

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**NATIONAL
DECENTRALIZATION
POLICY**

October 2021

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BDS	: Business Development Services
CDC	: Community Development Committees
CDF	: Common Development Fund
CG	: Central Government
CRVS	: Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
CSO	: Civil Society Organization
DCs	: District Councils
EAC	: East African Community
EDPRS	: Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy
EUCL	: Energy Utility Corporation Limited
FBO	: Faith Based Organization
FRW	: Franc Rwandais
GDSWG	: Governance and Decentralization Sector Working Group
GoR	: Government of Rwanda
HGI	: Home Grown Initiative
ICT	: Information and Communication Technology
IEC	: Information, Education and Communication
JADF	: Joint Action Development Forum
LED	: Local Economic Development
LG	: Local Government
LODA	: Local Administrative Entities Development Agency
MIFOTRA	: Ministry of Public Service and Labour
MIGEPROF	: Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion
MINAFFET	: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
MINAGRI	: Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources
MINALOC	: Ministry of Local Government
MINECOFIN	: Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
MINICOM	: Ministry of Trade and Industry
MINIJUST	: Ministry of Justice
MININFRA	: Ministry of Infrastructure
MYCULTURE	: Ministry of Youth and Culture
NGO	: Non-Governmental Organization
NIC	: National Itorero Commission
NISR	: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda
NPPA	: National Public Prosecution Authority
NST	: National Strategy for Transformation
NHRC	: National Human Rights Commission
OAG	: Office of Auditor General of State Finances
OSR	: Own Source Revenue
PFM	: Public Financial Management
PPCP	: Public Private Community Partnership
PSC	: Public Service Commission
PSF	: Private Sector Federation
PWD	: People with Disability

RALGA	: Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities
RDB	: Rwanda Development Board
REG	: Rwanda Energy Group
RGB	: Rwanda Governance Board
RHA	: Rwanda Housing Authority
RIB	: Rwanda Investigation Bureau
RMI	: Rwanda Management Institute
RISA	: Rwanda Information Society Authority
RLRC	: Rwanda Law Reform Commission
RNP	: Rwanda National Police
RPPA	: Rwanda Public Procurement Authority
RTDA	: Rwanda Transport Development Agency
RURA	: Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Agency
SDG	: Sustainable Development Goals
TI-R	: Transparency International Rwanda Chapter
UNDP	: United Nations Development Programme

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FOREWORD

The Decentralization journey in Rwanda was adopted in 2000. Over two decades later, progress has been realized in various areas: decentralization has democratized leadership and created platforms for nurturing leaders with inclusion of women and youth, stronger Local Government structures that have been set up through reforms, with performance innovations such as “Imihigo” and platforms for community mobilization, accountability and participation.

The determination of Rwandans to transform their nation into a middle-income country and turn the page towards good governance and socio-economic development, makes Rwanda unique.

Moreover, the decentralization policy placed citizens at the center of governance and the results since its implementation have been outstanding. *“... ON DECENTRALIZATION [...]: We give them resources or they generate resources from within; actually, sometimes we ask them for more than they are able to achieve with the resources we’ve given them. But Maybe that’s the best way to do it [...].” H.E. Paul KAGAME, President of the Republic of Rwanda, responding to the question on Decentralization, Kigali, Post NUC Press Conference, December 14th 2018.*

Nevertheless, not all was achieved due to limited financing such as investment in capacity development (human resources and facilities, challenges related to systems and coordination). The level of empowerment we want for our citizens also needs to be strengthened. It is therefore important to formulate a decentralization policy with a nationally owned vision, clear objectives, and smart strategic results for its successful implementation. This policy is a result of an active participatory and consultative approach from high-level consultations of public institutions at Central and Local Government levels, involvement of Civil Society Organizations and development partners. The objectives and policy actions proposed aim to address these issues and give Rwanda a new future for decentralized governance and service delivery.

With the aforementioned achievements, MINALOC therefore encourages all stakeholders to build on what has been achieved in decentralisation and continue to strengthen the solid positive developmental impacts. With deepened and effective decentralization, more can be achieved.

Ministry of Local Government



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rwanda's Decentralization Policy was inspired by the fundamental principles of human rights, dignity, freedom, and development, which had been violated until 1994. The policy was adopted in 2000, following a series of dialogue sessions with citizens and in consultation with stakeholders in the governance arena in a quest for good governance. It was subsequently revised in 2012 to keep it focused and aligned with the changing political priorities and socioeconomic aspirations.

The government adopted a phased implementation approach. Each phase of decentralization had its own significant and remarkable achievements. In addition, each new phase was informed by the lessons learnt from the previous phase, consequently leading to the revised decentralization policy in 2012.

After the third phase, the actors continued implementing the imperatives of the previous decentralization policy of 2012. Even if there are impressive achievements from the implementation of the previous decentralization policy, challenges still stand in the way of effective decentralization. Moreover, new demands have come up as the country commits to new ambitions such as the African Union Agenda 2063, EAC Vision 2050, Rwanda Vision 2050, National Strategy for Transformation 1, in order to speed up national development with the target of becoming a middle-income country.

The development process of this policy was participatory and consultative in nature with the aim of ensuring that the policy is evidence-based and reflects the views of key stakeholders in the area of decentralization and accountable governance.

The purpose and objective of this policy is “To deepen and sustain citizen centered governance and promote equitable local development for socio-economic transformation”.

