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The domestication of governance assessments: evidence from the Rwandan Joint Governance Assessment

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Analysis

The domestication of governance assessments: evidence from the Rwandan Joint Governance Assessment

Haley J. Swedlund

In this paper, I consider the strengths and weaknesses of including local actors in governance assessments through an analysis of the Rwandan Joint Governance Assessment (JGA) and its supporting institutions. The JGA is the first and only governance assessment produced and approved by donors and a recipient country. The approach is seen by many as a model to replicate elsewhere, because it combines donors' need to assess governance in the countries in which they work with a desire for context sensitivity and local ownership. However, local and/or joint approaches may also face a variety of

problems ranging from implementation difficulties to the risk of political co-optation. The case study presented in this paper highlights the practical and political challenges faced during the implementation of the JGA and analyses to what extent these have the potential to compromise the approach. For both the donors and the recipient government, the process represents unknown terrain in which they continually struggle to position themselves. The findings also point to more general problems that can arise when international frameworks are embedded in local contexts.

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Introductory remarks

There are often contrary voices on the state of governance in Rwanda today. In this paper, I examine these contrasting narratives through an analysis of the Rwandan Joint Governance Assessment (JGA): the first and thus far only joint governance assessment between donors and a recipient country. While some international reports are very critical of what they see as Rwanda's suppression of political contestation and cross-border activities in neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo, the image painted by the JGA and related institutions is one of a state that provides for the security of its citizens and is dedicated to governance reform. The goal of the article is not to declare a winner in this contest but to consider the many complexities that arise when international frameworks and mechanisms are embedded in local contexts.

Particularly within post-conflict and fragile societies, such as Rwanda, the need to have local input and buy-in, particularly with governance issues, is seen as essential. However, are there costs to having 'local' actors involved in governance assessments? Just as international assessments face a number of challenges, local and so-called joint approaches—collaborations between international and domestic actors—are also likely to face a variety of challenges ranging from being difficult to implement to being co-opted by elites for their own political gain. As a recent special issue in this journal points out,¹ despite being more context-sensitive, policy in fragile states still tends to neglect key social and political realities on the ground, as well as relations between recipient countries and international donors and their impact on development co-operation.

In this article, I use a case study of the Rwandan Joint Governance Report to consider the strengths and limitations of joint and locally-driven approaches. The goal is to move from idealised conceptions of local and/or joint approaches to an empirical examination of the many complexities involved in their implementation. As the case study makes clear, governance assessments that attempt to integrate local stakeholders are likely to not only face a variety of practical challenges, but the political realities of the countries in which they are implemented often means that outcomes diverge from expectations. More broadly speaking, the case study also highlights that both donors and recipient-country governments continually struggle to position themselves amidst what is largely unknown terrain for both.

The article is organised as follows. I begin by examining the legacy of governance assessments, including critiques of quantitative governance assessments and the

emergence of an emphasis on approaches that integrate local actors. Here I stress that, although international governance assessments suffer from a variety of challenges themselves, we should be careful about assuming that local is always better. After all, what does 'local' even mean? I then turn to the case study of the JGA and the institutions that support it. This section is largely based on fieldwork I conducted in Rwanda in 2009 and 2010. In this section, I summarise the drafting and approval process of the JGA—which faced several challenges. I then discuss follow-up on the original report, which has been slow, and the emergence of the Rwandan Governance Board (RGB), which has grown from a small body within the Ministry of Local Government to a large initiative engaged in a broad number of activities related to governance in Rwanda. In the final empirical section, I look more closely at the contrasting narratives presented by international governance assessments versus the picture painted by the JGA and the RGB. In particular, I focus on how local data from the JGA and related surveys has been used to challenge international governance assessments that are critical of the state of governance in Rwandan today.

I conclude by arguing that optimism about local assessments needs to be tempered with realism about the practical and political challenges likely to be faced during their implementation. While the JGA presents an interesting alternative to international governance assessments, it is also limited in several ways. The process has faced a number of challenges, including limited institutional capacity; the lack of necessary data; and disagreements on how to characterise the state of governance in Rwanda today. Given these challenges, it would be foolhardy to assume that local and joint approaches to governance assessments will not face a host of challenges ranging from the more mundane and bureaucratic to the more political and complex.

The historical legacy of governance assessments

Since the mid-1990s, governance has been increasingly linked to poverty reduction and human development goals. It is now widely accepted that development requires sound institutions of governance, although the exact link between the two is widely contested. Accordingly, a number of quantitative governance assessments have emerged to track progress and backsliding on governance in developing countries, such as the World Development Indicators, Freedom House, and—specifically in Africa—the Mo Ibrahim Report. Quantitative governance indicators are now widely used by investors,

development analysts, academics, journalists and donor agencies,² and governance is often particularly closely monitored in post-conflict and fragile states because of the presumed links between good governance, security and development.

