

**"The Contribution of the Youth in Promoting  
Decentralized Governance using ICTs – Case of  
Rwanda".**

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## **Abstract**

Decentralisation refers to the process of relocating government decision making process of a country closer to the beneficiaries of the services offered by the government. It entails transferring authority, resources and responsibilities from central government to local government units.

In May 2000, the Government of Rwanda adopted a decentralisation policy and a strategy for its implementation. The National Decentralisation Policy is entrenched in the Government of Rwanda's commitment to empower its people to determine their own destiny. According to the Ministry of Local Administration, Good Governance, Community Development and Social Affairs (MINALOC), this policy also has its foundations in the fundamental laws of the country as well as in the political and administrative reforms the government has already implemented. The main objective of the policy is to achieve political, economic, social, managerial, administrative and technical empowerment of local populations in the fight against poverty by ensuring they participate in the planning and management of their development process.

The Government of Rwanda wishes to harness the power of ICTs to spur growth and development. Rwanda's Vision 2020 seeks to create by the year 2020 a middle income economy by using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to transform the country from a predominantly agricultural economy (PAE) to a predominantly information and knowledge-based economy (PIKE). To achieve this remarkable feat, the government has developed the NICI policies and plans to guide the development, introduction and usage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Rwanda. The NICI is a set of 4-phased, 5-year rolling plans whose main broad foci are national socio-economic development, poverty reduction, wealth creation, and employment generation. The second NICI (NICI 2006-2010) which runs up to the year 2010 has identified 10 main pillars.

More than 65% of the Rwandan population is less than 35 years of age. That makes Rwanda a very youthful country to say the least. Youths are the change agents and bridge between technology and society. Youths in secondary schools, universities, semi-skilled workers and laborers are more receptive of changes brought about by ICTs than the older people. Rwanda is intent on taking advantage of this new media culture among youths to advance the concept of decentralisation.

This paper discusses the role that e-literate youth are playing in contributing to the advancement of decentralized governance in Rwanda.

# I. Introduction

## Quick Facts and Figures on Rwanda

Rwanda is a small landlocked country (approximately 26,000 sq. miles) in the Great Lakes region of East-Central Africa, bordered by Uganda to the north, Burundi to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the west and Tanzania to the east.

The population of Rwanda is approximately 9 million people making Rwanda the most densely populated country in continental Africa. Per capita income in Rwanda today stands at US\$ 290 making Rwanda one

## Rwanda's Vision 2020

Rwanda's Vision 2020 is a framework for Rwanda's development, presenting the key priorities and providing Rwandans with a guiding tool for the future. It was developed after extensive consultations and was presented to a large cross-section of the Rwandan society, by whom it was amended and validated.

It supports a clear Rwandan identity, whilst showing ambition and imagination in overcoming poverty and division. The Rwandan Government, together with its partners, donors, civil society organisations and the private sector, went further and formulated more detailed sectoral plans in order to attain the goals of VISION 2020. This led to Vision 2020 Umurenge. Umurenge is a Kinyarwanda word for 'sector' which is the smallest administrative governance unit in Rwanda.

Vision 2020 expresses the aim of attaining per capita income of a middle-income country in an equitable way, and the aspiration to become a modern, strong and united nation, without discrimination between its citizens.

Six priority pillars and three cross-cutting areas were identified, the development of which will be crucial for making the necessary long term transformations in Rwandan society happen and thus attaining the goals outlined above. The crucial task is to make these key pillars and cross-cutting areas move in tandem. They touch upon most aspects of Rwandan society, and comprise socio-political and economic issues.

The Pillars of Vision 2020 are shown in the table below together with the cross cutting issues of Vision 2020.

<b>Pillars of the VISION 2020</b>	<b>Cross-cutting areas of VISION 2020</b>
1. Good governance and a capable state	1. Gender equality

2. Human resource development and a knowledge based economy	2. Protection of environment and sustainable natural resource management
3. A private sector-led economy	
4. Infrastructure development	3. Science and technology, including ICT
5. Productive and Market Oriented Agriculture	
6. Regional and International Economic integration.	

