Helpdesk Research Report: Civil Service Reform in Rwanda
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Query: Please collate the key literature on civil service reform and capacity development in the public sector in Rwanda in the past ten years, summarising the main debates, successes and current challenges.

Enquirer: DFID

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1. Overview

There is limited assessment of Rwanda’s public sector reform by donors and a marked lack of academic interest in comparison with other African countries. It is generally asserted that the Government of Rwanda has embarked on an impressive array of public sector reforms, with little criticism of their commitment or political willingness to support change. The Government’s commitment to reform is reflected in the number of policy documents which can be found on the subject, of which the two most relevant are cited below. Public sector reform is discussed in the following policy contexts: human resource development; good governance and institutional strengthening; decentralisation to district- and sub-district-level bodies; and public financial management.

A review of the literature suggests that there have been a number of successes in the public sector reform process. Key achievements are:

- Rapid downsizing and retrenchment implemented early on
- Comprehensive pay restructuring
- Better qualified and more competent public sector servants through capacity building. This is attributed in part to the implementation of the large-scale World Bank Multi Sector Capacity Building Project (MSCBP) from 2005 to address capacity issues. This also involved the establishment of a human resources development agency (HIDA).

Despite these achievements, the reform process still faces significant challenges in the following areas:

- Staff capacity is crucially lacking in the following areas: information and communication technologies (ICT), accounting, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).
- There is a lack of sensitisation of staff about the reform process and what capacity building entails, which can result in resistance to the process.
Retrenchment has left the public sector workforce depleted and lacking in institutional memory.

Reform has been difficult to manage in the context of decentralisation and the adoption of a 'one size fits all' organisational structure has been problematic.

There has been insufficient coordination between Ministries, Department and agencies, and insufficient clarification of a number of boundaries between different parts of government and their roles and responsibilities in reform.

There is lack of clarity about human resources and whether a Human Resource Policy exists.

2. Key Documents

Karega, V., 2006, 'Public Sector Reform in Rwanda: Critical Process to Realize an Effective State to Drive Pro-Poor Change', Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA) Presentation, Kigali. 


According to this report the main goal of public sector reform in Rwanda is to make the public sector more responsive to Rwandan citizens and other users' needs. Rwanda's Vision 2020 aims to transform the country into a knowledge economy with a skilled workforce and a strong public administration which promotes ethics, values, transparency, equity and results. The reform process currently consists of a) Restructuring public institutions in accordance with territorial reforms; b) Reviewing the legal framework (in particular the General Statute for Public Services, performance appraisal system and disciplinary process). Furnishing these reforms are the following activities:

- A management procedures manual
- Formulation of a Civil Service Commission
- Integrated human resources management and payroll system
- A sustainable multi-sector capacity building programme
- Long-term salary policy for government institutions
- A Human Resource development policy
- Impact assessment
- Improving retention and motivation
- Promoting a culture of organisational change

The country faces a number of challenges in its public sector reform initiatives, however:

- Abject poverty (60% below the poverty line)
- Issues surrounding unity, reconciliation, the role of women and the need to rebuild confidence
- Management of the shift from a highly centralised, bureaucratised state to a decentralised one using ICT
- Limited skills and a high turnover of staff: retention and motivation as huge problems
- Formulation of a sustainable capacity building system and approaches
- A degree of resistance to change and fear of the unknown

The report finds that public sector reform has been politically unpopular and courageous. A number of achievements are identified, such as:

- A reduction in the layers of bureaucratic decision-making in government;
- Decentralisation of power, and
- Increased competency of the workforce. In particular, there has been a rise in the number of university degree holders from 6.4% in 1998 to 79% in 2005.
Further, a number of concrete reforms have met success:

- Salary guidelines based on competencies
- Zero fleet transport policy
- Fixed ceiling and prepaid telephone bills for staff
- Retrenchment management, including measures such as training, back-to-school schemes and fund and credit schemes supported by the National Bank of Rwanda.
- Development of a Human Resources Policy
- Establishment of a Civil Service Commission
- Use of impact assessments to measure performance


(Not available online: see attached file)

This report focuses on six Ministries (Ministry of Economic Planning and Finance, Ministry of Public Service and Labour, Ministry of Lands, Environment, Forestry, Water and Mines, Ministry of Infrastructure, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education) in order to measure progress in the implementation of Rwanda’s public sector reforms. The report was financed by the World Bank and undertaken at the request of the Human Resource and Institutional Capacity Development Agency (HIDA).

