

# Umuganda and Communal Governance

*Assessing Social Cohesion and Public Goods Provision in Kigali's Nyarugenge District (2000–2026)*

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## ABSTRACT

The Umuganda programme, a state-mandated community work practice, is a central pillar of post-genocide reconstruction and developmental governance in Rwanda. While credited with visible infrastructure improvements, its deeper sociological impacts on social cohesion and the sustainability of public goods provision require systematic, district-level analysis. This study assesses the perceived impact of Umuganda on social cohesion and the maintenance of public goods within an urban administrative unit. It examines participant motivations, evaluates the programme's role in fostering collective action, and identifies challenges to its long-term efficacy. A stratified random sample survey ( $n = 412$ ) was administered to adult residents across Nyarugenge District's sectors. The instrument combined Likert-scale questions on perceptions of cohesion and public goods with open-ended items on participation drivers. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics; qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. A strong majority (78%) reported that Umuganda strengthened neighbourhood ties and trust. However, a significant minority (34%) viewed participation as primarily obligation-driven, correlating with lower satisfaction regarding the upkeep of created assets. Thematic analysis revealed a tension between communitarian ideals and perceptions of state oversight. The programme is a potent tool for visible public goods provision and fosters a baseline level of social interaction. Its effectiveness in building organic, sustainable social capital is moderated by perceptions of compulsion and the centralised management of community outcomes. Policymakers should integrate more community-led planning phases into the Umuganda cycle to enhance local ownership. Further research should employ longitudinal designs to trace cohesion and asset sustainability over time. community work, social capital, governance, public goods, Rwanda, urban development This study provides novel empirical evidence from a dense urban district, challenging assumptions of uniformly positive social outcomes and highlighting the complex interplay between mandated participation and genuine cohesion.

**Keywords:** *Umuganda, social cohesion, public goods provision, developmental governance, Kigali, Rwanda, community participation*

### Article Highlights

- Survey of 412 residents in Kigali's Nyarugenge District assesses Umuganda's social impact.
- Strong majority link programme to improved neighbourhood trust and visible infrastructure.
- Significant minority correlate compulsory participation with lower asset upkeep satisfaction.
- Analysis suggests integrating community-led planning to enhance organic social capital.

### Policy Implication

The study recommends incorporating more community-led planning phases into the Umuganda cycle to improve local ownership and long-term sustainability of public goods.

*This analysis provides district-level empirical evidence on the complex sociology of mandated community work.*



## ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

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