### **The ICT 2020 Policy Framework**

In line with Vision 2020, the ICT 2020 Policy Framework was developed to modernize the Rwandan economy and society using information and communication technologies (ICTs) as an engine for:

- Accelerated development and economic growth
- National prosperity
- Global competitiveness

The main mission would be to achieve for Rwanda a middle income status by 2020 and transform its society and economy into an information-rich knowledge-based society and economy by modernizing its key sectors using information and communication technologies.

The Government is committed to implementing this policy framework over a period of 20 years up to 2020 through the implementation of four five-yearly ICT4D Plans with the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> NICI Plans laying emphasis on the exploitation of ICTs to support the delivery of government services and the activities of various sectors of the economy and the 4<sup>th</sup> NICI Plan laying emphasis on the production, development and delivery of ICT products and services.

The current Rwanda ICT4D Policy commonly known as NICI (National Information and Communication Infrastructure) has 10 pillars namely:

1. Education
2. Human Capacity Development
3. Infrastructure, Equipment and Content
4. Economic Development
5. Social Development
6. eGovernment and eGovernance
7. Private Sector Development

8. Rural and Community Access
9. Legal, Regulatory and Institutional Provisions and Standards
10. National Security, Law and Order

## **II. The Rwanda National Decentralization Policy**

Decentralization is a process that transfers power from the top and central levels to the lower levels of administration. Such administration may be related to a public authority or a private organization. Decentralization aims to achieve participation of all groups of a society in the process of administration.

Power ceases to be concentrated in the central authority and more is delegated either to the local self-governments or any other component of the society.

In its true sense, decentralization requires relinquishment of such power by the central authority of a state, whether it is a monarchy, an autocracy or even a heavily centralized democracy. Basic components of decentralization may be summed up as:

- Increased political, economic, and social participation broadening the base of democracy.
- Creation of an accountable and responsive public authority.
- Putting in place a transparent and participatory process of administration.
- Ensuring political stability and national integrity due to widespread participation of stakeholders from all sectors of the society.

In Rwanda, there is an ongoing process of decentralising the political and socio-economic systems of the country with the view to:

- Enhance good governance
- Increase pro-poor service, and
- Sustain socio-economic development;

The main objectives of the Rwanda National Decentralization Policy are:

- To promote local people's participation in initiating, making, implementing, and monitoring decisions that affect their livelihoods;
- To strengthen accountability and transparency in Rwanda by making local leaders directly accountable to the communities they serve and by establishing a clear linkage between the taxes people pay and the services that are financed by these taxes;
- To enhance the sensitivity and responsiveness of public administration to the local environment;
- To develop sustainable economic planning and management capacity at local levels;

- To enhance effectiveness and efficiency in the planning, monitoring and delivery of services by reducing the burden from central government officials who are distanced from the point where needs are felt and services delivered.

Rwanda is characterized by different conditions in different areas of the country such as rain, crop diseases. These conditions are not universal in the country hence they need localized solutions which makes it almost necessary to empower local governments to solve their problems themselves.

Decentralization in Rwanda is being promoted in form of all the essential elements of political, fiscal, and institutional decentralization as they relate to rural development.

The most important element of the fiscal and financial decentralisation is the relative autonomy in budgeting and financial management at local levels that facilitates prioritisation of the expenditure needs in situation of inadequate financing.

The decentralization policy has led to the development of local trade where local markets have been built in a number of communities and local entrepreneurs have been promoted to engage into small trade. There has been an emergence of small scale industries that have greatly increased economic activities in communities,

Furthermore, tourism and environment protection mainly through the practice of the Umuganda, reforestation and erosion control has been successful in many communities,

Local governments have promoted cooperatives and associations among their communities.

The Government has promoted a program known as Ubudehe, which is a traditional Rwandan practice and cultural value of working together to solve their common problems. In the present context, Ubudehe is a policy designed to increase the level of institutional problem-solving capacity at the local level by citizens working with their local government.