The remarkable and significant achievements were observed around political, administrative, fiscal, and financial decentralization. However, the emerging governance and socio-economic development strategic issues were also experienced during implementation of previous policies of decentralization. The main challenges to be addressed in this policy are structure constraints, coordination framework, capacity constraints which undermine the effectiveness of decentralization implementation, fiscal and financial decentralization gaps, low use of ICT for service delivery and decision making at Local Government, and the level of participation of non-state actors.

In order to realize the participatory governance and equitable development aspirations enshrined in the Vision 2050 and entrenched in the objectives of the revised decentralization policy, the following are key policy actions:

1. Sector Decentralization and Service Delivery
2. Fiscal and Financial Decentralization
3. Capacity Development for Decentralized entities
4. Local Economic Development
5. Governance imperatives for National Transformation

As far as the institutional coordination framework is concerned, at national level, the implementation of this policy will be led by the Ministry in charge of Local Government in collaboration with other public, private, and civil society institutions as well as development partners. At Decentralized entities, by JADFs, which remains the key forum for ensuring the coordination of government and non-governmental actors in Governance.

The monitoring and evaluation will be conducted through existing government structures of coordination to ensure the implementation process of this policy is well done and coordinated. Inter-sectoral coordination will be achieved through regular meetings of 'Governance Cluster' Ministers and the Governance and Decentralization Sector Working Group (G&DSWG). The M&E framework will be designed to accommodate different systems to enable all stakeholders to access information on a timely basis without jeopardizing the implementation process.

The implementation of the national decentralization policy requires strong and supportive partnerships in terms of financial and technical resources. Given its broad and long-term nature, the accuracy in costing will be translated into specific strategies and actionable tasks.

The Ministry in charge of local governance and decentralization in partnership with sector ministries will develop appropriate communication strategies, and facilitate alignment of sectoral policies, programs and budgets with the decentralization policy and will involve partners for assisting in disseminating information about the policy.

Finally, the key performance measure for effective policy implementation will be the capacity of the Local Governments to plan, finance, deliver services to citizens, and the citizens' ability to own their Local Governments and to hold their leaders accountable.

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Rwanda's Decentralization Policy was inspired by the fundamental principles of human rights, dignity, freedom and development that had been violated until 1994. This policy was adopted in 2000, following a series of dialogue sessions for 11 months with citizens and consultations with stakeholders in the governance domain in a quest for good governance and democratization.

The main objective of the policy was to ensure political, economic, social, managerial, administrative and technical empowerment of local populations to fight against poverty by participating in the planning, monitoring and management of their development process. The Policy was subsequently revised in 2012 to keep its focus and align with the changing political priorities and socio economic aspirations.

The revised 2012 policy aimed at establishing democratic and community development structures at District level accompanied with a number of legal, institutional and policy reforms, as well as democratic elections for local leaders. It was conceived after a territorial restructuring, consolidating progress on national priorities, such as Vision 2020, deepening the decentralization process by enhancing effectiveness in service delivery to communities, upward accountability, particularly after introduction of the process of performance contracts commonly known as "Imihigo" and has strengthened synergies, coordination and harmonization of interventions in Local Government (Local Government).

The revised policy focused on strong empowerment of citizens towards improved active citizen's participation; sustaining the momentum; creating lasting impact; creating stronger and more autonomous local governments capable of sustaining the democratization process and fast-tracking socio-economic transformation, by harnessing the people's creative potential and resource endowments.

1.2. Rationale

The new orientation of the Government of Rwanda is to shift Decentralization from Governance to imperatives of socio-economic transformation and sustainable development¹. Another important rationale is that since 2012, a number of policy and legal frameworks have changed yet decentralization has a bearing on their implementation. Hence, the review of the 2012 National decentralization Policy is justified to align with these changes focusing on new development priorities.

Over the past two decades, there have been impressive achievements from the implementation of the previous decentralization policies with implications to the overall context of governance in Rwanda.

These achievements among others include: building social cohesion and reconstructing national

1 7 Years Government Programme: National Strategy for Transformation (NST1) 2017-2024

identity immediately after the 1994 genocide against Tutsi; building a capable, effective and efficient Local Government and improved wellbeing of citizens attributed mainly to the social protection and development programs that have been implemented through decentralization. As the country moves into the transformation agenda, there was need to further strengthen coordination of decentralization, the working relations between Local and central Government².

In addition, several studies³ commissioned by the Ministry of Local Government and other stakeholders in the recent past years have drawn attention to a broad range of challenges in the decentralization agenda that need to be addressed.

Rwanda is currently planning its long-term transformational development agenda. The review of the policy follows several calls by different stakeholders to revise the decentralization policy and align it with other frameworks. This call was inspired by the need to reposition decentralization in the face of emerging priorities such as Vision 2050, Africa Union agenda 2063, SDGs among others with a view to strengthen Local Government (autonomy, fiscal space, devolved functions amongst central government and Local Government).

The Government's current focus on socio-economic transformation, Local Economic Development (LED) and wealth creation at the household level requires the reconfiguration of Local Government to strategically play a relevant and key role in attainment of the country's development goals as laid down in the NST1, Vision 2050 and equally the international commitments that directly have implications on Local Government and service delivery in areas of political, administrative, fiscal and financial to ensuring that sustainable development is attained.

The review of the policy will consider the current national development context, more focus on continuously building a vibrant Local Government with highest quality of service delivery, improving the capacities of Local Government, mainstreaming and rationalizing sectoral decentralization to ensure active participation of citizens and non-state actors in the government programs and agenda. This policy will provide guidance on effective coordination for decentralization and working relations between Central and Local Government with clear roles and responsibilities.

