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POST GRADUATE FORUM

Variables Influencing the Efficiency and Effectiveness of District Communication in Rwanda

Critical Considerations for Accountability

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ABSTRACT

Within the context of decentralisation, the implementation of the values and principles promoted by the Government of Rwanda (GoR) require effective and efficient communication practices by local governments, their key partners including citizens, central government entities, development partners, as well as the media. The GoR adopted the National Decentralisation Policy in 2000, which establishes districts as the highest level of local government, while provinces are at central government level. Hence, districts are expected to play a key role in facilitating the GoR's decentralisation policy (Ministry of Local Government National Decentralisation Policy Revised 2012:8).

As such, a framework needs to be established to ensure that information is gathered, processed, disseminated and feedback is collected at district level. Communication is a complex, multi-facetted concept that is difficult to capture in one article. This article focuses on the variables that affect the efficiency and effectiveness of districts' communication, while specifically focusing on how this influences accountability. It highlights the role communication and communication practices play in promoting good and accountable governance in Rwanda's districts. To provide a framework for assessing the available capacity for communication practices, the article also focuses on the regulatory environment and potential and challenges of promoting good and accountable local governance in Rwanda.

INTRODUCTION

The first pillar of Rwanda's Vision 2020 titled *Good governance and a capable state*, highlights that the state is responsible for ensuring good governance (in Serubanza 2016:158). This includes accountability, transparency and efficiency in deploying scarce resources (Serubanza 2016:158). According to Vision 2020, the state should also respect democratic structures and processes, adhere to the rule of law and protect human rights. Grassroots-level participation will continue to be promoted through the decentralisation process. Through their involvement in the decision-making process, local communities are able to address the issues that affect them (Government of Rwanda 2012:10).

The functioning of the public service in society is influenced by demographics of the citizens they serve, the ideology of the ruling party, the nature of public policy, and the accepted conventions attached to good and accountable governance.

Much has been written about the characteristics of *efficient* government, but the characteristics of *good and accountable* governance, defined in societal terms, remain elusive (Auriacombe 2016:52). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1997 (in Auriacombe 2016:53) developed the following characteristics associated with good governance:

- *Participation* – All men and women should have a voice in decision-making, either directly or through legitimate intermediate institutions that represent their interests. Such broad participation is built on freedom of association and speech, as well as capacities to participate constructively.
- *Rule of law* – Legal frameworks should be fair and enforced impartially, particularly the laws on human rights.
- *Transparency* – Transparency is built on the free flow of information. Processes, institutions and information are directly accessible to those concerned with them, and enough information is provided to understand and monitor them.
- *Responsiveness* – Institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders.
- *Consensus orientation* – Good governance mediates differing interests to reach a broad consensus on what is in the best interests of the group and, where possible, on policies and procedures.
- *Equity* – All men and women have opportunities to improve or maintain their well-being.
- *Effectiveness and efficiency* – Processes and institutions produce results that meet needs while making the best use of resources.
- *Accountability* – Decision-makers in government, the private sector and civil society organisations are accountable to the public, as well as to institutional stakeholders. This accountability differs depending on the organisation and whether the decision is internal or external to an organisation.

- *Strategic vision* – Leaders and the public have a broad and long-term perspective on good governance and human development, along with a sense of what is needed for such development. There is also an understanding of the historical, cultural and social complexities in which that perspective is grounded.

According to Serubanza (2016:156) "Decentralisation is considered as one of the most effective ways to ensure good local governance...This is despite the fact that the process has been unsuccessful in a number of countries". Globally, many countries have embraced decentralisation, hence, Manor (1999:1) adds that "the pace of implementing the required reforms has not led to the expected increased efficiency, effective community participation and private sector contribution". Serubanza (2016:156) also states that, "Although the decentralisation process involves a variety of stakeholders, local authorities are key actors and beneficiaries to a certain extent...[and] often operate within a complex, fragmented broader governmental framework...As such, they need to create a well-coordinated, inclusive channel to express their views".

The article adopted a desktop analysis of literature and official documents to conceptualise and contextualise the area of investigation. Conceptualisation entails "the process of specifying the vague and mental imagery of our concepts (and) sorting out the kinds of observations and measurements that will be appropriate for our research" (Babbie and Mouton in Auriacombe 2006:632). "At this level, the focus is shifted from a conceptual paradigm to earmarking different variables and indicators" (Auriacombe 2006:632). Auriacombe (2006:632) states that, "A variable refers to descriptive or analytical attributes that can take on various values under different conditions. In turn, an indicator provides a concrete, measurable, indirect value to an otherwise immeasurable concept" (Auriacombe 2006:632).

