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EPrint URI: http://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/4879

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Paper 1: The relevance of Western Models of Innovation for the Rwanda Context

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Rwanda
A small land locked country in Central Africa

- Population 11 million
- Main trade coffee and tea
- Became independent from Belgium in 1962
- Language: Kinyarwanda
Recent History: Genocide 1994
That the education system contributed to divisions leading up to the 1994 genocide (Obura, 2003)
‘developmental patrimonialism’ (Booth & Golooba-Mutebu, 2012)
22 years on - 88.2% primary school enrolment - highest in Africa. Achieved gender parity (UNESCO, 2014)
A desire to become a knowledge economy (Ministry of Finance & Economic Planning MINECOFIN, 2009)

Rapid mass expansion in education has turned to focus on **education quality as a top priority** for the Rwandan Ministry of Education (MINEDUC)

Supporting Policies:
- Vision 2020
- Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP)
What is ‘Innovation in education’?

‘In education, innovation can contribute to improved results, help open up pupils minds’. Wong, 2012 p.2)

‘great educators are natural innovators because they routinely look for inspirational ways to engage and reach their students’ (Smith, Brand, & Kinash, 2013 p.67).

What is ‘A Hub for Innovation’ (HfI)?

Creating a culture where innovative ideas in education are recognised, fostered and rewarded

Where creativity in teaching and learning contributes to improving the quality of education

‘I believe innovations can really make a difference and bring positive change in Rwandan classrooms’

Former Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education, Rwanda

A consortium led by Bristol University (UK) working alongside MINEDUC. The activities were underpinned by the Wong Model of Innovation adopted by the development partner.
Wong Model of Innovation used to frame the Hub for Innovation project

Creating a MINEDUC Hub for Innovation

**LEADERSHIP**

- Provide committed & inspiring leadership
  - Minister as a ‘Champion’ of innovation
  - Inspiring innovation to deliver ESSP

**PLANNING FOR SCALE-UP**

- Planning for future scale-up of innovative solutions
  - Supporting MINEDUC to identify cost-effective, high quality solutions for scale-up

**INFORMATION**

- Innovation Evidence
  - Generating evidence of ‘What Works’ to inform MINEDUC programmes

**NETWORKING & COLLABORATION**

- Connecting people, places & ideas
  - Creating a platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration – MINEDUC website
  - Organising events & workshops – learning and dissemination
  - Showcasing best practice both nationally and internationally

**HUMAN & FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

- Resources
  - Supporting thinking on how MINEDUC could sustain innovation for education

**ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT & CULTURE**

- Create a culture of innovation
  - Providing training to support management of innovation
  - Supporting staff incentive initiatives
    - Innovation Awards
    - Staff Appraisal Design
Creating a Hub for Innovation

Activities intended to embed a culture of innovation. Based on the Wong Model these were adopted for the HfI project (Sept 2014 - Sept 2015)

1. **Masterclass** and training events for senior Ministry of Education officials so they can champion innovation

2. **5x Innovation Fairs** across Rwanda. To showcase innovative activities initiated by teachers and learners from the grass roots

3. A national **Award scheme** to reward the most innovative education activities in the country

4. **International Innovation Conference** to create hype and media interest around innovation in education in Rwanda
Data

- Diagnostic assessment of existing innovation culture within MINEDUC
- SWOC analysis with senior personnel across MINEDUC
- Interviews with 30 key personnel across MINEDUC and its agencies (REB, HEC, WDA)
Assumptions and Issues raised through the Hfi project

- An assumption of systems and structures which operate in the same way as in Western contexts
- An assumptions of risk management
- An assumption of a decentralised political system which would enable the ‘culture of innovation’ to flow through uninterrupted
- An assumption that Rwanda is trying to ‘catch-up’
- An assumption of the suitability of western diagnostic instruments
- The role of development partners
Assumptions about systems and structures

- Systems and structures
- Flows of communication
- ‘Political will’ does not translate into effective systems and structures

‘I have a new idea in my department and I want to ask about budgeting…. or resource experts. How can I go about it?’

