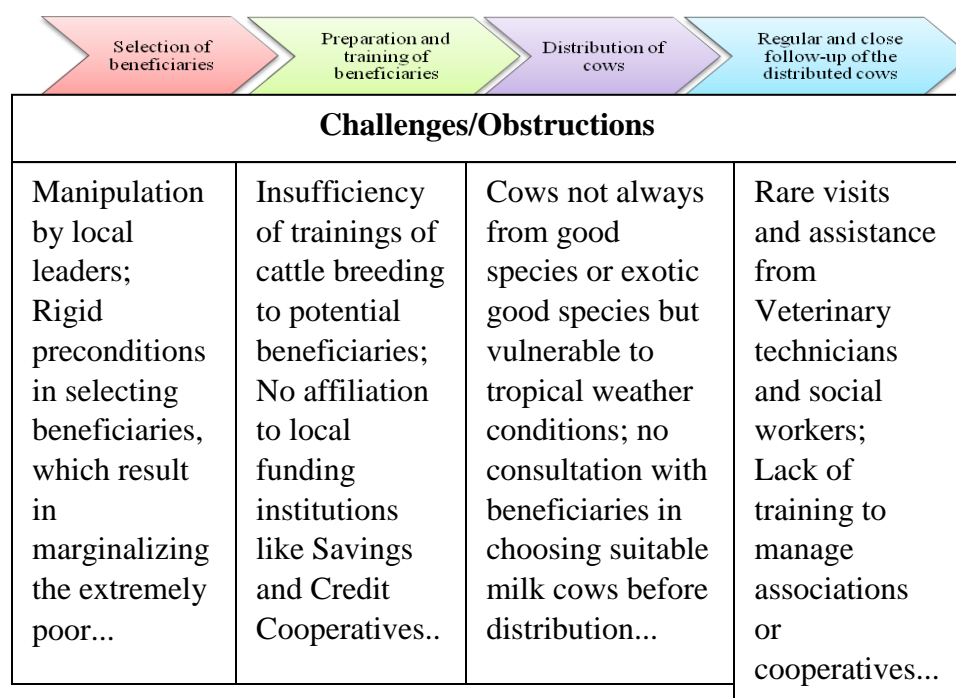
*Local leaders often counteract the initial philosophy of girinka programme based on providing a milk cow to selected persons in reference to the ubudehe philosophy, which privileges participatory approach in selecting the most disadvantaged categories in the village.*

This quote reveals the unprofessionalism prevailing in the process of selecting people who may be given cows in the line of girinka programme. As illustrated in the figure below, the provision of the cow follows four main stages: (i) the selection of beneficiaries, (ii) the preparation and training of the beneficiaries, (iii) the distribution of cows and (iv) the follow-up (Republic of Rwanda, MINAGRI, 2015).

In the first stage, the village residents themselves have to select in those who may be served first depending on who seem to be the most disadvantaged and meet the required preconditions. However, it happens very often that local leaders do not respect this procedure.

This creates discontents among the community members when they see formal process being manipulated. The figure below presents the actual stages followed in the implementation process of girinka programme with a summary highlighting selected key challenges and obstructions that thwart its success.

**Figure 1: stages of girinka programme process and related obstructions**



**Source:** information collected from SWP, ACM, BGP, BGPA and PBGP by the authors.

Based on the above figure, it seems that though the girinka programme is theoretically well designed, it is not fairly implemented, i.e. there are contradictions between the potential beneficiaries privileged by the programme – the extremely poor citizens with cases of child malnutrition – and the required preconditions to be eligible beneficiary.

Usually top officials take actions against those who misappropriate milk cows for the poor (see The New Times, 2016) but sustainable actions would be possible if the potential beneficiaries themselves exercise their rights (see SDC, 2004 in Luttrell, et al., 2009, p. 16) to influence the change of what they find unfair. Otherwise social work responsibility in terms of advocacy (Payne, 2005, p. 298) on their behalf would be indispensable.

### *Unsuccessful associations and cooperatives*

In the perspective of overcoming individual problems, it was recommended to encourage potential beneficiaries to gather in associations/cooperatives and nurture collectively the received cows. In such circumstances, every member may fulfil specific activities to keep the cows healthy and to ensure their productivity. Even though there have been outstanding advantages from associations in terms of uniting efforts for the realisation of some specific activities such as cultivating and planting grass to feed the cows, there have been many discouraging situations.