The following questions are posed for the purposes of this article: What regulatory frameworks exist for government communication? What human and material capacities do districts have to facilitate efficient and effective communication? What are the current practices in districts in terms of communication (target audiences, channels, tools)? Who are the partners that influence effective and efficient communication in the districts? How does efficient and effective communication impact accountability? What challenges affect effective and efficient communication and accountability within the districts? Do districts have communication strategies in place? Do district leaders and staff understand the importance of communication in accountability? Do they have basic skills in communication? What role do district partners play in providing a conducive environment for effective/efficient communication?

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND OF RWANDA'S DISTRICTS

Rwanda's "transitional government carried out extensive consultations with citizens, all categories of development stakeholders including society opinion leaders and experts after the genocide against the Tutsis in 1994...The aim was to understand the reasons for the genocide against the Tutsis, as well as how this page could be turned permanently...Poor governance was identified as one of the root causes... and it was decided that decentralisation would be the best way to instil good governance, as it would give Rwandans full control of their destiny" (Serubanza 2016:157).

This resulted in the country's National Decentralisation Policy, which was formulated in May 2000. The aim was to make the districts and City of Kigali autonomous local governments with their own set of functions and to delegate as many functions as possible to the lowest administrative entities (Serubanza 2016:157). This was entrenched in the Rwandan Constitution under Article 167 in 2003 (Government of Rwanda 2003:167).

Districts within the decentralisation context

The GoR adopted the Decentralisation Policy in 2000 to establish districts as the highest level of local government, while provinces are at central government level. As such, districts are expected to play a key role in facilitating the GoR's decentralisation policy (Ministry of Local Government National Decentralisation Policy Revised 2012:8). This includes to:

* enhance and sustain citizens' participation;
* promote and entrench a culture of accountability and transparency; and
* enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the planning, monitoring, and delivery of services.

The initial document on the decentralisation policy highlighted the importance of defining the responsibilities and functions of every level of government in the decentralisation. Furthermore, the document stressed the importance of following a phased approach to implement the decentralisation policy. As such, districts will be expected to be fully equipped to achieve the policy's objectives during the third phase of implementation, from 2010 to 2015. Below are the phases of implementation of the decentralisation policy, as described in the initial document (Ministry of Local Government National Decentralisation Policy Revised 2012:9).

* **Phase one:** A deconcentration at the *Intara* (province) level and devolution at the *Akarere* (district) level.

- **Phase two:** The capacity at the *Akarere* will have been improved so that certain functions and responsibilities at the *Intara* level can be decentralised to the *Akarere* level. In turn, corresponding resources and some administrative functions at the *Akarere* level will be deconcentrated to *Umurenge* (sector) level.
- **Phase three:** The capacities at the *Akarere* and *Umurenge* levels should be sufficient to take on all responsibilities and functions of the *Intara* level. The *Intara* tier will then be removed, so that there are fewer administrative layers between central government and the aforementioned levels.

After all three phases of the decentralisation policy were completed; it was decided not to remove the *Intara* (province) level. In terms of capacity, extensive efforts have been made to capacitate the districts in terms of human and material resources to achieve the GoR's objectives of adopting a decentralised governance approach.

Districts as administrative entities

Rwanda's administrative structure is divided into six layers, namely the country, provinces, districts, sectors, cells and villages. The country is divided into five provinces, namely the Northern Province, Western Province, Eastern Province, Southern Province and the City of Kigali; and into 30 districts.

Figure 1 provides an administrative map of Rwanda, while Table 1 gives a break-down of provinces and districts in Rwanda.

Table 1: A breakdown of provinces and districts in Rwanda

	Eastern Province		Northern Province		Western Province		Southern Province		City of Kigali
1	Nyagatare	1	Burera	1	Rubavu	1	Muhanga	1	Nyarugenge
2	Gatsibo	2	Musanze	2	Nyabihu	2	Kamonyi	2	Gasabo
3	Kayonza	3	Gicumbi	3	Rutsiro	3	Ruhango	3	Kicukiro
4	Rwamagana	4	Gakenke	4	Ngororero	4	Nyanza		
5	Bugesera	5	Rulindo	5	Karongi	5	Huye		
6	Ngoma			6	Nyamasheke	6	Gisagara		
7	Kirehe			7	Rusizi	7	Nyaruguru		
						8	Nyamagae		

Source: (http://rwandadiasporagermany.com)