Generally, the reform process aims to create a public sector that is lean, able to delegate responsibilities, responsive to citizens, decentralised, and separated into policy and technical functions. The public sector should be oriented towards wealth creation, private sector development, results and the reduction of poverty. Key developments in the Rwandan reform process are:

- In 1998-99, there was large-scale downsizing of the civil service with over 12,000 workers being dismissed or removed from the payroll as ‘ghostworkers’. Salaries increased by 40% and the civil service numbered 8,500. In addition to these cuts in employees and revised and simplified salary structures, management structures have also been harmonized.
- In 2002, the Government published the National Decentralisation Policy and Policy Framework for Rwanda’s Civil Service Reform. Decentralisation has since been facilitated by local government reforms, with a reduction in the number of provinces and districts.
- In 2004, public sector reform was again articulated in the document ‘Reconfiguration and Transformation of Rwandan Public Administration’.
- In 2005, the World Bank’s Multi-Sector Capacity Building Project began.
- In 2005-06: comprehensive pay reform was implemented.

Key findings are:

- Despite more pessimistic assessments by Ministry staff, there can ‘be no doubt that radical changes have been made in the public services’ (p. 7). The Rwandan Private Sector Federation’s own assessment of its relations with the public sector indicate that the effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector had improved as a result of reform. However in a number of areas reform had stalled or where they had had unintended consequences. Despite a clear vision the reforms have not been approached in a comprehensive way at any time, with no properly-sequenced action plan. What has resulted is a downsized civil service without an improvement in performance.
There was little opportunity to scrutinise, debate and possibly modify some of the structural assumptions upon which the reforms were based.

There was no basis for a ‘proper campaign of publicity’ which would have enabled citizens and civil servants to understand the reform process. Little was done to reorient public servants towards new ways of working and to facilitate attitudinal change.

The rigid retrenchment exercise resulted in a loss of institutional memory and in some cases a loss of capable staff. The review did not however find that posts were being occupied by under-qualified individuals.

The problems facing Ministries are not to do with individual competence but a broader capacity issue, consisting of four dimensions: a) Staff numbers; b) Staff succession in the case of illness or absence; c) Structure; d) Systems (particularly ICT).

As part of the report findings, a number of specific areas of concern are identified:

- Leadership and Coordination of Reform: Both the Administrative Reform Unit and Public Administration Reform Task Force have unclear mandates and inappropriate institutional homes.
- Machinery of Government: A number of boundaries and responsibilities need to be clarified at inter-ministerial level.
- Processes and Procedures: Policy, planning, supervision and monitoring and evaluation have not been clearly defined.
- Human Resource Development and Management: There are generally no human resource policies or procedures. Personnel records are kept manually, pay is relatively low and turnover remains high. Finally, there is no Public Services Law as a basis for managing a decentralised public service.
- Finance Issues: Financial control systems and the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) remain undeveloped, no proper accounting system has been introduced to support decentralisation and ICT infrastructure remains weak.

The review also contains more detailed findings for each of the six institutions, as well as offering key recommendations to the Government of Rwanda on the basis of the review’s findings.


This report is based on national consultations leading up to the seventh session of the African Governance Forum (AGF) in October 2007. The consultation process was led by the Ministry of Public Service and Labour (MIFOTRA), the Human Resources and Institutional Capacity Development Agency (HIDA) and included the Ministry of Local Government, Good Governance, Community Development and Social Affairs (MINALOC) and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN). The scope of the report is on all capacity building initiatives, but has a particular focus on the public sector. In general, the findings of the report indicate that despite the huge efforts the Government of Rwanda has made to invest in and improve human resource capacity within the public sector, many challenges remain in terms of adequate resourcing and gaps in capacity.

Rwanda’s national development plan – Vision 2020 – foresees the need for competent human resources in order to fulfill the demands of a knowledge-based economy. Reforms have been taken in a number of sectors: public service, judicial, territorial administration and public financial management. These occurred alongside the decentralisation process.
Development of Human Resources

Prior to 2001 there was little in the way of systematic capacity building of the Rwandan public sector. The Multi-Sector Capacity Building Project presented a comprehensive attempt to build human resource capacity. HIDA currently coordinates a number of national capacity development initiatives, including skills audits, a programme to strengthen local training institutions, functional reviews and institutional government audits to assess public sector reforms, assessments of capacity development initiatives, public sector strengthening, and the establishment of a national monitoring and evaluation framework. In addition, civil service reforms were introduced in 1998 in order to:

- Transform management
- Bring efficiency into public services
- Eliminate corruption
- Ensure equity, transparency and accountability

Ministries and province structures have been redesigned, and civil service labour legislation has been reviewed. The civil service reform process has been mitigated by providing education to those wishing to upgrade their qualifications and a support package for those wanting to enter the private sector.