For instance, it was found that internal as well as external factors influence negatively the success of the associations. From this perspective, the advisory committee members and some beneficiaries of girinka programme in association have declared the following:

‘The attempt to provide cows to people grouped in associations failed because the beneficiaries were not well prepared to work cohesively and to own the top-down proposed project’. ‘Members of the association are often in conflicts because some of them do not fulfil their obligations, of feeding the cows and cleaning their shed’.

The extremely poor landless or holding very small land are generally encouraged to form association or cooperatives in order to benefit from subsidies that would help them to take care of milk cows before they receive them, otherwise without fulfilling these preconditions they are not eligible to girinka programme yet, considering their social status, they are the most eligible. The advisory committee members illustrate this as follows:

*The extremely rural poor landless or those with less than 0.05 hectares do not benefit from the programme if they do not come together in order to meet the preconditions of constructing a cowshed and grow fodder for cows. In missing the offered opportunities the living conditions of the extremely rural poor population remain worse.*

*Some beneficiaries do not have convenient cowsheds and they continue taking care of their cows in precarious way and consequently the production of milk decreases considerably. Though, they know they will be accountable, generally the beneficiaries sell the cow before it dies.*

Participants to group discussions have revealed that some people are given a cow while they are not entitled to get it. As we have seen earlier, this happens because participation of community members and accountability of implementers are sometimes disregarded in the process.

This means that a programme manager or implementer who doesn't involve community members in selecting beneficiaries or disregard their selection and distribute the available cows to whoever they want to favour or cheat for their own advantage are not accountable. Moreover, the beneficiaries who sell the received cow instead of keeping it for milk supply to feed their children or keep it but prefer selling the milk for other purpose and children



continue to suffer from malnutrition are irresponsible. Generally, lack of accountability from both sides leads to suspicious environment which, in turn thwarts the girinka programme to attain its objectives of improving the wellbeing of disadvantaged Rwandans and strengthening social cohesion among all Rwandans.

The beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries of the girinka programme have suggested small domestic animals in general but particularly pigs as a substitute to milk cow because the extremely poor households are not able to care for it. The following statements illustrate this suggestion: ‘We have realised that extremely poor households are unable to take care of a milk cow, but also we have seen that the shift from a lowest to a high income status is possible without milk cow’.

*We would suggest that instead of providing a cow to extremely poor households, they provide them pigs. This is proposed because we know that a pig reproduce twice a year and generally it produces not less than eight piglets.*

*...generally, after four weeks each piglet once sold generates fifteen thousand Rwandan Francs [around USD 20] In order to avoid malnutrition, part of generated money can be used to buy at least one litre of milk per day for children and the remaining can be used to afford the expenses of other needs.*

One of the beneficiaries whose cow died had mentioned that small animals are preferable by very poor households because they resist prolonged dry season and tropical diseases and when they fall sick their medications and treatment are affordable. The majority of participants had similar view and one of them has humorously proposed a new scheme for extremely poor families with a

designation of “one pig per extremely poor household” programme. This suggestion is very significant insofar as diversity within Rwandan culture exists. The suggested programme would not be relevant for extremely poor household only, but also for families that traditionally have never owned a cow.

Though, the cow has a significant value in Rwandan culture, we should be aware that within the Rwandan culture exists subcultures with specific patterns based particularly on geographical location and cultural beliefs where for instance the symbol of dowry is instead “agricultural tools” especially a hoe, which symbolises wealth (see some Northern and North-Western areas for example). This means that hoe is more important than a cow in some regions of Rwanda. Based on these arguments, everyone’s preference-based research could be suitable than persuading everybody that girinka programme is the best.

The fourth survey report known as (EICV4) shows that small domestic animals including mainly pigs and goats are also distributed among poor households (Republic of Rwanda \_ NISR, 2015; Republic of Rwanda \_ MINAGRI, 2012), but the distribution is also subjective since the NGOs involved in such programmes do not make a research before the distribution, they just rely on variables such as extreme poverty, land scarcity, being orphan or widow without considering individual or group preference.

#### **4. Discussion**

This article aimed to explore the success, challenges and obstructions of girinka programme and eventually reveal the contribution of social work practitioners in seeking sustainable solutions to the observed challenges and obstructions. Participants

to this study have shown credible positive side of the programme with substantial outputs among poor farmers and adverse side where beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries of the programme were disappointed.

For instance, interviewees have, on the one hand revealed that cows they receive are not always from good species and those assumed to be good species generally from abroad are vulnerable to tropical weather and poor living conditions and, on the other rigid preconditions in selecting beneficiaries such as constructing a cowshed, cultivating grass, to mention but a few, lead to marginalization of the extremely poor without resources to invest in those activities, yet they are the most eligible.