Figure 1: Administrative map of Rwanda

Source: (http://rwandadiasporagermany.com)
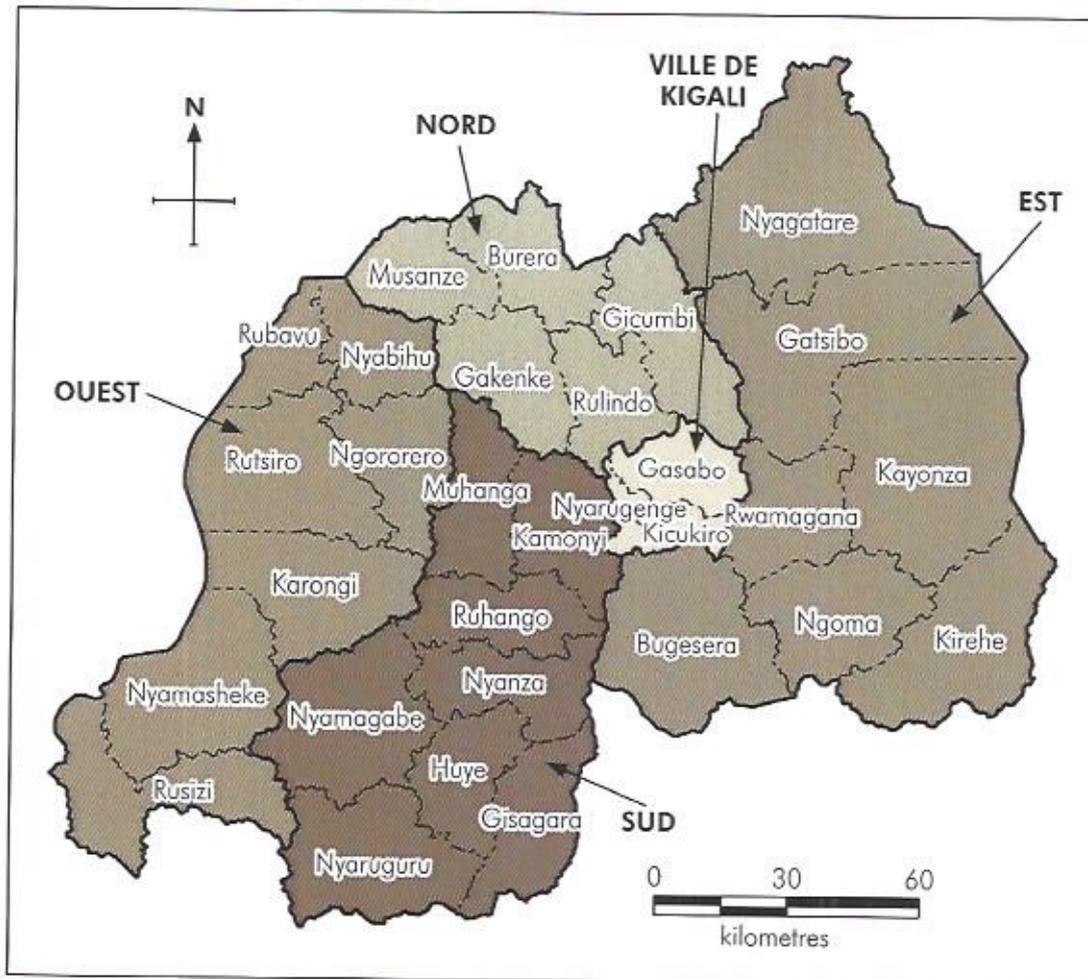
ACCOUNTABILITY, EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Countries on the African continent in general are confronted with complex challenges such as chronic poverty, low levels of literacy, disease (e.g. Malaria, Yellow Fever and HIV/AIDS), inequality, and issues associated with climate change. Governments have both a moral and legal obligation to address these challenges in the most effective and democratic way. This means that resources should be optimally utilised to address the needs of society and that society should have a voice in the way their needs and resource allocations are prioritised. The democratisation of service delivery implies the "rules" that govern the interaction between government delivery agencies and the community as customers. These "rules" include aspects such as accountability, responsiveness, openness, transparency, and responsibility (Auriacombe 2016:59).

Government officials are accountable to society in general for their actions and inactions. On a national sphere, accountability is mainly facilitated by

means of oversight by elected political representatives in parliament. At the local government sphere, districts should consult and involve communities in decisions about service delivery needs and priorities.