Alongside these human resource-related reforms the government has invested in the country's skills and education through a restructuring of the education system, the strengthening of local training institutions, and an emphasis on vocational education and sector-specific training.

Public Sector Governance Reforms

Reforms have been undertaken to increase the accountability, transparency and level of participation in government. This consisted of decentralising government and improving accountability at all levels, enhancing the capacity of the public sector, strengthening public financial management and increasing the transparency and predictability of policy-making. Accountability and transparency initiatives include the setting up of the Auditor General Office, Office of the Ombudsman, National Tender Board (NTB) and Rwandan National Examinations Council (RNEC). Decentralisation in Rwanda has focused upon creating a dynamic local economy, with the challenge being to build capacity at central government level to coordinate activities in the decentralised bodies. Public financial management reforms have included specific budget policy reforms which modernise accounting systems and internal audits. The bodies responsible for ensuring enhanced transparency and accountability have a large role to play in public financial management.

In terms of civil service reform and public sector capacity development a number of challenges are identified:

- Entrenching democracy and the rule of law in a post-genocide context.
- Utilising and retaining capacity in the public sector. The key challenge here is how to retain the most qualified people despite attractive employment in both the private sector and international NGOs.
- Resource constraints, such as poor communications and transport links, lack of data and inadequate financial resources.
- Conceptual challenges in regard to what capacity building entail. In response to this, a 'total systems' approach (p28) which addresses the capacity-related issues of individuals, organisations and systems needs to be taken. This requires a more demand-driven approach in which decentralised bodies have a role to play.

In conclusion, the report argues that overall a ‘good foundation’ (p. 31) for democratic and accountable governance has been set, but that Rwanda needs more programmes and
resources in order to address the skills gap in all sectors. With regards to the public sector, the report recommends that: a) a results-driven approach should be adopted, which is measured by effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; and b) emphasis should be put upon institutional capacity-building rather than individual training.

3. Policy and Project Documents

Republic of Rwanda


This programme statement offers a general overview of the Rwandan government’s approach to strengthening governance. It outlines institutional strengthening and the strengthening of financial management and economic planning as two of the programmes’ ‘pillars’. The programme plan from 2002-06 is intended to build upon the 1998-2001 reforms, of which decentralisation and public sector capacity building were two major features. The renewed programme is designed to go further by making the explicit link between governance and poverty reduction.

The efforts of the Government of Rwanda prior to 2002 are described as resulting in a number of concrete successes. Three achievements are particularly relevant:

- Reforming and strengthening the civil service through the restructuring of wages, establishment of health insurance, development of human resources and implementation of new management systems.
- Fostering transparent and accountable management of public affairs through the establishment of the Auditor General and institution-building for efficient public financial management. Key bodies in this regard include the Rwanda Revenue Authority, the National Planning Commission, the Rwanda Investment Authority, the National Tender Board, the Statistics Department and the Office of the Auditor for State Finances.
- Developing Human resources and capacity building. Key bodies to have been established are the Rwanda Institute of Administration and Management and the Human Resource Development Agency.

The two programme ‘pillars’ are also discussed. The most relevant areas of consideration are as follows:

**Institutional Strengthening and Coordination:**

- Strengthening constitutionalism through a number of measures, including human resource development.
- Strengthening decentralisation and people’s empowerment through an enhanced Public Administration and sustainable economic and financial planning mechanisms.
- Effective and efficient coordination and harmony of policies and actions of government, involving the building of human capacity to coordinate policy.
- Enforcing transparency and accountability and fighting corruption through the relevant bodies, enacting laws and codes of conduct to regulate the behaviour of public servants, and the designing of communication systems which hold public servants to account.
- Human resource development through civil service reform, a human resource body and ICT training.
Economic Planning and Financial Management

- Coordinated and integrated national planning through the development of stronger capacity to plan and coordinate.
- Aid management and coordination by strengthening the capacity of government bodies to monitor and account for aid expenditures.
- Financial management through the development of accounting skills.