² MINALOC, Assessment of the Current Status of the Sectoral Decentralization in Rwanda, 2020

³ MINALOC, Assessment of the Impact of decentralization policy implementation in Rwanda 2001-2017, 2018 and MINALOC, Assessment of the Current Status of the Sectoral Decentralization in Rwanda, 2020

2 POLICY FORMULATION PROCESS

The formulation process used to develop this policy was participatory and consultative. The aim of such a process was to ensure that the policy is evidence-based and to reflect the views of key stakeholders in decentralization and accountable governance.

Several consultative dialogues with stakeholders from various institutions and ministries were conducted including but not limited to: a high level dialogue with high Government officials, Mayor of City of Kigali, Governors, Mayors and Civil society organizations held on 03/02/2020; the national dialogue on decentralization with development partners under the theme: “Decentralization policy, future prospects”, convened on 12/02/2020; A consultative meeting that brought together MINALOC Affiliated Agencies, City of Kigali Executive Committee members, Governors and Representatives of Local Government on 29/06/2020; discussion held in the General Assembly of the Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities on 10 September 2020, discussed in the Governance and Decentralization Sector Working Group meetings and a meeting with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning held on 07 October 2021.

A desk review of relevant policies related to decentralization and existing international, regional, and national strategic documents was done. The review process also benefited from the outputs that emerged from public views collected during community outreach programs, through online media for those with twitter accounts.

3 SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Since 2000, the implementation of decentralization has attained significant and remarkable achievements that serve as best practices this policy can build on to make decentralization more focused and to realize more sustainable impact, towards Vision 2050. The challenges encountered during the path of the implementation of decentralization have been identified and need to be addressed in this policy.

3.1. Key achievements

The commendable achievements of the implementation of the decentralization policy are described below:

Political decentralization: The most sensitive issues for which decentralization has dealt with was to build social cohesion and reconstructing national identity immediately after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi - entrusting power to citizens and capacitating them to be active participants in their governance and development; democratization and increased accountability seen in regular elections of local leaders; citizens' participation increased at all levels of governance and service delivery. There has been a mindset shift among citizens and local leaders, from a powerless and dependent population to a productive, self-reliant (Kwigira) through among others home grown initiatives. Citizens have been empowered and transformed from beneficiaries to stakeholders and played a big role in the improvement of high-quality services as a right. Decentralization has created a strong institutional framework that promotes equitable and inclusive development.

Administrative decentralization: Through devolution of power, authority, functions, and resources from central government to sub-national entities, districts are now the main decision-making entities on a wide range of matters as local capacity for decision-making has increased considerably. This has increased human resource and local administration capacity as seen in the number of high-skilled personnel in Local Government thus amplifying effectiveness and efficiency in decentralized service delivery.

Decentralization has made the state more effective and efficient. It is partly on this account that the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy – EDPRS 1 after the decentralization reforms of 2006 have been more effective. Decentralization has increased access to high quality, affordable and reliable services from powerless and dependent to a productive self-reliant population through home grown solutions and directed all efforts and resources around systems, structures, and processes of service delivery to citizens. The impact assessment report⁴ indicated that services are more accessible at 81%, faster 75%, cheaper 73% and more reliable 76%. Some 54% of citizens make one (1) trip to get a service at the District level, 37.3% at Sector level and 35% at Cell level. 72.5% of respondents believe that decentralization has empowered women to participate in leadership and service delivery, improved citizens social and economic wellbeing through social protection and development programs.

⁴ MINALOC, Assessment of impact of decentralization implementation policy in Rwanda (2001-2017).

Decentralization has enabled home-grown initiatives (HGIs) to address a range of social and political challenges, by empowering citizens and local leaders to creatively find solutions to the problems they face rather than looking up or elsewhere. Stakeholders' coordination through JADFs took shape as many development partners closely work together with districts, and there is some level of coherence and collaboration between Local Governments and local development actors. Local governance capacity challenges and potentials for innovative and sustainable solutions were tackled through the establishment of the Rwanda Association of Local Government Authorities (RALGA) and its subsidiary Local Governance Institute.

Financial and Fiscal Decentralization: There has been considerable progress in both the amount of own source revenue (OSR) and intergovernmental fiscal transfers. Local Government revenue has increased significantly over the years, from FRW 49.7 billion in 2006 to FRW 440.3 billion in 2017/185. A progressive increase in intergovernmental fiscal transfers to implement priorities of the decentralized entities for 2019/20 fiscal year was FRW 595 billion which comprises of FRW 82 billion from own revenues, FRW 361.7 billion from earmarked Transfers, FRW 59.2 billion from block grants and FRW 92.1 billion of transfers from other government agencies⁶.

Local Economic Development⁷ Local Governments are increasingly focusing on Local Economic Development (LED) and each District has its own Development Strategy with identified potentialities. Decentralization aimed at increasing private sector engagement by attracting private investments in Local Government and development of urban and secondary cities, which improved infrastructure development in rural and urban areas, internet penetration, development in towns and urban centers.

3.2. Lessons learnt

Decentralization in Rwanda has recorded a number of lessons that can inform this policy as illustrated below:

Decentralization promotes political and economic inclusion: The main lesson from implementing decentralization in Rwanda is the opportunity for inclusive governance that helped to accelerate citizens' mobilization, participation, reconciliation, and social cohesion in a fairly short time.

Political will is a precondition for effective implementation: Decentralization is a sensitive governance reform process that is often politically unpopular. It can only succeed with immense political will from top leadership.