According to the *Business Dictionary*, accountability means: "The obligation of an individual or organisation to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them, and to disclose the results in a transparent manner" (**http://www. businessdictionary.com/definition/accountability.html**).

According to Strong (1966 in Thornhill 2014) accountability is perhaps as old as organised government. Strong added that, "Government is an authoritarian mystery...There is a historical connection between administrative secrecy and the hierarchical state" (1966 in Thornhill 2014). Hence, this "complicates the function of accountability as the reliability of information is often difficult to ascertain...Should the question of accountability be investigated it has to be considered that the function is actually an ingrained component of government and of the public sector" (Thornhill 2014).

Within the Rwandan context, as described in the *Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy II* document, public accountability means ensuring that citizens and communities and stakeholders, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and donors; monitor and track government actions and question their impact on development (Government of Rwanda, Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy II, 2013–2018 2013:76). Being part of public institutions, districts have to abide by the principle.

According to Cloete (1998:110–111), the efficiency of any public institution should be seen in terms of effectiveness, frugality and economy. Briefly stated; "efficiency is the extent to which inputs are used optimally to produce outputs" (Visser and Erasmus 2002:368). The above definition implies that efficiency is about the achievement of an objective or goal where the inputs justify the benefits of what is received. One could thus argue that efficiency means to perform functions in the right way.

Effectiveness refers to the "extent to which inputs accomplish outcomes, or the achievement of maximum outcomes by selecting optimal mixes of inputs" (Visser and Erasmus 2002 in Auriacombe 2016:37), therefore, performing the right functions. When priorities are determined, according to Cloete (1998:110), "the extent of need satisfaction should be in line with the original programme of action".

CONCEPTUALISING COMMUNICATION

The *Business Dictionary* defines communication as a "Two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange (encode-

Figure 2: The communication process
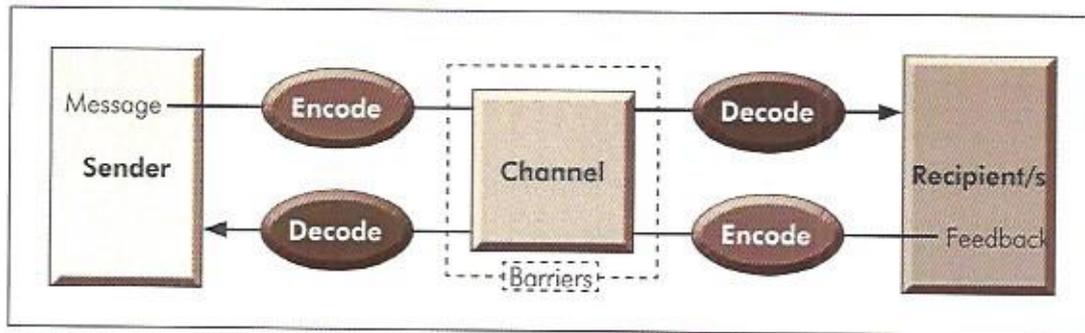
decode) information, news, ideas and feelings but also create and share meaning" (http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/communication.html).

Figure 2 provides a better understanding of the process and adds the missing components of successful communication.

Figure 2 highlights that communication takes place when a person/institution (sender) sends a message to one or many persons or institutions called receivers or recipients. Successful communication also entails the receiver giving feedback to the sender showing that the message was understood.

Effective communication

Effective communication implies that "the transmitted content is received and understood by someone in the way it was intended" (http://www.livestrong.com/article/69309-effective-communication).

Certain key factors characterise effective communication (http://www.live strong.com/article/69309-effective-communication). Encoding, or the ability to relay a message clearly and directly, enables the receiver to decode the message correctly. When decoding the message, the receivers should make an effort to ensure that they understand the message being sent. In terms of the context, the recipient's age, religion, sex and intellectual abilities, among others, are taken into consideration. Feedback is an effective tool to ensure that the sender and receiver understand the message. The key to encoding a message properly is to know your audience, while the receiver should pay attention to decode a message correctly (http://www.livestrong.com/article/69309-effective-communication).

For effective communication to take place, the message sender should consider the context of the targeted receiver, while selecting the most effective channel and language to transmit the message. For example, using a district's Twitter handle to send an announcement in English calling for manpower for a road construction project will not generate appropriate feedback. Most of the

target audience do not have access to Twitter, nor do they understand English. A radio announcement in the context of Rwanda, in the Kinyarwanda language, would be more appropriate. In addition, one might have to avoid using the Kinyarwanda names of months while announcing the application deadlines for the job opportunity, as a large section of the target audience, such as young men and women who grew up in cities or as refugees, might not understand.