The high visibility of governance assessments means they often have important real world implications. For example, good scores on the World Bank's Doing Business Report may encourage higher levels of foreign direct investment, while low scores on corruption indexes, such as Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, may lead donors to question large resource transfers. At the same time, poor reports or declining scores on governance indicators related to voice and accountability are often picked up by both local and international journalists and maybe used to criticise politicians and the ruling party. In Rwanda's case, for example, low scores in voice and accountability, as well as civil liberties and political rights, resulted in the country failing to qualify for full compact status under the United States' Millennium Challenge Cooperation (MCC) programme.³

Critiques of governance assessments

International governance indicators allow us to track progress and backsliding over time and allow us to make comparisons between states. They also put front and centre the importance of governance to socioeconomic development. However, their numerous limitations have also been well documented. In particular, the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), which were first published in 1999, have come under fire for lack of transparency, selection bias, adverse selection in sampling, poor data quality and misuse.⁴ For example, Thomas argues that there is little evidence that the WGI have construct validity; in other words, the indicators may not measure what they claim to be measuring.⁵

More broadly speaking, defining governance—and particularly 'good governance'—is also a challenge in and of itself. In addition to having multiple definitions, Hyden argues that the term tends to become a catch-all, subsuming too many activities to be meaningful.⁶ He also notes that its normative content often reflects one particular model of conducting public affairs. While some assessments focus on political systems, others focus on public administration, social governance or market governance.⁷ These differences not only make comparative work challenging but point to fundamental differences in underlying assumptions, hypotheses and values, which are often anything but explicitly stated in the governance assessments themselves.⁸

In addition to ‘independent’ governance assessment frameworks, almost all donor agencies have developed their own internal governance assessments.⁹ Such frameworks are often relatively opaque to outsiders. Furthermore, because donors typically conduct governance assessments to inform country strategies, donor governance assessments are largely developed to serve narrow individual agency needs and concerns. As a result, they are often ‘not strongly related to partner-country governance processes and concerns’.¹⁰ As two recent conferences explored, the disconnect between donor assessments and recipient-country priorities and needs is at odds with the 2005 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, which emphasises ownership or effective leadership by partner countries over their development policies and strategies.¹¹

‘Local’ approaches to governance assessments

Collectively, critiques of international governance indicators and the new emphasis on recipient-country ownership have prompted more focus on national institutions and local expertise, resulting in a greater emphasis on peer and local—or country-led—governance assessments.¹² Such assessments are increasing popular, because they are thought to foster a domestic dialogue on governance; something that it is difficult for international and donor assessments to do.¹³ Instead of relying on ‘naming and shaming’, local assessments are believed to stimulate good governance from the bottom-up by fostering a national discourse and debate on governance.¹⁴ Instead of just evaluating governance based on externally-derived indicators, assessments that are ‘locally-owned’ are supposed to promote a vibrant national dialogue on governance. This dialogue is then thought to prompt more sustainable and meaningful changes in governance practices. This may be particularly important in post-conflict societies like Rwanda where buy-in from local actors is seen as essential for sustainable, long-term peace.

However, one can also imagine that locally-driven assessments might suffer from a variety of challenges. Conceptually, what would a ‘local’ assessment even look like? Who are the key stakeholders and who would be assessing who? Global experiences with policy initiatives, such as the poverty reduction strategy process,¹⁵ suggest that the agendas of donors often end up dominating policy processes in recipient countries; even when documents are considered ‘nationally-owned’, participation is typically constrained to a narrow sub-set of actors within a country. In such cases, ‘local’ almost always means national-level elites rather than farmers or local administrators residing outside the capital city.

Additionally, from a political analysis perspective there are many reasons to be suspicious of the possibility of a truly frank assessment. After all, local governance assessments are based on the idea that a government will willingly consent to their own self-assessment, opening themselves up to criticism from not only international but also domestic actors. If done properly, assessments are likely to highlight issues that any government wishing to stay in power would prefer to keep under wraps and could be used by opposition groups to mount political challenges. Accordingly, there is clearly some incentive on the part of governments to rein them in as much as possible.

Lastly, and more pragmatically, local and joint assessments require devoting what are often very scarce resources and personnel in recipient countries towards the assessment. For assessments to be truly local, they should be designed and carried out by local staff. However, frequently low levels of capacity in recipient countries combined with a desire by donors for oversight means that tasks that should ideally be completed by local staff are carried out by international consultants. Even when local actors do lead, or at least participate in such processes, it presumably will take time away from other tasks, including time spent on the implementation of governance reform.

The JGA is the first and only governance assessment produced and approved by donors and a recipient-country government. In this regard, it offers a middle ground between international and local governance assessments. Accordingly, in many ways the bar is even higher. Not only does a joint assessment have to circumvent the challenges laid out above, but it has to meet both the needs of donors and recipient governments. As Williams and his colleagues point out, donors and governments may actually have conflicting needs. For example, while donors are likely to be concerned with maintaining accountability to their constituents, governments are likely to be concerned—amongst other things—with retaining political power and aid flows.¹⁶

In the case of Rwanda, the process also took place in a political context that is by many accounts highly centralised and with a government that is sensitive to criticism, especially on issues of governance and national security.¹⁷ As Table 1 illustrates, the current Rwandan government is credited with making dramatic improvements in control of corruption and government effectiveness since the genocide and civil war in the early 1990s. However, their scores on voice and accountability remain low. International critics often emphasise the importance of opening up the political space in Rwanda and are critical—especially as of late—of Rwanda's alleged support to Congolese rebels in the Eastern Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Table 1. World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators for Rwanda (percentile rank), 1996–2011

	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011
Voice and accountability	12.4	8.2	9.6	13	12.2
Political stability	4.8	4.8	23.1	37.3	45.8
Government effectiveness	5.7	18.5	28.4	48.3	58.3
Regulatory quality	5.4	13.7	28.8	33.3	48.3
Rule of law	5.4	13.7	28.8	33.3	46.9
Control of corruption	N/A	28.6	37.9	59.4	69.7

Source: Kaufmann et al., *Worldwide Governance Indicators*.