From a political and administrative view, the Rwandan system was largely centralized and could not address economic and social development. This led the Government to consider Decentralization as one of its top priorities on the agenda.

Continuous leadership commitment: This was demonstrated by the establishment and sustained support of the Common Development Fund (CDF) in 2003, now Local Administrative Entities Development Agency (LODA), Social protection, Local Government Capacity Development for effective delivery to which the Government of Rwanda earmarked funding (10% of development and 3% of recurrent budget) to implement government policies and programs at local levels.

⁵ Op.cit, p.37

⁶ MINECOFIN, Understand the 2019/2020 National Budget – A citizen guide (2019)

⁷ Ibidem.

Decentralization demystified the concept of “timing” and proved unnecessary the idea of waiting for the right conditions to implement sensitive political reforms. It does not require waiting to have all resources and institutions setup as long as the problem has been properly identified.

Citizens’ trust and empowerment take time and require consistency and focus: Decentralization was launched at the time when the state was still struggling to reconcile a traumatized, poor, hungry, and socially divided nation, and restore full confidence of citizens in Government. The decision to quickly disperse power and authority to elected leaders demonstrated the Government’s commitment and helped to build trust.

Constant commitment of development partners: Rwanda’s Decentralization process has enjoyed timely and sustained support from donors and other partners. Their commitment was inspired by the trust in the governance system and efficient and rational use of resources to deliver on citizens’ service priorities. A number of development partners have continued to support the different reform processes in terms of technical and financial support, specifically contributing to citizen empowerment, advocacy and the implementation of decentralization in Rwanda.

Context is important: Appreciating the political, cultural, socio-economic, and institutional context enables rational decisions to be made about when and how to rollout and implement decentralization reform processes. As the country was fragile after the genocide, it was appropriate for the Government of Rwanda to return power to citizens as it was among the major causes of bad governance. For the successful implementation of decentralisation reforms, inclusion of citizens would lead to less disruptive processes in post-conflict reconstruction for participatory governance and citizen-centered service delivery in the recovery and transformation processes.

Periodic reviews enable the policy and implementation process to remain focused and relevant to changing context: The Government has regularly appraised the decentralization process to keep the policy relevant and implementation strategies focused and effective.

3.3. Challenges

In the implementation of decentralization policy since its adoption in 2001, the following major challenges hindered the effective decentralization processes:

- **Structure constraints** with imbalance in the allocation of functions and resources including human resources. Lower administrative entities, especially the cells, are yet to have more staff in line with the growing expectations of the citizens/customers.
- **Sectoral decentralization** that is yet to foster strategic linkages and leverage political will to fast-track political decentralization and strengthen intergovernmental relations.
- **Capacity Constraints** as expectations and needs of customers have been in excess of what available resources could meet in terms of required resources, infrastructure as well as systems.
- **Fiscal and financial decentralization gaps** in maximizing Local Government own revenue potentialities, review of Local Government taxes and fees base, review of central government transfers allocation formula (Block Grant, Earmarked and Development transfers);

- **Limited ICT penetration**, there is still a need to rollout the use of ICTs for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery and the level of ICT literacy among citizens.
- **The low level of participation of non-state actors**, Civil society development barometer of 2018 indicated that CSO participated at 67.07%⁸.

3.4. Policy Context

The formulation of this policy originated from Rwanda's move to continuously nurture good governance, build local economies, strengthen capacity in general and create effective and responsible institutions within the international, regional and national policy framework to respond to national priorities. In addition, it focuses on substantially reducing corruption and bribery in all their forms; developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels and ensuring public access to information.

International and Regional Context: The development of this policy complies with Rwanda's international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁹ concerned with building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. As far as the Africa Union Agenda 2063 is concerned, the development of decentralization policy considered its aspirations of having an Africa with good governance, democracy, and respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law and an Africa with people-driven development, relying on the potential of African people especially its women and youth, and caring for children.

Looking at the EAC Vision 2050¹⁰ imperatives, this policy considered the ambition of having a prosperous, competitive, secure, and politically united East Africa. The mission is to widen and deepen economic, political, social, and cultural integration in order to improve the quality of life of the people of East Africa. Strategic targets of EAC Vision 2050 informed the development of this decentralization policy.

National Context: The Central Government is responsible for policy formulation while the Local Government is bound to implement policies and programs. However, Local Government is considered as an enabler for the successful and efficient Central Government at lower or local level.

The revised decentralization policy is conceptualized in alignment with the Constitution of Rwanda and other relevant legal frameworks, policies and strategies for decentralization and local governance. Rwanda's Constitution stipulates that the territory of Rwanda is divided into administrative entities; public powers are decentralized at local administrative entities and home-grown mechanisms that are initiated to deal with matters concerning them; and all Rwandans have the right to participate in the governance of the country, either directly or through their freely chosen representatives, in accordance with the law. The Local Government Act was considered where it defines the role and responsibilities of each decentralized entity. However, to give a special attention to the City of Kigali, a specific law governing the City of Kigali was enacted¹¹.

⁸ All details, see Rwanda Governance Scorecard, 6th Ed., 2019 and CSDB, 2018

⁹ UNDP. Indicators for Sustainable Development Goals

¹⁰ East Africa Community, Vision 2050

¹¹ Law no 22/2019 governing the city of Kigali, official gazette, no special of 31/07/2019.