Although the message may be clear and sent through the right channel, it might not be deemed effective communication if the receiver does not pay attention. This could lead to the receiver not decoding the message correctly, and, as such, there will be no feedback.

Efficient communication

While effective communication aims to ensure that the receiver understands the message exactly as the sender had intended; efficient communication focuses on ensuring the receiver heard the message and acts timely.

Effective versus efficient communication

Effective communication means you deliver a message and the receiver understands it exactly as you intended. Perfect communication is rare, as various filters can hamper the effective delivery or receipt of the message. Communication efficiency means that you deliver your message timely in a way that allows the receiver to hear, interpret and make use of it as the sender had intended.

Objectives of effective and efficient communication

Effective and efficient communication has subtle, but distinct, differences. Effective communication's primary goal is to ensure that the receiver or audience clearly understands and interprets the intent of the message – even if it takes time. For example, as a manager, it is critical that employees understand directions. On the other hand, the objective of an efficient message is that an urgent message gets disseminated to the receiver, even at the risk of less-effective communication.

Link of communication through information technology

To link the right to information and access to information with information technology provides an interesting and important paradigm for citizen participation. Some members of the public may claim that they are not being consulted by a local authority on matters that affect them directly, while on the

other hand a local authority could claim it is not possible and also expensive to consult with every member of the community. The point is that modern technology offers easy and convenient communication tools that can be used to reach many people in a few seconds or simultaneously. Perfect examples are the Internet, emails, radio and television. Therefore, questions arise on how well informed citizens are in this information age and how much more informed are these citizens today than they were 10 years ago, if at all?

Waggon (1998 in Auriacombe 2016:57) argued that the flow of information and communication should provide people with access to government processes. That is, it provides the dynamic ingredients within the political and administrative systems that help citizens to understand its essential relationships, whether between government and citizens; between an executive branch and legislature; or between bureaucracy and politicians. The bottom line is that information in this instance is the lifeblood of good governance. The digitalisation of telecommunication, together with the advent of user-friendly desktop computing, has enabled important innovations to occur in both computing architecture and information systems. These technical innovations are the source of so much "impact" which is claimed for modern information technology. These innovations, in particular, are creating new, and still expanding, capabilities for computers to communicate with other computers and connecting far removed businesses, governments and individuals to communicate with each other instantaneously and independently of geographical distance (Taylor and Bellamy 1998 in Auriacombe 2016:80).

Most information age scenarios assume that ICT systems will be used to support an ever increasing range of electronic transactions between businesses, governments and their customers. It is also important that the information age is being shaped as much by the economic, social and political arrangements from which it has emerged, as it is by the technological innovations on which so much emphasis is placed.

Electronic citizenship and democracy is an important innovation that is occurring in the era of electronic democracy (Taylor and Bellamy 1998 in Auriacombe 2016:82). However, this innovation is designed to strengthen the democratic process, e.g. applications such as electronic public meetings and policy forums, emailing elected representatives and officials, and virtual community groups. In such ways ICTs are involved in innovations designed to recast the relationships between citizens, community groups, politicians and government officials. The new information and communication capabilities with ICTs are also the source of enhanced capabilities to manage democratic processes, by permitting the deployment of refined market research techniques (Taylor and Bellamy 1998:149).

Frissen (1992 in Auriacombe 2016:84) believes that the conjunction of new capabilities and innovation in the workplace is permitting the technologies to

become, at one and the same time, agents of employee empowerment and agents of control and of oppression. By the same token, if these scenarios are translated to the wider society, then there is a basis for more or less subtle forms of monitoring and control of citizens on the one hand, and for their liberation and enrichment on the other. It is for this reason that ICTs have been characterised as being inherently ambiguous technologies. However, ICTs offer fundamental choices to the institutions, a workplace for employees and a means of making decisions more *open* and engendering a stronger sense of ownership, engagement and accountability.

STATUTORY, REGULATORY AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

As highlighted in the foreword of the revised National Decentralisation Policy document of 2012, "Rwanda adopted the Decentralisation Policy in May 2000, [which was] formulated after a series of dialogue sessions with citizens and consultations with experts on how Rwandans could turn their page permanently for the better in terms of good governance and wellbeing in which Rwandans themselves would be in-charge of their destiny" (Ministry of Local Government National Decentralisation Policy Revised 2012:6).