In response to such criticism, the Government of Rwanda (GoR) often emphasises the importance of security and stability, using Rwanda's violent past and fears of renewed violence to justify activities such as restrictions on political parties or ambiguous laws against divisionism and genocide denial.¹⁸ At the same time, the GoR—along with supportive donors—is quick to promote the host of socioeconomic reforms that have taken place in Rwanda since the mid-1990s. In doing so, the GoR couches its political agenda in the language of donors but also tries to temper expectations by emphasising Rwanda's violent past.

Examining the process of implementing and sustaining the JGA can give us insight into the many complexities that arise when international frameworks and mechanisms are embedded into particular local contexts. Given the challenges facing local and joint approaches and the existing Rwandan political context, the end outcome of the JGA was anything but certain.

The JGA Review and the Rwandan Governance Board

In this section, I examine the origins, implementation and aftermath of the Rwandan Joint Governance Review. The section is based largely on fieldwork undertaken in Rwanda during 2009 and 2010. During my time in Rwanda, I conducted 47 formal interviews with 48 Rwandan government officials, development staff from donor agencies and non-governmental organisations and independent consultants.¹⁹ In addition to interviews, I observed two key meetings particularly pertinent to this article: a workshop on the Joint Governance Assessment and a policy dialogue on the Mo Ibrahim Foundation Index. Attending these meetings allowed me to speak to many more individuals than those I

formally interviewed and allowed me to observe informal exchanges between development partners and government officials regarding the JGA.

Drafting and approval

The original impetus for the Joint Governance Assessment came from ‘the top’.²⁰ During a press conference at a high-level meeting between donors and government officials in 2006, Rwandan President Paul Kagame challenged those present to create a dialogue guided by ‘facts’ and challenged development partners to work with the government to develop governance indicators.²¹ Donors and the Ministry of Local Government later followed up on Kagame’s proposal, resulting in the JGA. Key financial support for the first report came from the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DfID) and the European Union, with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) managing the contracts.²² The initiative was originally justified on two grounds.

First, the JGA was supposed to lower transaction costs by creating a single assessment that both the government and donors could support.²³ Due to the proliferation of governance assessments over the past decade, many countries, including Rwanda, must frequently respond to multiple requests for information and a constant stream of visits from external evaluators. In Rwanda and elsewhere, this consumes a large amount of time for the Ministry of Local Government, which is already low on capacity. At the same time, donors often spend a great deal of time funding, responding to and deciding what is accurate from myriad reports on Rwanda. By producing one report that all agree on, it was hypothesised that the transaction costs of both donors and the GoR would decrease.

Second, and likely more importantly, the JGA was supposed to result in a singular, context-sensitive assessment of governance in Rwanda.²⁴ Depending on what indicators are used and how the data is analysed, assessments of governance in Rwanda can present a very different picture. Thus, particularly on the GoR side, a singular, ‘context-sensitive’ assessment was desired.²⁵ Several of my interviewees pointed out that the JGA came about following critical reports by the World Bank and Transparency International.²⁶ As one interviewee put it, the government was ‘pissed-off’ at external people coming in, spending little to no time in Rwanda and making judgments.²⁷

The first JGA report was overseen by a high-level steering committee led by the Minister of Local Government and the World Bank Country Manager.²⁸ The steering committee was supported by a technical committee and the Rwanda Governance Advisory Board—

Table 2. Timeline of first Joint Governance Assessment Report

Year	Month	Activities
2006	December	Engaged development partners; approved the terms of reference; formed the steering and technical committees
2007	January	Funding mechanisms and contract management established (DfID and EU contributed funds, UNDP managed the contract)
	February–October	Policy Practice, Ltd. engaged after a lengthy international bidding process to procure the assessing firm
2008	January	Inception report examined and approved by steering committee; workshops and interviews begin (30 January)
	April	Draft presented to steering committee—found inaccurate
	July	Final report examined and adopted by the steering committee (28 July)
	September	Final report is sent to cabinet for consideration (6 September) and endorsed (12 September)
	November	Approved by donors at 2006 Development Partners Meeting
	December	Formal launch

discussed in more detail below. Lastly, a UK firm, the Policy Practice Ltd., was hired to perform the research and analysis, conduct consultations with stakeholders and eventually draft the report.²⁹

After the initial idea for the JGA was conceived, the first report took time to realise, at least in part because of procurement and other bureaucratic delays.³⁰ Two other agencies were hired before the Policy Practice finally began the project in late 2007.³¹ See Table 2 for a summary of the first JGA from the approval of the terms of reference to its formal launch.