Looking at Rwanda Vision 2050¹², accountable and capable state institutions is one of the pillars of “The Rwanda we want towards vision 2050” adopted in 2019. According to this vision, the State is committed to deepen decentralization, to bring services closer to the citizens by focusing on local economic development (LED), governance for production, creating jobs, deepening capacity, and continued improvement in service delivery.

In the revision of this policy, the National Strategy for Transformation (NST1) was considered. It commits to continue strengthening capacity, service delivery and accountability for public institutions and increase citizen participation, engagement, and partnership in development.

¹² MINECOFIN. The Rwanda we want: towards ‘Vision 2050.

4 POLICY REFORM ORIENTATIONS

4.1. Vision

“A self-reliant, secure, politically mature and informed society for sustainable national transformation.”

4.2. Mission

“To build a highly effective and accountable Local Government driven by citizen centered governance for local social economic transformation”

4.3. Overall and specific objectives

The overall objective is to deepen and sustain grassroots-based democratic governance and promote equitable local development by enhancing citizen participation and strengthening Local Government systems. Thus, it will require maintaining effective functional and mutual accountable linkages between Central and Local Government entities.

To realize this overall objective, the following specific objectives will be pursued:

- i. To enhance and sustain inclusive citizens’ participation in planning and budgeting processes and decision making.
- ii. To promote and entrench a culture of Integrity, precision, accountability and transparency in governance and service delivery.
- iii. To fast-track and sustain equitable local economic development as a basis for enhancing local fiscal autonomy, employment, and poverty reduction, by empowering local communities and Local Governments.
- iv. To enhance effectiveness and efficiency of Local Government in planning, monitoring, and delivery of services
- v. To consolidate national unity and identity (Ubunyarwanda) to foster, enhance and sustain the spirit of reconciliation, social cohesion, and national identity.
- vi. To build and consolidate volunteerism, community work and self-reliance based on cultural and other values of collective responsibility, personal worth and productive involvement.
- vii. To fast track and translate the regional integration agenda into a politically meaningful, economically fruitful venture for Rwandans in all corners of the country, and a strong anchor for national stability, peace, and unity.

To achieve the objectives, a set of policy actions under the following policy priorities will be implemented:

1. Define central and Local Government structures with clear roles, responsibilities, and functions;
2. Mainstream and rationalize sectoral decentralization process;
3. Strengthen coordination arrangements for decentralization;
4. Promote quality Service delivery in decentralized entities;

5. Strengthen frameworks for exercising local autonomy and inter-governmental relations;
6. Fast track the use of ICTs for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery;
7. Build up Data and Information Management Systems to support evidence-based decision making;
8. Strengthen and empower Local Governments to generate and collect revenue;
9. Enhance intergovernmental transfers;
10. Strengthen local Public Financial Management capacity;
11. Developing Sustainable Capacity for effective decentralization;
12. Promote equitable Local Economic Development;
13. Ensuring planned and sustainable urbanization;
14. Domestication of international cooperation and cross border relations;
15. Community Mobilization for National Transformation;
16. Enhance and sustain social local innovations and Voluntary initiatives;
17. Value systems, Accountability and Fight against corruption;
18. Promote Integrated Citizen-centered Local and National Development Planning;
19. Strengthen mechanisms for participation and coordination of non-state actors (JADF);
20. Citizen and community initiatives for transformation to enhance their engagement, empowerment, participation, and accountability;

4.4 Guiding Principles for Decentralization

The Decentralization Policy is formulated based on the aspirations of efficient and accountable institutions for socio-economic transformation that the Government and people of Rwanda aspired to through the Vision 2050. Its conception and implementation are guided by the following principles:

1. **Subsidiarity:** Central Government should have a subsidiary function, only performing functions that cannot be undertaken effectively at the LG level.
2. **National unity, indivisibility and equitable development** will make sure that decentralization is not used as an excuse – either deliberately or accidentally- for national disintegration and discriminative development.
3. **Demarcation of roles and responsibilities:** Efficiency and accountability in governance and service delivery require that there must be clear separation of powers, functions, and responsibilities between political, administrative and technical entities. Without this separation, downward accountability will be compromised, and LGs might not perform as expected.
4. **Local autonomy:** LGs are endowed with decision making authority to facilitate local innovation and creativity in addressing local livelihood and development challenges.
5. **Government as a single system or entity (whole-of-government):** Decentralization aims at creating sub-national Governments with considerable autonomy while maintaining the authority of one Government as required more so in a unitary state like Rwanda. Government entities have an obligation to work together towards the same national goals.
6. **Recognizing that “one size does not fit all”,** decentralization shall be undertaken in different ways by different sectors depending on the nature of the sector and services to be provided. LGs must be treated differently because of their unique needs, strengths, and challenges.
7. **Accountability:** Inter-governmental relations should be characterized by vertical and

horizontal accountability linkages that are clear, transparent, and cost-effective.

- 8. Gender equality and inclusive governance:** The Rwandan society is demographically constituted of men and women, youth, people with disabilities and historically marginalized groups whose interests and needs must be recognized, and they are given equal opportunities to participate in governance and development activities at all levels.

5 POLICY FRAMEWORK

Despite the significant achievements and successes of the decentralization policy in Rwanda, several challenges persist. These include, but are not limited to, limited financing and investment in capacity development (human resources and facilities, and coordination). These challenges are so critical that if not addressed, can hamper, or slow down the decentralization outcomes as envisaged in the policy. To realize the participatory governance and equitable development aspirations, areas of focus of this policy were defined to address the aforementioned challenges.