The specific objectives of the revised decentralisation policy make it clear that the GoR seeks to "... enhance and sustain citizens' participation, ...to promote and entrench a culture of accountability and transparency..., and to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the planning, monitoring, and delivery of services" (Ministry of Local Government, National Decentralisation Policy Revised 2012:8).

As noted before, within the context of decentralisation, the implementation of the mentioned values and principles promoted by the GoR requires effective and efficient communication practices by local governments, their key partners including citizens, central government entities, development partners, as well as the media. This implies that frameworks need to be established to ensure that information is gathered, processed (encoding the information into a clear message), disseminated and feedback is collected at district level.

The following section aims to highlight the existing regulatory framework to facilitate the implementation of the above-mentioned principles, as well as to implement the necessary infrastructure and tools for efficient and effective communication.

Government communication

The Prime Minister's Order No 78/03 of 12/08/2011 (that was published in the Official Gazette No 36 of 05/09/2011:33) (Prime Minister's Office 2011)

established the Office of the Government Spokesperson in 2011 and determined its responsibilities, organisation and functioning.

The Office of the Government Spokesperson was established with "... a general mission of an efficient and proactive government communication system in order to disseminate a success story and promote the good image of Rwanda" (Prime Minister's Office 2011).

The office was given the following responsibilities:

"1. Developing and disseminating the government communication strategies through:
   a. elaborating policies, strategies, plans and programmes to improve the quality of government com-munication; and
   b. developing efficient communication channels and tools;
2. Coordinating communication programmes within government institutions.
3. Monitoring the implementation of government communication policies, strategies and programmes through:
   a. evaluating the impact of information on national development and on promotion of the image of Rwanda;
   b. monitoring and evaluating the communication plans and programmes in government institutions; and
   c. reporting periodically to the government on the achievements of the office".

Media regulation

Law No 02/2013 of 08/02/2013 (Prime Minister's Office 2013) establishes the rules for information gathering, processing and publication by media practitioners. In the decentralisation context where districts are the key implementers of government programmes, they are crucial sources of information for the media to responsibility provide accurate information to the public, but also as key partners in holding leaders accountable on behalf of the citizens and other partners (Prime Minister's Office 2013).

Access to information

As stipulated in article one of Law No 04/2013 of 08/02/2013, (Prime Minister's Office 2013a) its purpose is to "...enable the public and journalists to access information possessed by public organs and some private bodies. This Law shall also establish modalities and procedures to promote the publication and dissemination of information".

This Law has additional value to media law, as it binds information holders to make information in their possession available to both the public and the media upon request. The promulgation of the Law came as a big step in the process of promoting citizen participation in government programmes. Furthermore, it promotes accountability and transparency by civil servants as key aspects of good governance in Rwanda.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

In 'Tracing Major Developments in Rwanda's ICT Sector' (**http://www.myict.gov. rw/ict/documentation/tracing-major-developments-in-rwandas-ict-sector/**) the Rwandan Ministry of Youth highlights key milestones in the ICT sector's development since 1998. These include establishing strategies and policies to regulate ICT in Rwanda, such as the Rwandan ICT for Development (ICT4D) policy, commonly known as the National Information and Communication Infrastructure Plan (NICI) (Ministry of Youth and ICT 2011). Milestones also include establishing a regulatory framework for telecommunications by enacting the Telecom Law No 44/2001 of 30/11/2001 as well as Law No 39/2001 of 3/09/2001 (Ministry of Youth and ICT 2011) establishing the Rwanda Utilities and Regulatory Agency (RURA). Other milestones regulate ICT equipment, as well as capacity-building within various categories of Rwanda's ICT.

The aforementioned examples aim to promote efficient and effective communication at district level, as it creates a framework for speedy information gathering, processing and dissemination, as well as an avenue to receive feedback from citizens. All districts have high-speed, secured Internet connections through the National Backbone fibre-optic cable system. Furthermore, the districts have access to communication equipment such as smartphones, computers, modems, tablets, and servers. This has increased districts' capacity to gather, process, and disseminate information efficiently. Moreover, it enables almost-instant feedback through short message systems (SMSs), emails, mailing lists, online forums and even video calls.

Protecting whistle-blowers

Information on service delivery and transparency is a delicate subject. In line with this, Law No 35/2012 of 19/09/ 2012 promulgated to "protect, in public interest, whistle-blowers who denounce illegal acts and behaviors in public, private institutions and elsewhere" was yet another major contribution to the achievement by the GoR of the established principle for good governance (Prime Minister's Office 2012).

