

Power to the People?

Assessing the level and quality of citizen participation in policy and decision making in Rwanda

What is the Problem?

Studies indicate very low levels of citizen participation in policy and decision-making in Rwanda. According to research conducted by the World Bank, Rwanda is ranked in the higher percentiles in measures of control of corruption, the rule of law regulatory quality, government effectiveness, and political stability. However, Rwanda performs very poorly on the indicator of “voice and accountability” (The World Bank 2010). Similar Studies carried out by the Institute of the Research on Peace and Dialogue (IRDP), as well as the Rwanda Joint Governance Assessment Report (2008) indicate similar findings, all recommending the need for increased citizen participation.

What is the Background to the Research?

A key strategic objective of the Decentralization Policy (2000) is to create a pro-active citizenry able to “determine its destiny” through a sense of ownership of its development processes. The government of Rwanda put in place numerous frameworks intended to strengthen community participation, especially at the grassroots level. The Community Development Policy (2001) was devised to complement the decentralization policy, its main objective being to enhance community participation in policy design and decision-making processes. Programs to enhance citizen participation include, *Umuganda* (community works) *Ubudehe* (poverty reduction forums), *Abunzi* (community mediators), *Imihigo* (performance contracts), advisory councils, women councils and youth councils, among others.

What are the questions that will guide our research?

If the government has put in place the infrastructure- legal, institutional, and policy frameworks- for citizen participation, what is restricting people from deeper engagement?

Broadly, what is the nature of the social contract in Rwanda? Who is accountable to whom? Who represents citizens and how do they get their collective voices heard? What is the profile of those more inclined to participate, and why?

What is the relationship between participation and influence?

How shall we carry out the study?

The project will combine the strengths of a large household survey (quantitative) with qualitative methods (stakeholder interviews, in depth interviews, focus group discussions) in order to both identify the extent to which participation in policy and decision making is working and to provide an understanding of the reasons for differences.



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