The Policy Practice conducted approximately a month of fieldwork before producing a first draft of the report. While the consultants originally felt very welcomed and were told nothing was off limits, at approximately the third meeting of the steering committee tensions began to rise and the initial version was eventually tabled.³²

The most controversial issues in the initial draft revolved around comments found in the report's introduction. This introductory section was included to provide historical and contextual background to the assessment. The consultants originally believed their comments in this section to be uncontroversial and were caught off guard when they turned out to be contentious.³³ However, national history has frequently been a point of contention in Rwanda and was not taught in schools until recently.³⁴ Particularly difficult passages included

comments about human rights abuses by both sides during the civil war and genocide, commentary about Rwanda being a hierarchical society and a discussion of the recent change in the official language from French to English. These are all issues which have been controversial in the past. Furthermore, in an attempt to be independent and credible, the initial version referenced critics of the regime, leading to claims of genocide denial by the GoR.³⁵

A key challenge for the Policy Practice was confusion on what the report actually was. On one hand, it was supposed to be a joint assessment between donors and the GoR. On the other hand, it was supposed to be an internationally credible report. In the end, the consultants were caught in the triangle this confusion created. After the first draft was tabled, Policy Practice shifted their role to that of a facilitator, helping to clear the air and get the process back on track.³⁶

A second report, which dropped much of the contentious introductory section, was then drafted.³⁷ This draft was much better received by the government and was approved by Rwanda's cabinet on 12 September 2008. It was then adopted by donors at a meeting between the Government of Rwanda and development partners in November 2008.³⁸

As one interviewee put it, the final document is a 'consensus document'.³⁹ Discussions of controversial topics are treated delicately and gains rather than weaknesses are emphasised. For example, the controversial issue of party-owned enterprises is treated very carefully,⁴⁰ and no indicator is included in the monitoring framework related to this issue.⁴¹ According to a report by the original consultants:

*It was difficult to move the discussion beyond a consideration of the working of formal institutions to examine the underlying structural political factors and informal power relationships that many governance professionals, including the [consultants], regard as being of fundamental importance. This reflected the limitations of the terms of reference, the preference given to easily measurable indicators, and sensitivity of some of the issues raised by political economy analysis.*⁴²

As a result of these difficulties, as the consultants themselves concede, the final report adopts largely a technocratic view of good governance and its recommendations largely centre on reforms to formal institutions.⁴³

As Hayman points out, the final document is quite careful about making judgments, particularly around the issue of democratisation and emphasises consensual rather than adversarial politics.⁴⁴ The document frequently invokes Rwanda's violent past as a reason

for Rwandan exceptionalism, particularly around controversial topics, such as civil liberties and the laws against divisionism and genocide ideology, and such topics are also missing from the 45 measurable indicators.

There has also been criticism of the participatory nature of the document. A short case study by the Oslo Governance Centre in 2009 concluded that the executive largely drove the JGA and that many members of parliament and civil society organisations were unaware of the JGA at the time of their interviews.⁴⁵ My interviews also suggested that the original document was—at least in the beginning—largely an exercise between donors and the executive.⁴⁶ While civil society was involved in the process via a singular representative on the steering committee, they were not represented on the technical committee where much of the ‘grunt work’ was carried out, and parliamentary involvement was marginal.⁴⁷

All these criticisms aside, it should be emphasised that the majority of those I interviewed about the JGA expressed a general level of satisfaction with the final document. The exception to this is was a senior-level bilateral donor representative who argued it was a sensitised document that only reflected the government’s priorities.⁴⁸ However, most interviewees, donor and government representatives alike, seem to believe it was a positive—if small—step forward, and the donor representatives I spoke to largely appeared to accept the removal of the contentious sections as a cost of an undertaking such as this.

That being said, it is clear that the process of adoption was neither easy nor smooth. The process of approval faced a number of implementation challenges, and the political nature of the document clearly led to difficult negotiations between stakeholders as each struggled to represent their interests. Furthermore, due to the uniqueness of the initiative, there was a good deal of uncertainty about what the final project should actually look like and how it should be used. As the following section outlines, these challenges continue to plague the JGA process.

Post-approval

The first JGA report established a set of 45 indicators for a governance assessment. The idea was to produce a yearly report, using the indicators and recommendations to highlight progress or backsliding. However, a follow-up report did not appear until 2011—three years after the initial report.⁴⁹

Despite the lengthy time period between the initial and follow-up report, the latter is limited in its ability to assess progress on governance in Rwanda. Many of the indicators

developed in the first report did not have baseline data until late 2009 when a survey of approximately 3,600 individuals was conducted. This means that progress or backsliding cannot be determined until the conclusion and publication of a second survey. Additionally, some indicators did not have baseline data by the time the second report was published, and in other cases the data available was limited or contradictory in some way. Accordingly, even over five years after the initial exercise began, the data gaps are substantial, and it is difficult for the report to make a definitive stand on how governance is progressing in Rwanda. Consequently, the report's conclusions remain tentative and empirical data limited.

According to interviewees, since the first report, the process has become 'bogged down'. In particular, the process has faced a number of co-ordination and capacity challenges. For example, one interviewee told me that the JGA process is difficult because it is hard to get people together;⁵⁰ another told me that the process takes up way too much of everyone's time and is not efficient, adding that government capacity constrains the process.⁵¹ A third interviewee noted that the process is challenged by issues such as the size of the committee overseeing the JGA, the fact that the government is relatively new and the limited number of consulting firms with expertise in this area.⁵²

The GoR body charged with supporting the JGA technical committee is the Rwandan Governance Board (RGB), which was previously called the Rwandan Governance Advisory Council.⁵³ Since its establishment, the board has expanded greatly both in terms of staff and in terms of mandate. When I first visited their office in October 2009 its small staff had only two researchers, three support staff and the executive secretary. The staff barely filled the large space it had recently been allotted. When I returned only eight months later, the current staff of 15 was overrunning the space.