DISTRICT CAPACITY FOR EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION

Decentralisation provides a challenging context for districts to facilitate efficient and effective communication. Within the decentralisation context, districts are mandated to implement almost all government programmes. Subsequently, an ever-increasing number of services are being decentralised to local government entities. This has led to an increased workload of citizens demanding a range of services on a daily basis. Furthermore, the GoR pushes for rapid development in all sectors, as well as high-quality, timely service delivery. This also requires more responsibility in terms of accountability and transparency in activity planning, implementation and monitoring; among partners such as citizens, central government institutions (provinces, line ministries, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Public Account Committee in the Parliament, and the Office of the Auditor General, development partners, as well as the media.

In addition to the heavy workload and responsibility for accountability and quality service delivery, citizens are increasingly aware of their right to participate in planning and holding public servants accountable. This is thanks to regular awareness campaigns mainly during month-end community work, known as *Umuganda*. Furthermore, Uganda's citizens are increasingly making use of numerous ICT tools to exercise their rights. In fact, an ever-increasing number of citizens are asking questions or contributing ideas through various media platforms.

Rwanda's media landscape has changed considerably since the turn of the millennium. In 2003, Radio Rwanda and Rwanda Television were the only broadcasters in the country, while the local online media was almost non-existent. Currently, 33 radio stations, 11 television stations, and 54 local online media organisations, are officially registered with the Rwanda Media Commission (RMC), a self-regulatory body in charge of accrediting media outlets. These media outlets give citizens various platforms to participate in government programmes and to hold leaders accountable. As a result, many people make calls and send SMSs during radio and TV talk shows, comments are posted in reaction to online news articles, as well as comments on online media platforms. This new media environment requires districts to facilitate effective and efficient communication to face the growing demand for citizen participation in planning processes, speedy quality service delivery, as well as transparency and accountability.

Human and material resources

There are certain requirements to ensure efficient and effective communication. In the districts effective and efficient communication would require capacity to collect

information on the process of participatory planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting on the numerous activities; at village, cell and district levels.

Importantly, clear, appropriate information should be packaged so that the target audience can easily understand the message. To ensure that the messages are appropriate, it is important to identify key target audiences within the districts. In addition, there should be a focus on identifying suitable communication channels to reach the target audience. To ensure that the target audience understands the information, feedback should be monitored and analysed. If the message did not fulfill its purpose, it should be reformatted and resent.

The model of organisational structures of urban and rural districts and rural and urban sectors and cells, has employed Public Relations, Media and Communication Officers (PRMCOs) in districts (Ministry of Public Service and Labour 2015:18). In addition, Article 8 of the Access to Information Law requires all public organs and their branches to appoint or designate an information officer to enable them to provide information to persons requesting it in accordance with the Law (Prime Minister's Office 2013a).

The GoR adopted ICT as an effective way to boost public servants' performance, as well as to develop the country in general. As a result, district officials and staff have access to computers with high-speed fibre-optic Internet, mobile phones (including smartphones and iPads for senior staff), provided by districts as service equipment or acquired privately. In terms of information-sharing equipment or as a feedback mechanism, districts have the resources to communicate effectively and efficiently, whether it is internally among staff or externally while engaging with partners. The available tools offer quick, cost-effective solutions, such as emails, SMSs, video conferencing, websites and social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Notably, the information needs to be collected and processed before it is published or disseminated. As such information gathering and processing equipment, such as photo and video cameras, voice recorders and appropriate image and sound editing software are needed. In addition to the equipment, the information-gathering and publishing process requires a budget for transport, communication and publishing information in privately owned media outlets, as well as other material such as brochures and newsletters.

According to the PRMCOs, most of the districts have bought cameras, so that they can take photographs. In addition, PRMCOs can also ask their colleagues with smartphones to take photographs for websites and social media when they are unable to attend events. The biggest challenge is the lack of video cameras, voice recorders and professional sound and image editing computers. While audio and videos would contribute to the communication process, districts have to resort to SMSs and photographs.

Current practices and challenges

There are noticeable improvements, but a lot still needs to be achieved. Considering the situation that prevailed before the appointment of PRMCOs and information officers, no one was specifically in charge of communication at district level. The introduction of PRMCOs and information officers has improved the efforts for effective and efficient communication and service delivery. However, the communication needs at district level are far beyond the current institutional capacity. In addition, it is clear that most district staff members have limited communication skills and they are of the opinion that district-level communication is the sole responsibility of the PRMCO and information officer.