This document outlines the Government of Rwanda’s vision, objectives and strategies for civil service reform to be led by the Ministry of Civil Service (MIFOTRA), as articulated in 2002. The Government’s strategic approach comprise a number of themes: decentralisation, the streamlining of management systems, privatisation of certain sectors, the creation of national bodies charged with capacity building, and enhancing the functioning of public institutions to ensure effectiveness. The functional working areas are as follows:

- Streamlining of structures
- Development of human resources and capacity
- Developing the Government’s financial capacity
- Systems of management, technology and working methods

The policy statement offers a number of measures through which to achieve civil service reform: 1) Changes in laws and policies, such as Civil Service Standing Orders; 2) Renumeration and Motivation through salary, the provision of transport, health insurance, housing and access to credit; 3) Performance Evaluation 4) A Public Service Commission; 5) Modern Management Systems; 6) Redeployment, recasting and forecasting of Human Resources; 7) Civil Service and Human Resource Development, through the National Policy on Human Resources.

World Bank


This document provides the rationale and design for the Multi-Sector Capacity Building Project (MSCBP). The Bank highlights the following as key concerns of the Rwandan public sector:

- Weak links between public sector reforms and capacity building risks stifling reform efforts. The transformations outlined in the Government of Rwanda’s Public Sector Reform Strategy (PSRS) need to be accompanied by institutional assessments and reforms, new processes and training.
- Inadequate capacities for strategic planning, policy and project design, and implementation due to centralised, top-down structures. Government agencies are insufficiently responsive to the needs to local communities.
High staff turnover, despite a number of incentive schemes (enhancement scheme for noncompetitive salaries and special allowances for scarce skills).

- Inadequate financial accountability
- Weak coordination and ownership of capacity building initiatives which are often implemented in isolation and driven by donors. There is no framework for managing Government-donor relations in capacity building.

The purpose of the project is described as being ‘to facilitate efforts to strengthen institutional capacities, design and implement priority programs and related policies outlined in the PRSP, and manage financial and human resources’ (p. 3). The Bank-led project complements other donor and Government projects and has four ‘higher-level’ objectives: good governance and economic governance; human resource development; institutional capacity-building; and poverty reduction. Conceived as a 5-year project, the MSCBP has 5 components:

- Coordination of the MSCBP, involving the establishment of a human resources agency – ‘a one-stop shop for capacity building I Rwanda’ (p8).
- Strategic Human Resource Development, involving a Government policy on human resource and capacity development, the training of 50 leaders of ministries, employment incentives to fill key agency positions, and enhancing salaries.
- Cross-Cutting Public Sector Reform to target: a) public expenditure management and procurement; b) public service reform; c) a national M & E system to monitor progress towards PRSP indicators.
- Enhancing Agency Performance, involving the participation of 6 ministries to improve strategic planning and implement and monitor workplans. An Agency Performance Fund (APF) will be set up.
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT), involving an ICT policy, training of 300 top public service managers and provide for urgent ICT needs (hardware, software, training, maintenance).

Based on lessons learned from capacity building initiatives in the past, the MSCBP design emphasises: a) coordination and coherence through the Human Resources Capacity Building Agency; b) a comprehensive approach which intervenes at the individual, agency ad cross-cutting level; and c) ownership by both the Government of Rwanda and other stakeholders.

The Annexes provide comprehensive information on the MSCBP’s financing arrangements.


This report assesses the Institutional Reform Credit (IRC) project, with the Republic of Rwanda gaining a ‘Highly Satisfactory’ performance rating, and the World Bank being rated as ‘Satisfactory’. The relevant component of the IRC is Public Expenditure Management. It is designed to have a governance, effectiveness, efficiency and poverty impact on public sector reforms and is addressed in the following ways:

- A decentralised budget process;
- The integration of recurrent and development budgets;
- Linking the Medium Term Expenditure Framework to sector plans;

Overall this component is rated as satisfactory. Particular achievements have included:
Building the capacities and institutions needed to foster greater transparency and accountability in public resource management;
Linking the reform process to decentralisation by placing decentralisation ‘focal points’ in each ministry; and
Introducing a Joint Monitoring System (JMS) for budget monitoring.

Institutional capacity has presented a challenge in a number of ways however and is identified as a potential risk to sustainability:

- Lack of information from donors has constrained the ability of the government to integrate national and development budgets;
- The JMS faces accounting capacity constraints in ministries, agencies, and sub-national governments; and
- Limited human resources for internal auditing.