Each Pillar outlined in this policy is linked with their priority areas as follows:

Pillar 1: Sectoral Decentralization and Service Delivery

Policy issues:

1. Sectoral decentralization requires fast-tracking as sectoral ministries and government specialized agencies continue to perform functions that can be done better and faster by the Local Governments.
2. Issues in quality-of-service delivery in the country as highlighted by citizen satisfaction.
3. Low level of the use of ICTs for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.
4. Limited availability and use of data and information management systems at Local Government level.

Priority area 1: Define Central and Local Government structures with clear roles, responsibilities, and functions

1. Review the decentralized administrative structures aiming at strengthening the Cell as the center of service delivery:
 - The Village for citizen mobilization;
 - The Cell as a center of service delivery and data collection for development;
 - The Sector as a center for coordination and oversight of volunteerism system in Local Government;
 - The City of Kigali / Districts as center for overall planning, implementation of policies and programs, capacity building of lower decentralized entities including Councils at all levels and resource mobilization as well as project management hub.
2. Review the structure of local Councils and strengthen their capacity to perform their functions including effective citizens' representation and accountability;
3. Put in place appropriate legal and institutional support, as well as adequate infrastructures at Sector and Cell levels to deliver services to the expectation of citizens and stakeholders;
4. Carry out the administrative, financial, and human resource reforms in decentralized entities that facilitate Local Government to acquire qualified personnel and adequate human resource management that are aligned with the functions and service delivery demands at each level.

Priority area 2: Mainstream and rationalize sectoral decentralization process

1. Take stock of decentralized functions across sectors and clearly define functions to be devolved, delegated, or deconcentrated powers and authority;
2. Redefine roles and responsibilities between different layers of Government for enhancing synergy among implementation actors;
3. Ensure that any proposed sectoral policy, law, and strategic plan is strongly scrutinized for its conformity with decentralization principles before approval;
4. Develop a legal framework on sectoral decentralization;
5. Capacitate both multi-stakeholders and sectors on decentralization principles and what they entail in terms of decentralizing responsibility assignments;
6. Conduct a rigorous and continual awareness on sector decentralization mostly at Central Government, with special focus on newly recruited and appointees in all sectors.

Priority area 3: Strengthen coordination arrangements for decentralization

1. Strengthen mechanisms to improve coordination of stakeholders involved in the implementation of decentralization policy, considering differences between actors both local and national level.

Priority area 4: Promote quality service delivery in decentralized entities

1. Improve accessibility on information related to services by organizing regular social gatherings to create active dialogues, as well as strengthening team spirit throughout different service providers;
2. Develop a service delivery system in decentralized entities that promote service culture, employee engagement, quality service and customer experience;
3. Improve accountability/transparency mechanisms for service delivery.

Priority area 5: Strengthen frameworks for exercising local autonomy and inter-governmental relations

1. Establish platforms for regular dialogues and clear channels of communication within and between Local and Central Government;
2. Put in place mechanisms that improve inter-governmental dialogue platforms on decentralization and policy formulation;
3. Review the structural set up and reform the management of existing intergovernmental platforms to facilitate closer, regular, interaction and dialogue between Central and Local Government actors.

Priority area 6: Fast track the use of ICTs for enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery

1. Strengthen the use of ICT to promote efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery;
2. Increase investing in ICT infrastructures to ensure access to all Local Government entities up to the Cell level;
3. Conduct regular ICT awareness and digital literacy campaigns across the country;
4. Put in place mechanisms to avail and fast track service access points at local level especially the Cell level.

Priority area 7: Build up Data and Information Systems to support evidence-based decision making

1. Put in place a robust Local Government data management system that will provide data for evidence-based decision making and planning;
2. Establish Community data center at cell level;
3. Make the village the source of basic information;
4. Strengthen the use of ICT tools in data collection and analysis;
5. Develop data and information management protocols in decentralized services.

Pillar 2: Fiscal and Financial decentralization**Policy issues:**

1. Limited economic base for maximizing Local Government own revenue potentialities, most districts have a narrow economic base, which cannot be explored to generate and collect sufficient local revenue.
2. Decentralized tax revenue sources are limited (i.e., rental tax, trading license and property tax).
3. The fact that Local Government cannot auto finance, meaning that there are some issues that need to be handled to allow Local Government to maximize the revenue collection for instance.
4. The capacity gap in the matter related to Public Financial Management is still critical at decentralized entities.

Priority area 1: Strengthen and empower Local Governments to generate and collect revenue

1. Assessment of the range of decentralized taxes on a regular (annual) basis with a view to enhance collection capacity of Local Government and improve the experience of taxpayers in service delivery and efficiency.
2. Continuously to use new tools to increase efficiency in local revenues collection and management

Priority area 2: Enhance intergovernmental transfers

1. Strengthen intergovernmental fiscal transfer mechanisms by reviewing the allocation formula and shifting from earmarked transfers to block grant.

Priority area 3: Strengthen local Public Financial Management capacity

1. Strengthen Public Financial Management systems at Districts and their subsidiary entities through peer review and peer learning;
2. Enhance the knowledge and skills of Local Government personnel in strategic Public Financial Management functions and resource mobilization in all Local Governments.

Pillar 3: Capacity Development for decentralized entities

Policy issues:

1. Limited staff capacity in Local Government: The Local Government faces institutional and human resource constraints, which undermine the effectiveness of decentralization;
2. Low uptake of systematic induction for newly elected leaders, recruited staff and systematic coaching, mentoring and trainings which affects the career development of Local Government personnel;
3. Limited capacity to handle the volume of services decentralized from the Central government .