As the information officer is mainly concerned with journalists' information requests, the PRMCO is almost solely responsible for district-level communication, from gathering and publishing information, to monitoring feedback. Notably, communicating district-level activities include those at village, cell and sector level, and as the title of the position indicates, the PRMCOs manage public relations, media relations and communication in general. This could lead to a limited capacity to collect, process, and disseminate information in an effective and efficient fashion.

The following section focuses on factors that can improve district communication effectiveness and efficiency.

AVENUES TO IMPROVE DISTRICT COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

To ensure effective and efficient communication practices within the decentralisation context: the districts need the following:

- Adequate staff with efficient communication skills, experience and team spirit to be able to conduct the above-mentioned duties successfully. Ideally, all district staff members should have basic communication skills to identify newsworthy information and share them with the communication team. To ensure efficiency, at least one staff member per department or unit should spearhead communication.
- Sufficient resources (equipment, budget) to gather, process and disseminate quality information. Considering the fact that most activities take place concurrently and sometimes in remote areas, it would be helpful to equip each unit with basic information-gathering tools, such as an affordable digital camera and voice recorder to ensure they can at least contribute to the information-gathering process when attending events.
- Importantly, communication requires strategic planning. A communication strategy plays a key role in communication practices within any institution. A

communication strategy allows role-players to set communication objectives for the institution; identify the institution's target audiences; identify key messages for various audiences; earmark the best communication channels suited to the target audience; and identify the resources needed to achieve the communication objectives and planned activities within the set timeline.

- Although most districts have annual planning, most do not have communication strategies. Some even communicate in an *ad hoc* manner without any sound plan for communication activities. The lack of proper strategic planning for communication activities affects efficiency and effectiveness of district communication.

PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY IN DISTRICTS THROUGH COMMUNICATION

As highlighted in the foreword of the revised National Decentralisation Policy of 2012 document, "Rwanda adopted the Decentralisation Policy in May 2000, formulated after a series of dialogue sessions with citizens and consultations with experts on how Rwandans could turn their page permanently for the better in terms of good governance and wellbeing in which Rwandans themselves would be in-charge of their destiny" (Ministry of Local Government, National Decentralisation Policy Revised 2012:6).

The specific objectives of the revised decentralisation policy make it clear that the GoR seeks to "enhance and sustain citizens' participation, ...to promote and entrench a culture of accountability and transparency..., and to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the planning, monitoring, and delivery of services" (Ministry of Local Government, National Decentralisation Policy 2012:8). Within the decentralisation process, the implementation of the values and principles promoted by the GoR require effective and efficient communication practices by local governments. Undeniably, key partners, such as citizens, central government entities, development partners and the media should all play a part in ensuring effective and efficient communication.

Despite districts' numerous achievements, as reflected by the results of performance contracts evaluations, various partners, including the citizens and the media, still perceive them as inefficient. For example, for the past two years, districts' average overall performance was 73.5% for the 2013–2014 financial year and 74.3% for the 2014–2015 financial year (Institute of Policy Analysis and Research Imihigo Evaluation FY 2014/2015: iii). At the beginning of every financial year, district mayors sign a performance contract with the President of the Republic against which they are evaluated at the end of the year.

Local governments make continuous efforts to be accountable through government accountability organs such as the Office of the Auditor General,

the Office of the Ombudsman and parliament's Public Account Commission. This was reflected by the 62% satisfaction level for the sub-indicator on the level of satisfaction in efficiency of accountability organs in local governance, as reported by the Rwanda Governance Scorecard (Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) Rwanda Governance Scorecard 2014:57). However, citizens' perceptions in the media mainly focus on local governments' poor performance at district and village levels. Subsequently, the accountability level of local governments still needs to be improved to bolster citizens' confidence.

The above situation is difficult to understand considering the GoR's commitment and willingness to build an efficient and proactive government communication system in order to disseminate success stories and promote the good image of Rwanda.

CONCLUSION

The article investigated certain key factors that define efficient and effective communication and how it relates to district level. Undeniably, decentralisation provides a challenging context for districts to facilitate efficient and effective communication.

Despite this, districts have made strides to promote efficient and effective communication. All districts have high-speed Internet connections and have access to communication equipment, such as smartphones, computers, modems, tablets, and servers. Undeniably, this has increased districts' capacity to gather, process, and disseminate information efficiently.

There are noticeable improvements in communication at district level, but a lot still needs to be achieved. As such, adequate staff with efficient communication skills should be employed at district level. In addition, sufficient resources (equipment, budget) should be made available to gather, process, and disseminate quality information to communities at district level.

NOTE

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