Since becoming a board in 2011, the organisation's capacities have further grown. Some recent projects seem to be related to the JGA. For example, the Rwanda Governance Scorecard also assesses governance in Rwanda but has a different methodology than the JGA with eight indicators, 37 sub-indicators and 139 sub-sub-indicators. Additionally, the Scorecard is not jointly approved by donors and government.⁵⁴ However, in addition to such governance assessment projects, the RGB has begun to take on responsibilities that go beyond research and monitoring, such as registering and granting legal status to NGOs and religious organisations. According to the law that established the board, the mission of the organisation is not only to measure governance in Rwanda but to improve it.⁵⁵

The RGB operates as a non-political, research organisation. It is headed by a professor and staffed by researchers with degrees in population studies and statistics. New activities, such as a peer-reviewed journal, only further suggest that the board wants to be seen as an independent research organisation. However, it is questionable how realistic independence is for the board, even if it has the best of intentions. The council began as a subsidiary of the Ministry of Local Government, originally operating down the hall from the Minister of Local Government,⁵⁶ and has often taken a defensive position against external critiques. For example, the first—and, thus far, only—publically available article in the aforementioned peer-reviewed journal is a summary of the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators. While the journal article does not completely ignore negative findings, it clearly emphasises areas where the GoR is doing well and rushes through weaknesses.⁵⁷ Similarly, a publication by the institution on the 2010 Rwandan presidential election focuses on positive findings. In doing so, it overlooks alleged transgressions and questionable political practices, such as the restriction of political parties that challenge the current ruling party.⁵⁸ In the following section, I more explicitly examine the contrary narratives painted by international governance indicators versus the JGA and the Rwandan Governance Board.

Contrasting narratives

Historically, the current Rwandan government led by President Paul Kagame and his party the Rwandan Patriotic Front has been defensive of international indexes and reports that criticise governance practices and detractors are often fiercely condemned.⁵⁹ Well before the beginning of the JGA process, the government accused the International Crisis Group of 'persistently wag[ing] a misinformation campaign designed to not only malign the Government of Rwanda, but also to undermine the efforts of the Rwandan people regarding national unity and reconciliation' after they published a report critical of Rwanda's democratic progress.⁶⁰ And, in response to concerns about the expulsion of a researcher from Human Rights Watch, a staff member of the Rwandan Directorate General of Immigration and Emigration declared that the:

*constant accusations against the Government of Rwanda over allegations of human rights abuse, lack of political space and press freedom have been part of campaigns to discredit the credibility of recent presidential elections. These accusations show how the international community is manipulated by some organizations that are eager to assume state powers in this era of globalization.*⁶¹

The RGB creates an official space for local responses to international evaluations. It was repeatedly communicated to me by staff of, what was at the time of my interviews, the Rwandan Governance Advisory Council that external indexes do not involve them in their research and are top-down; consequently, ‘real’ information is missing and external indexes cannot be seen as valid or taken as a realistic portrayal of what is actually occurring on the ground.⁶² RGB publications often emphasise not only the shortcomings of international approaches, but also how such shortcomings lead to Rwanda being misrepresented. For example, in a paper published by the RGB on the Legatum Prosperity Index, the RGB staff authors conclude that:

*[...]the index did not capture well the situation/reality of the country. Quite often seen, the sub-indices did not adequately measure what they claim to measure [...]. The Rwandan citizens involvement in the affairs of their country signal a nation that is united and committed towards writing a new chapter in her history, and many foreign countries testify to this.*⁶³

During 2010, much of the criticism against international assessments was directed at the Mo Ibrahim Index, which assesses African countries on a variety of criteria pertaining to governance.⁶⁴ In each of the 12 indexes that have been issued by Mo Ibrahim, Rwanda’s aggregate rank has been somewhere in the middle of the pack, ranking anywhere from 23 to 32. In the 2010 index, Rwanda ranked 31 out of 52, receiving high marks for sustainable economic opportunity but low marks for safety and rule of law, as well as participation and human rights (see Table 3).

In June 2010, prior to these scores being released, the Rwandan Governance Advisory Council—now the RGB—invited staff from the Mo Ibrahim Foundation to Rwanda for consultative meetings, which I had the opportunity to observe. There were a total of four sessions; one for each of the four broad categories of the index. A representative of Mo Ibrahim first presented the results of the 2010 index in a particular category; then a representative of the council responded. Finally, the floor was opened for questions.

Table 3. Rwanda’s rankings in the 2010 Mo Ibrahim Index (out of 52 countries)

Overall 2010 Ibrahim Index	Safety and rule of law	Participation and human rights	Sustainable economic opportunity	Human development
31	39	34	10	25

Responses by the council staff were largely based on the argument that ‘local’ data, most of it coming from the JGA and corresponding surveys, showed a different picture. Almost every data point, from political pluralism to mobile phone usage, was contested and an alternative vision presented. For example, on personal security, Mo Ibrahim’s score for the level of criminality in the country—25 per cent—was contrasted with data from a survey question from the JGA that asked: what is your level of satisfaction for citizens and people’s security at your district in the last 12 months? According to the data presented by the RGA, 86 per cent of those surveyed answered excellent or strong. Similarly, regarding rule of law, Mo Ibrahim’s score for the independence of the judiciary—12.5 per cent—was contrasted to a question from the JGA that asked: how do you perceive the independenc[e] of the judicial system and the parliament in Rwanda? According to figures reported, more than 65 per cent responded excellent or good for both the judicial system and parliament.⁶⁵