The sustainability of the IRC is explicitly linked to other World Bank activities, namely the Public Sector Capacity Building Project and assistance to the decentralisation process. In general the report concludes that one of the lessons learned during the implementation of the project is that ‘the successful implementation of policy and institutional reforms requires adequate capacities in key areas’ (p20). A lack of human capacity was identified as a key constraint in the project’s implementation.

4. Decentralisation Documents


This needs assessment forms Output 3 of the National Decentralisation Implementation Plan. The bulk of the work has been in working with district authorities to produce 30 locally-owned capacity building needs assessments (CBNAs). The findings of the 30 CBNAs are presented in Section 2 of the report. The key findings are as follows:

- Institutional arrangements: The report found that knowledge of legal frameworks at local levels was minimal, with the drafting of legal documents lacking consultation with district authorities. District-level authorities also lack knowledge of projects and programmes, with a lack of basic budgetary information. Lastly, service delivery is hampered by a lack of transport to carry staff to their destinations.
- Management arrangements: District-level authorities possessed knowledge of planning and budgeting, but lacked capacity to address many of the practical challenges encountered. Further, financial management was weak, fiscal decentralisation had not been effective in a number of districts, and local governments tended to have poor revenue collection. In general, districts had no strategies for mobilising external resources, procurement systems were weak and districts are not satisfied with the technical support they receive from MINECOFIN. Most districts have no system in which to monitor the implementation of decentralisation plans yet conversely districts were overwhelmed with reporting procedures.
- Management of Human Resources: The report found that the current organisational structure is not adapted to local needs and that human resourcing was a significant challenge. The management of salaries is not undertaken efficiently and any funds for training tend to be re-allocated. Staff retention is also a huge problem.
- Ways of Working: Staff were found to be under the pressure of too many meetings and responsibilities and that relations between districts and lower level bodies
(sectors, cellules, imigudu) were hampered by a lack of technical, financial and human resources.

- Facilities and equipment: Although most district administrations have offices, they are largely overcrowded. The largest problem was electricity and ICT equipment with both hospitals and schools lacking the equipment needed for staff to do their jobs.

On the basis of these findings the report presents a number of recommendations and guidelines for implementation. The most relevant recommendations are as follows:

- Improve the way in which MINALOC coordinates the decentralised bodies.
- Reorganise the organisational structure.
- MIFOTRA should set up a clear training policy for local governments.


This paper considers post-conflict governance in Rwanda in a wide sense. The most relevant section is entitled ‘Post Conflict Constitutional Development: Public Administration and Local Governance’ which considers decentralisation as a way of promoting localised public sector capacity building. This paper argues that the principal way in which the public sector has been reformed is through decentralisation and the capacity-building of local institutions. The Government has embraced decentralisation as the following achievements indicate:

- Local elections in 1999 and 2002
- The National Decentralization Policy in 2000
- The Common Development Policy, involving the Common Development Fund for local governments
- The World Bank’s ‘Community Reintegration and Decentralization Project’
- Imidigudu (see the next document)

Decentralisation has met a number of problems, however. These include:

- It has been difficult to surmount the legacy of centralised power in the country;
- The transparency and accountability of local elections were questionable; and
- The central government has often had to intervene to make key economic decisions.

The paper argues that although donors are keen to support decentralisation, its success will depend on the willingness of the central government to award sufficient autonomy and resources.


This report uses Rwanda’s recent Imihigo initiative to examine whether institution-building is necessarily an integral part of Africa’s ‘good governance’ approach. The paper argues that decentralisation is the key to reforming the public sector at local level and enhancing service delivery to citizens.

The Government of Rwanda has articulated its own ‘vision’ of governance reform, through its Decentralisation Policy (2000) and Vision 2020. The Imihigo initiative refers to a kind of
performance contract: originally a public commitment to a particular set of behaviours by military leaders to the king. This has been translated into all sectors of Rwandan public life, an example of this being Imihigo Day in which mayors report to the citizens in their district. These presentations have caused a degree of competition between mayors who compete to report the most significant progress and change in their wards.

*Imihigo* is described by all as having improved the public sectors’ responsiveness to citizens. The impact of the initiative can be understood in the following way:

- Increased accountability
- Setting clear objectives and goals
- Promoting ownership
- Providing enhanced service delivery

On the basis of *Imihigos* the report argues that decentralisation should be the key to achieving good governance rather than national state-building. It is a genuinely ‘African’ governance mechanism and should be used as a model.

### 5. Additional information

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