Priority area 1: Develop Sustainable Capacity for effective Decentralization

1. Strengthen coordination of capacity development for Local Government entities;
2. Establish electronic platforms for capacity building and development of Local Government personnel such as e-Learning and online induction;
3. Ensure that District Councils and lower-level Councils are strengthened with the requisite tools and appropriate structures to become effective political mechanisms for people's representation and accountability;
4. Put in place an appropriate institutional framework to guide the Local Government public service, to define how Local Government staff needs are determined, recruited, trained, deployed, remunerated, motivated, appraised, promoted, disciplined, and retired, cognizant of concerns for career development and job security;
5. To revamp Rwanda Management Institute (RMI) to effectively and sustainably address issues of capacity of Local Government;
6. Ensure continued adequate coordination of Local Government capacity development by different stakeholders in various fields.

Pillar 4: Local Economic Development

Policy issues:

1. Limited tapping into economic development opportunities at local level. Many economic opportunities are unexploited partly due to limited focus and inadequate capacity of local authorities to creatively turn them into opportunities for livelihood security, employment, and local economic growth;
2. Inadequate engagement and partnership between Local Governments and Trade and Investment sector;
3. Limited public-private community partnership to exploit local development potentialities as it appears that Local Governments are investing rather than looking for investors;
4. Inadequate legal framework determining the functioning of secondary and satellites cities and their structures;
5. Citizens have limited knowledge and benefits on EAC regional integration and other regional and international cooperation.

Priority area 1: Promote equitable local economic development

1. Invest in local development infrastructure (including roads, markets,) to expand local livelihoods and economic development opportunities;

2. Promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) to attract private capital investments especially in rural areas and strategic sectors and mobilize citizens for production as well;
3. Establish mechanisms to support PPPs that benefit local poor people (with special attention to youth, women and PWDs);
4. Strengthen Local Government capacity to manage PPPs;
5. Develop guideline on incentives for private investment in LED projects;
6. Enhance efficiency and effectiveness of twinning and partnership of Local Government within and out of the country as a tool of promoting the socio-economic development;
7. Mainstream climate change and green growth schemes in decentralized agencies.

Priority area 2: Ensuring planned and sustainable urbanization

1. Put in place mechanisms (such as guidelines, legal instruments, etc) for categorizing urban centers as Local Government entities and for equating them with the traditional administrative structures (District, Sector, Cell, Village) for effective management and clarity;
2. Develop mechanisms on rural and urban development (urban, secondary and satellite cities and towns) as poles of economic growth with provision of affordable housing, waste management, physical planning, and employment creation;
3. Put in place mechanisms (including criteria) to identify and demarcate areas and sites for urbanization and agriculture, as well ensure that urban areas are created on the basis of solid decision processes informed by feasibility and long-term scenario-based planning;
4. Put in place mechanisms to ensure that urban areas are properly governed in line with internationally and nationally defined standards;
5. Ensure that urban development processes are aligned with basic infrastructures and essential facilities such as water, electricity, transport, telecommunication and security, so as not to undermine human wellbeing.

Priority area 3: Domestication of international cooperation and cross border relations

1. Put in place mechanisms to raise awareness of local political and civic leaders on regional and international integration activities;
2. Review the regional integration and international cooperation mechanisms to enhance representation of Local Governments' and decentralized entities' interests;
3. Develop mechanisms to support Local Governments to initiate, participate or otherwise engage in regional cooperation activities that benefit their districts or localities, while safeguarding the territorial integrity and security of the country.

Pillar 5: Governance imperatives for national transformation

1. Inadequate Communication and Social Behavior Change for peaceful communities
2. Limited support to social local innovations and voluntary initiatives;
3. Limited data evidence-based planning and monitoring;
4. Slight participation and engagement of citizens and inadequate coordination of stakeholders.

Priority area 1: Community mobilization for national transformation

1. Develop a community mobilization strategy with emphasis on citizen participation and engagement;

2. Streamline communication systems at all levels to enhance inclusive and accountable service delivery;
3. Formulate a clear communication strategy with appropriate mechanisms for feedback and increase public access to information;
4. Develop a regulatory framework and standard communication guidelines across Local Governments to ensure standardized management of information on decentralization;
5. Establish stakeholder dialogue platforms at different levels to facilitate regular free exchange of information and feedback on decentralization activities.

Priority area 2: Enhance and Sustain social local innovations and voluntary initiatives

1. Undertake measures to ensure that the spirit of volunteerism is continuously entrenched among Rwandans in rural and urban areas, as a way of strengthening citizen's participation and ownership of development activities;
2. Review the framework for volunteerism and establish appropriate incentives to sustain it;
3. Strengthen the management system of Home-Grown Initiatives to ensure their sustainability for the benefit of Rwandans;
4. Develop and implement appropriate frameworks for specific groups aiming at improving their employment and development to deal with problematic situations and become active in their communities.

Priority area 3: Value systems, accountability and fighting against corruption

1. Zero tolerance for corruption and the efforts in the fight against corruption in decentralized entities;
2. Consolidate the efforts to promote the culture of transparency and accountability in decentralized entities;
3. Strengthen the use of mobile technology and applications to empower citizens to report corruption cases and to provide services to minimize human interface that increases susceptibility to corruption in Local Government;
4. Put in place appropriate mechanisms to empower citizens to keep the Local Government accountable without Central Government intervention;
5. Review the local accountability structure and strengthen a new culture of citizen-state relation and integrity.