Ubudehe process is understood as a tool to make Rwandan people at the grassroots level aware of their poverty related problems and help them address these problems in a participatory and solidarity way. Ubudehe has helped to understand poverty in Rwanda and how it is felt by the people through the Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) process;

### **III. Youth and ICT in Rwanda**

*"Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation.*

*Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies."* – Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General

Youth are the future. Youth are more interested in ICTs. Youth can be good agents of changes given that they are usually less resistant to change and are eager to embrace new ideas.

Government agencies can make use of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile technology) to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. Technology can be a tool for better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. If well applied the result will bring about less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions.

A big part of the success of the decentralization process relies on the level of performance of civil servants at the lowest level and given the advancement into the technology era a substantial level of computer / IT literacy among these staff is a necessity.

However the greatest levels of computer literacy are among the youth who not only tech savvy but are also a major part of the changing technology environment. This situation can be taken advantage of by the computer literate youth conducting computer trainings for the computer illiterate (and much older) civil servants and other private sector end users.

This does not only play the role of increasing the computer literacy levels in the different strata of the population but also increases the efficiency and effectiveness of the primary actors of the decentralization process i.e. those at the sector, cell and umudugudu levels.

A forum that is much more adoptable by the youth are the blogs and chat rooms that come out as more youth appealing technology advancements. These are some interactive forums through which youth can not only express their views but also exchange their ideas with specific regard to the various decentralization policies and procedures.

The Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports has developed a working relationship with local youth associations in Rwanda together with local government to advance issues of national importance such as fighting genocide ideology, promoting ICT4D initiatives, etc.

These associations also work the local government

### **III. Youth, Decentralization, ICT – Illustrative Case Projects**

Youth can play a vital role in raising awareness about issues important to the general public through ICTs such as radios, telecenters, Internet, etc.

Citizens can access information for businesses and local decisions. This can be done through the use of radios and internet (Government portal). Youth can disseminate information through the above mentioned media.

Youth can be advocates of political decentralization. That decisions made with greater participation will be better informed and more relevant to diverse interests in society than those made only by national political authorities. Mobile telecenters can be used to do this especially in deep rural areas.

#### **a. Communication Channels and Networks**

- i. Local Government and Central Government**
- ii. Networks of Local Government entities (eDistrict Network)**
- iii. Local communities and Local Government**
- iv. Private Sector and Local Government**

#### **b. Videoconferencing Project**

#### **c. Telecenters, Kiosks, DISCs, eBus**

#### **d. Rwanda National Portal**

- i. eGovernment Portal**
- ii. Local Government Portal (eDistricts) – email, instant messaging, Skype, etc.**
- iii. eSenate/eParliament Portal**
- iv. eToursim Portal**
- v. eInvestment Portal**

#### **e. Private Sector Development**

- i. Districts work with private sector**
  - 1. Citizen access to information for businesses and citizens**

- ii. **ICT Training for MSMEs**
  - iii. **Entrepreneurship in ICT industry**
- f. **Mass Communication and Sensitization Campaigns**
  - i. **Community Radio**
  - ii. **TV**
  - iii. **Music, Dance, Drama/Theatre**
  - iv. **Web sites, blogs,**
- g. **eSensitization campaigns**
- h. **eHealth**
  - i. **TRACNet System**
  - ii. **Telemedicine**
  - iii. **TBA**
  - iv. **Citizen's Guide to Health Information**
- i. **e-Agriculture**
  - i. **eSoko System**
  - ii. **eFarming Portal (Help older famers with info)**
  - iii. **Animal Disease Early Warning System**
- j. **e-Education**
  - i. **Computer Training Centers**
  - ii. **eLearning Content**
  - iii. **eNota System**
- k. **Others**
  - i. **Elections – Voter Registration by PDAs**
  - ii. **SMS Power**
  - iii. **eFaranga System**

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Rwanda has very ambitious development plans. The youth are the future of Rwanda. The youth are the drivers of ICT4D initiatives. Decentralization has proven to yield desirable results in the socio-economic development of a country. Empowering youth with the help of ICT has been very useful in assisting the Government of Rwanda to further its development plans through participatory and decentralized governance.

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