Above all challenges and obstructions to the programme, we found that there is also misappropriation of milk cows for poor households due to lack of accountability and bribery characterising some local leaders and/or local girinka programme officers.

We have identified so many other challenges and obstructions to the success of the programme and the results of this study revealed that solutions are in the hands of the beneficiaries, the potential beneficiaries and the social work practitioners who have to advise and advocate for them. Based on the empowerment views of knowledge, Payne (2005) argues that clients or service users considered potential beneficiaries and beneficiaries of girinka programme in this study, “often have the best knowledge about their circumstances and objectives, which should therefore be followed”. Payne emphasizes the importance of these views by

arguing that “service users’ knowledge should be empowered ...” and that “their understanding of their situation should be what guides social work practice” (Payne, 2005, p. 59). Though this study shows that professional social workers were not effective actors in community developmental function (see Midgley and Conley, 2010) in the process of girinka programme implementation, their involvement as social justice seekers and advocates (Ibid.) is essential in empowering disadvantaged population.

The function of community development is generally undertaken by non-professional social service providers, local administrators and technicians. Trainings in management of associations or cooperatives and small income generating activities are often provided by staff members with a background other than community development or social work, particularly, veterinary, agronomists and others.

Though Social work practitioners do not play the same role in economic development activities as the economists do, they play an important role in rural economic development. Social work practitioners are able to build a bridge between local policy implementers and policymakers in order to fix the observed shortcomings. Based on empirical evidences collected through a qualitative interview, practitioners can mobilize, train, facilitate, empower and advocate for girinka programme beneficiaries and other potential beneficiaries among the poor population to enhance and maintain their welfare. They acquired values that guide them in their everyday activities. These include advocacy, broker, facilitator, trainer, educator... and above all volunteer.

As educator and trainer, social workers can reduce the gaps of professional staff in remote areas – generated due to the government measures of limiting civil servants – by training trainers among the beneficiaries of girinka programme in animal husbandry, fighting malnutrition, income generating activities and skills in running small businesses, the management of cows' associations/cooperatives, the importance of savings and credit, basic skills of writing, reading and calculation, veterinary medicine first aid, etc. and indeed, this can facilitate the work that would otherwise be performed by a big number of civil servants.

## **5. Conclusion**

In the process of empowering poor rural people, the girinka programme initiative has to some extent a positive social and economic impact. This initiative has allowed some households to shift from a lower stratum of poorer to a relatively poor class. The interviewees and other participants in this research declared that some beneficiaries of girinka programme have increased their livelihood due to selling surplus milk and increased agricultural production due to manure use. Moreover, milk consumption and balanced diet reached due to manure use in kitchen garden have decreased the number of malnourished children among poor households. It was also proved that the girinka programme has, through cow rotation scheme, contributed to social harmony in the community. Some women declared themselves that despite girinka programme hindrances they were economically empowered because they were no longer totally dependent on their husbands' income.

As observed earlier, in the process of girinka programme implementation, the initial principles behind it were neglected and this has contributed to its precariousness. For instance, limited skills in managing cooperatives and animal husbandry have contributed to their instability.

The recommendation was that social workers as change agents and community developers can not only back up veterinary and agricultural technicians in training about cooperative management but also in lobbying for financial support when necessary and advocating for the right to survival and development. Besides that, social workers would also encourage poor population to wrest their rights to participation in the process of decision-making and the autonomy in shaping their own fate, which would satisfy their actual needs.

The results show that girinka programme managers and/or implementers in most rural areas were corrupt and this has worsened the situation of the potential beneficiaries on the waiting list. For instance, cows meant to be given to vulnerable groups were either given to people other than those on the waiting list or misappropriated by the providers. Lack of accountability was not observed among the implementers only but also among the beneficiaries who dared to sell the received cow instead of keeping it for the intended objectives.

Social work practitioners are able to find the strengths that the extremely poor have and use them for alternative solutions to their destitution. One way of coping with identified shortcomings and challenges is to increase the number of social work graduates

oriented in rural community development in order that they build a bridge between beneficiaries/potential beneficiaries of girinka programme and the local government officials/policymakers. In urgent situation, the professionals including veterinaries, agronomists and social workers or other community development agents can train trainers among village residents in cow breeding, use of manure and cooperative management.

This would save the life of sick cows and prevent recurrent domestic animal diseases, assist the population in manure use and understand the advantage of feeding their children with milk. Train the potential beneficiaries of the programme in savings and credit and other related skills would also contribute to positive change.

In-depth research considering all factors including subcultures among Rwandans, geographical and environmental obstructions before the distribution of cows or any other small domestic animals would be necessary.

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