Representatives of the council were particularly critical of Mo Ibrahim’s scoring on national security, which included indicators for government involvement in armed conflict⁶⁶ and civilian death from civilian targeted violence.⁶⁷ For both measures, Rwanda received the worst possible score from Mo Ibrahim. In contrast, the council presented responses to a question from the JGA that asked: what is your confidence level in the following security organs in your district? The data presented indicated that over 80 per cent had confidence in both the national police force and the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF).⁶⁸

Mo Ibrahim representatives largely responded to these critiques by emphasising that they required cross-national data in order to make comparisons, and that data must come from a reputable, international source to be credible. Therefore, if there are problems with the data used in the index, the government needs to supply better data to the various sources used by Mo Ibrahim to compile the index. This conversation resulted in a stalemate of sorts with the two sides largely talking past one another. Quite quickly the comments from not only council staff but also from other government representatives in attendance turned into a critique of external indices more broadly.

Attempts to collect local data are highly commendable and several of the critiques made by the RGB of Mo Ibrahim and other governance indicators are likely valid—at least broadly speaking. For example, the data used for such assessments is often far from perfect and the choice of particular indicators is certainly up for debate. Representatives of Mo Ibrahim I spoke to at the dialogue were complementary towards the willingness of the government to sponsor such a meeting. It was the first of its kind for Mo Ibrahim.

However, data collected locally is also likely limited in several ways. Much of the data presented at the workshop comes from a survey conducted in 2009 of approximately 3,600 individuals, for which sampling techniques and response rates are not reported.⁶⁹ In addition, while the data presented at the workshop may fall broadly under those same categories as Mo Ibrahim indicators—i.e., national security—often the indicators are actually measuring something quite different. Thus, the question is not necessarily which data point is correct but a more fundamental question about how indicators should be measured. Lastly, how the data is used by the GoR suggests that it occupies a politically strategic place in the government's defence against critiques.

A few months after the dialogue described above took place Mo Ibrahim publicly released the data they had presented in Kigali. Three different articles in the government-leaning *The New Times* responded to the publication of the Mo Ibrahim Index and a nine-page official response was released.⁷⁰ In one of these articles, Professor Anastase Shyaka—Chief Executive Officer of the RGB—argued:

What is clear is that is that the index is not based on facts. Even on the last Mo Ibrahim report, the government reacted over data discrepancies. We showed them areas where there were data discrepancies, they promised to make sure to rely on more accurate data next time [. . .]. If you analyse properly you see that whoever fills in this data has a plan to undermine or deliberately soil the image of the country.⁷¹

Later that fall, the critique continued at a meeting between donors and senior government officials when the then Minister of Local Government, James Musoni argued, '[s]ome external people and NGOs use baseless frameworks and indexes and have been misrepresenting Rwanda's governance status'.⁷² He went on to argue that the major external challenges to governance—in contrast to local challenges, such as poverty—include: 'negative/ biased reports and indexes on Rwanda's governance'.⁷³

Such discourses suggest that at times the JGA has been used to defend current practices and dismiss critiques of government practices. This finding runs counter to depictions of local assessments that emphasise their potential for expanding domestic accountability and encouraging bottom-up reform. It could be argued that the amount of attention spent on responding to international assessments suggests that the GoR takes such assessments—or at least their implications—seriously, and, in many ways, the JGA does appear to have given certain 'local' entities a bigger platform. However, as the previous

discussion makes clear, it would be foolhardy not to take into account the political nature of the JGA process and its related institutions.

Summary of findings and conclusions

The JGA is a novel approach to governance assessment that emphasises the need to not only measure progress in governance but also to engage local actors in a dialogue about governance. In doing so, it tries to combine the recent emphasis on the desirability of local governance assessments with the needs of donors to have an internationally credible report.

While an interesting and useful experiment, the case study of the JGA presented in this paper suggests there are several reasons to be cautious of the limitations of local and joint approaches to governance assessments. As the experience of the JGA makes clear, joint approaches are likely to have a host of implementation challenges, such as alternative expectations and low levels of domestic institutional capacity. Similar to other aid co-ordination efforts implemented following the *Paris Declaration*, the transaction costs of collaboration also appear to be quite high. It has taken a good deal of time and effort to co-ordinate the JGA process, and expectations regarding what the document should look like vary. At the same time, data shortage remains acute and it remains difficult to measure progress or backsliding on several of the indicators. To my knowledge, no donor has stopped conducting their own governance assessments on account of the JGA.

Additionally, just as international governance assessments can be political, evidence from the case study suggests that local and joint assessments are also likely to be a product of the political environment in which they take place and can be used strategically by local actors. As the discussion about the Mo Ibrahim report makes particularly clear, the JGA and related institutions have not always been used to foster a frank and open discussion on governance in Rwanda. Instead, they have sometimes been used to dismiss unfavourable reviews of the government as non-local and therefore inaccurate.