Member of Rwandan Education Board

Wong Model - domains overlap, and interact

An assumption these exist in readiness to be either developed or exploited to embed a culture of innovation
Assumptions of risk management

- Innovations with the greatest potential gain are also often the ones which are most risky (Mulgan & Albury, 2003)

- All data sources identified risk as a major barrier to innovative activity. But, the diagnostic assessment was unable to identify risk management possibly because risk management is not embedded within the systems and structures.

- Link to centralised and bureaucratic nature of governance - a part of ‘developmental patrimonialism’

Innovation is risky
Innovation is disruptive
Innovation is rule-breaking

This issue of risk makes imitating innovations attractive, where risks have been tried and tested. This comes with a cost in itself: by dropping all the risk the actual benefit of innovation is also lost.

Samoff (2013)
Assumptions of an established decentralised political system

- Consistent reference to the top down and centralised nature
- Nevertheless, recognition that on-going moves to support decentralised decision-making could eventually assist - though this would take time
- A dis-connect between top and bottom levels

‘It’s always a challenge because the staff are under MINELOC... which is under another line ministry and yet is implementing the business of other ministries [MINEDUC]. So it’s always challenging.’

Senior MINEDUC personnel

‘The culture is difficult, it is something you build over time but we can say there is the understanding of the need for this and there are some successful examples that have shown that you can do things differently to achieve results. We cannot say that everyone is on board but we are on the way.’

District Education Officer
Assumptions of ‘catch-up’

- that developing economies are just ‘behind’ developed countries. Little consideration of what makes these economies different in nature (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012) not just scale.
- Different cultures, economies, range of languages, systems, structures and histories mean that they are not necessarily ‘behind’ but coming from an entirely different starting point.
- Comparing is therefore not appropriate.

'reverse innovation'
Govindarajan & Trimble (2013)

Innovations do not always begin in Western contexts.

Challenging and often resource-starved contexts mean innovations which respond to the needs of that context, often produced at a reasonable cost which is then modified and ‘up-scaled’ to larger or Western markets.

Cultural effects of colonialism (Spivak, 2003)
The suitability of Western devised instruments

- WAVE instrument never used before in developing country contexts
- Assumed knowledge of systems, structures, terminology
- As a result it produced results that were insufficient in picking up intricacies of the actual culture of innovation – except perhaps ‘political will’
The role of development partners

- Development partners are rarely ‘silent partners’
- Often projects are introduced and delivered by development partners (Samoff, 2013)

In practice, Hfl remained on the peripheries of the main commitment of personnel for a range of reasons including time.

Example:
Key documents intended for MINEDUC notably had no direct input from them

Presentation of documents framed within the Wong model of innovation rather than the issues raised or addressed.

‘Innovation requires time [...]. With the kind of responsibility structures we have it is very demanding if you work 7am – 8pm, I don’t see how you are going to do a lot of innovation.’

Member of REB
A central role for systems and structures

Risk Management

A temporary 'innovation unit' to manage risks could be helpful in removing the 'fear of failure' and facilitate innovation.

Flow of communication

Developing appropriate, relevant and consistent systems for communicating could play a crucial role across all systems and structures.

Systems and structures

Developing systems and structures to facilitate and connect the existing appetite for innovation at a range of levels.

A disconnect between centralised and local systems

Facilitating systems and structures so that there are opportunities to meet and collaborate.

'Space' for innovation
Conclusions

- Legacy of successful innovations in education sector
- A desire to be self-driven rather than by external agencies (Hayman 2007)
- Development partners as ‘silent partners’?

‘Textbook distribution: I am proud of that – there is a new decentralised textbook distribution scheme – suppliers are contracted at a national level and the supplier is paid only when the books are in schools. It is innovative and led to good results.’

Rwandans were recently found to be the happiest people in Africa (Gallup Positive Experience Index, 2015)

Member of Rwanda Education Board
References