Critiques of the JGA process do not mean that local and/or joint governance assessments ought to be abandoned entirely, but they do suggest that it would be foolhardy to blindly endorse local assessments and to automatically replicate the JGA without considering its limitations. In particular, the case study suggests that it is unreasonable to assume that local governance assessments will have a significant effect on power relations within a country. Alternatively, local assessments are likely to be a product of existing

power dynamics and stakeholders will likely try to use them to their advantage when possible. Accordingly, utopic visions of broad citizen participation in governance frameworks and truly 'local' assessments are likely to be highly unrealistic unless strong domestic accountability exists prior to the assessment.

The case study presented in this article points out the need to go beyond idealised conceptions of 'the local' to consider how local and joint approaches will play out in the multifaceted political environments in which they are implemented. What is often missing from perhaps well-meaning international frameworks and mechanisms that emphasise the need to incorporate local actors and agendas is the recognition that when such frameworks are actually embedded in local contexts the outcomes are likely to diverge in ways that international actors may not have foreseen—and may find problematic. In many circumstances, local stakeholders' political motivations are simply overlooked and even when they are not it is frequently very difficult for international actors to truly understand their partner's changing political motivations. Local actors may have agendas and opinions that are difficult to reconcile with global good governance principles and, as the case of the JGA suggests, may use local approaches as a platform for defending themselves against critique. Despite plenty of theoretical and empirical evidence to the contrary, international discourses on partnership and local ownership almost universally fail to acknowledge the possibility that such discourses may actually give certain local actors a platform from which to advocate for positions that international actors find problematic and that local political realities almost always unseat even the best laid plans.

Endnotes

1. Baranyi and Desrosiers, 'Development Cooperation in Fragile States'.
2. Arndt, 'Politics of Governance'.
3. Hayman, 'Funding Fraud'.
4. Kurtz and Schrank, 'Growth and Governance'; Oman and Arndt, *Uses and Abuses*; Thomas, 'Worldwide Governance Indicators'; van de Walle, 'State of the World's Bureaucracies'.
5. Thomas, 'Worldwide Governance Indicators'. For a response to Thomas by the authors of the WGI, see Kaufmann et al., 'Response'.
6. Hyden, 'Challenges of Making Governance Assessments'.
7. Ibid.
8. OECD, *Survey of Donor Approaches*.
9. According to a 2008 survey, 11 donor agencies had developed one or more assessment tools, while an additional six agencies were in the process of developing them. Ibid.
10. Ibid, 5.
11. UNDP, *Supporting Country-Led Democratic Governance Assessments*; Rakner and Wang, 'Governance Assessments'.
12. Examples of peer assessments include the African Peer Review Mechanism, the peer reviews overseen by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the peer reviews needed to

- accede to the European Union. The only widespread example of a country-led assessment is the State of Democracy assessment methodology used by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.
13. OECD, *Donor Approaches*.
 14. UNDP, *Supporting Country-Led Democratic Governance Assessments*, 3.
 15. See, for example, Cheru, 'Building and Supporting PRSPs'; Fraser, 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers'; Gould, *New Conditionality*.
 16. Williams et al., 'Carrying Out a Joint Governance Assessment', 2–3.
 17. Reyntjens, 'Rwanda, Ten Years on'; Reyntjens, 'Constructing the Truth'; Straus and Waldorf, *Remaking Rwanda*; Hayman, 'Funding Fraud'.
 18. For an overview of the campaign against divisionism and genocide denial by the Rwandan government, see Waldorf, 'Revisiting Hotel Rwanda'.
 19. This research was conducted in the context of a larger project on donor–government relations; given the centrality of the JGA in Rwandan development politics at the time, most of my interviews included a discussion of the JGA and several of them were solely about the JGA. Interviews lasted anywhere from 30 min to over three hours with the average being about an hour. Given the nature of the research, interviewees were selected largely through snowball sampling. For more on conducting research in the Rwandan environment, see Swedlund et al., 'Fieldwork in "Restrictive" States'.
 20. Interview with bilateral donor representative, Kigali, 6 November 2009; interview with civil servant, Kigali, November 2009; interview with multilateral donor representative, Kigali 6 November 2009.
 21. Interview with civil servant, Kigali, November 2009; interview with multilateral donor representative, Kigali 6 November 2009. JGA Steering Committee, 'JGA Review 2008/2009'.
 22. *Rwanda: Joint Governance Assessment Report*, 5. Interview with multilateral donor representative, Kigali, 13 November 2009.
 23. AfricaTimes, 'Head of the Rwanda Governance Council Discusses Rwanda's Joint Governance Assessment'. YouTube, 2009. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsKgTyCbCHE> [Accessed 22 August 2013].
 24. Ibid.
 25. One interviewee noted that while some reports were saying Rwanda is doing well and has a visionary government, other reports were criticising civil society involvement and freedom of media (interview with civil servant, Kigali, November 2009). According to another interviewee, 'business was getting complicated' because there were often two versions of the same story (interview with multilateral donor representative, Kigali, 16 November 2009).
 26. Interview with multilateral donor representative, Kigali, 13 November 2009; interview with civil servant, Kigali, November 2009.
 27. Interview with bilateral donor representative, Kigali, 4 November 2009.
 28. At the time, the Minister for Local Government was Protais Musoni and the World Bank Country Manager Victoria Kwakwa. For a list of members of the original steering committee, see JGA Steering Committee, 'JGA Review 2008/2009', 90.
 29. Williams et al., 'Carrying Out a Joint Governance Assessment'. For a description of tasks and responsibilities, see Box 2 on page 3.
 30. Interview with independent consultant, Kigali, 23 June 2010.
 31. One reportedly dropped out because of personal reasons, one because of cold feet (interview with bilateral donor representative, Kigali, 6 November 2009; interview with JGA consultant, Skype, 13 July 2010).
 32. Interview with JGA consultant, Skype, 13 July 2010. Interviewees were very careful to not say that the draft was rejected. However, it became quite clear that the first draft would not be accepted by the government as is.
 33. Interview with JGA consultant, Skype, 13 July 2010.
 34. A new history education curriculum was developed in 2008 and 2010 and new textbooks were introduced in 2010 and 2011. Russell, 'The Role of Education'.
 35. As Waldorf outlines, the meaning of the term genocide denial is relatively opaque. Many claim that this opaqueness allows the government to apply the charge indiscriminately. Waldorf, 'Revisiting Hotel Rwanda'.
 36. Interview with JGA consultant, Skype, 13 July 2010.
 37. One interviewee described this process as a 'slashing' of the document by the GoR. Interview with bilateral donor representative, Kigali, 23 October 2009.
 38. Rwandan Governance Advisory Council, 'Rwandan JGA Re-Invigorated'.
 39. Interview with bilateral donor representative, Kigali, 23 October 2009.
 40. While David Booth and his colleagues at ODI argue that Rwanda is best seen as a developmental patrimonial state, others have strongly criticised this characterisation, claiming that Rwanda is suffering from elite capture. Booth and Golooba-Mutebi, 'Developmental Patrimonialism'; Gökçür, 'Ruling Party-Owned Enterprises'.

41. It is recommended that a debate on party finance takes place and that political parties be required to publish their financial statements.
42. Williams et al., 'Carrying Out a Joint Governance Assessment', 6.
43. Ibid.
44. Hayman, 'Funding Fraud'.
45. Meyer et al., 'Conference Report', 15.
46. The document was originally written in English but has since been translated into Kinyarwanda.
47. Interview with multilateral donor representative, Kigali, 13 November 2009; interview with civil society representative, Kigali, 5 June 2010; interview with independent consultant, Kigali, 23 June 2010.
48. Interview with bilateral donor representative, Kigali, November 2009.
49. JGA Steering Committee, 'JGA Review 2008/2009'. The plan is now to have a report every three years.
50. Interview with multilateral donor representative, Kigali, 30 October 2009.
51. Interview with bilateral donor representative, Kigali, 4 November 2009.
52. Interview with multilateral donor representative, Kigali, 13 November 2009.
53. In 2011, the council was merged with what was at that time called the National Decentralization Implementation Secretariat. Together the two bodies became the Rwandan Governance Board.
54. Shyaka et al., *Rwanda Governance Scorecard 2011*.
55. Republic of Rwanda, *Law Establishing the Board*.
56. Meyer et al., 'Conference Report'. The board is now a public institution overseen by the Prime Minister's office. Republic of Rwanda, *Law Establishing the Board*.
57. Rwandan Governance Advisory Council, 'Worldwide Governance Indicators'.
58. Rwandan Governance Advisory Council, 'Preliminary Report on Presidential Elections'.
59. For example, in a 2009 article, Bert Ingelaere briefly summarises two cases where findings critical of the government were publically refuted by the Rwandan government and two cases where the Rwandan government allegedly interfered to prevent the release of data collected that was less than favourable of the government. Ingelaere, 'Life After Genocide', 46–50.
60. Republic of Rwanda, 'News Release'.
61. Innocent Niyonsenga, 'Human Rights Watch Manipulations Against the Government of Rwanda'. *The New Times*, 25 August 2010.
62. Interview with civil servant, Kigali, 29 October 2009; interview with civil servant, Kigali, 3 November 2009; interview with civil servant, Kigali, 6 November 2009.
63. Usengumukiza et al., *Rwanda's Performance*, 6.
64. Scores for each indicator are combined to produce scores in four broad categories—safety and rule of law; participation and human rights; sustainable economic opportunity; and human development—and an overall score. From these scores, a ranking of African countries is compiled.
65. Rwandan Governance Advisory Council, 'Mo Ibrahim Foundation Index'.
66. Ibid. The index measures whether government is a primary or secondary party to a conflict which has resulted in at least 25 or more battle deaths a year.
67. Ibid. In 2010, the index measured whether more than 25 deaths—targeted at civilians—occurred from the use of armed force by either the government or a formally organised group. This is no longer an indicator for the index.
68. Ibid.
69. JGA Steering Committee, 'JGA Review 2008/2009', Annex 6.
70. Edmund Kagire, 'Mo Ibrahim Index Misleading; Gov't'. *The New Times*, 13 October 2010; Paul N. Mamasseh, 'Flaws in the Mo Ibrahim Index of Governance'. *The New Times*, October 2010. Available at: http://www.new-times.co.rw/news/views/article_print.php?14057&a=21560&icon=Print; Edmund Kagire, 'Mo Ibrahim Index Full of Discrepancies—Official'. *The New Times*, 8 October 2010.
71. Ibid.
72. Musoni, 'Rwanda's Governance Progress', slide 8.
73. Ibid, slide 21. Response to the 2012 Mo Ibrahim Index was similar: Ivan R. Mugisha, 'Rwanda: Mo Ibrahim Index Challenged'. *The New Times*, 12 October 2012.

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