Priority 4: Promote integrated citizen-centered local and national development planning

1. Establish appropriate frameworks for decentralized bottom up and inclusive local planning by revamping Consultative Committee on Development of Cell to be effective vessels for bottom-up planning, monitoring and evaluation;
2. Identify capacity gaps and develop a short to medium-term plan to build up the knowledge, skills, and capacity for effective decentralized planning;
3. Put in place mechanisms to reinforce the planning function in the Local Government system to enhance evidence-based planning, bottom-up needs identification, such as Imihigo, Umuganda, and Inteko z'Abaturage;
4. Put in place data evidence-based planning and monitoring tools with reliable databanks and analysis systems at Cell level;
5. Establish practical guidelines for bottom-up planning and incentive mechanisms to encourage results-oriented and evidence-based planning.

Priority 5: Strengthen mechanisms for participation and coordination of non-state actors (JADF)

1. Strengthen Joint Action Development Forum (JADF) mechanism;
2. Provide incentives to encourage partnership between Local Governments and non-state actors;
3. Strengthen existing mechanisms that ensure Public, CSOs, FBOs and private sector representatives actively participate in the local development planning processes, implementation of decentralization as well as improve coordination of stakeholders involved.

Priority area 6: Citizen and community initiatives for transformation to enhance their engagement, empowerment, participation and accountability

1. Develop and implement a national multi-media program of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) focusing on citizens' rights and responsibilities in development;
2. Design and implement a comprehensive, systematic, and sustainable, citizen-centered civic education and awareness raising program in a holistic and participatory manner, focusing on the literacy levels of all citizens;
3. Enhance mechanisms that enable more effective and sustain citizen engagement, participation in local governance and economic development;
4. Encourage and facilitate nonstate institutions to integrate the principles of the decentralization policy into their interventions and engagement with citizens;
5. Put in place mechanisms to ensure that all citizens have access to information on governance, public administration, service delivery and economic opportunities in line with the country's modernization and social transformation agenda;
6. Put in place mechanisms to enhance collaboration and partnership with non-state institutions in areas of civic education focusing on issues of accountability, citizens' participation, and local development;

6 IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS AND COORDINATION

Implementation of this policy will be supported by effective and integrated collaboration between all concerned stakeholders. Furthermore, active involvement of all stakeholders across sectors is crucial to ensure successful implementation of this policy. These include Central Government, Local Government, private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), financial institutions, development partners and communities

6.1. Role and responsibilities

Governance Cluster

Inter-sectoral coordination will be achieved through two key mechanisms: the regular meetings of 'Governance Cluster' Ministerial level and the Governance and decentralization Sector Working Group (G&DSWG). The Governance Cluster meetings will provide a high-level forum for consultation on key policies, strategies, and programs prior to their submission to Cabinet, as well as monitoring of implementation of Presidential pledges, post Cabinet Actions, National Dialogue and Leadership Retreat resolutions.

Governance and decentralization Sector Working Group (G&DSWG)

The Governance and decentralization Sector Working Group shall remain the primary forum for technical coordination at national level. The G&DSWG will continue to be led by the Ministry responsible for Local Governance and Decentralization and a development partner shall be nominated as the Co-chair. Key civil society networks will be permanently represented on the G&DSWG.

The G&DSWG will also be restructured to create dedicated technical working groups or sub-committees focusing on key elements of the policy. The members and terms of reference of technical working groups or sub-committees will be determined in consultation with stakeholders.

The Ministry in charge of Local Governance and Decentralization

The implementation of this policy will be led by the Ministry in charge of Local Governance and Decentralization in collaboration with other public, private, and civil society institutions as well as development partners, specifically will be responsible for:

- Developing and disseminating decentralization policy and its legal frameworks;
- Developing institutional and human resource capacities, including assessing and building the capacities of decentralized entities;
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation of decentralization policy;
- Mobilizing resources for sector activities, including promoting partnerships for joint development efforts by stakeholders at local level;
- Strengthening the Governance and decentralization Sector Working Group;

- Mobilizing resources for policy implementation;
- Working with stakeholders to document the lessons learned from implementing decentralization and adopt best practices around the world to implement this policy with excellence.

Monitoring and evaluation will be conducted through existing Government coordination frameworks. The Ministry in charge of Local Governance and Decentralization will remain at the centre of coordinating all activities related to:

- Facilitating cross sectorial implementation of the decentralization policy and accelerating the envisaged process;
- Advising on harmonization of legislation on decentralization and harmonize sector policies to reflect devolution;
- Overseeing Ministerial re-alignment to reflect changing roles and responsibilities of different Ministries vis à vis decentralization;
- Approving indicators to monitor decentralization implementation.

Sector Ministries and affiliated Agencies

Sector Ministries will ensure that national institutions responsible for managing decentralization and Local Governance are adequately capacitated in terms of financial resource mobilization, technical knowledge and skills, institutional resources, and political support to effectively take decentralization to the desired level.

They will be also responsible for supporting the implementation and monitoring of decentralization in regard to putting in place appropriate structures and staffing at national and decentralized levels, coordinating capacity development and resource mobilization to ensure service delivery and Local Government capacity development mechanisms are implemented.

Decentralized levels

At District level, JADF, including the Governance Commissions and Governance Sub-Commissions, will remain the key forum for ensuring coordination of government and non-governmental actors in Governance. Every year, development partners and non-governmental actors will present to District authorities a detailed plan of their interventions in the district, disaggregated for each sector. The JADFs will ensure that development programs are aligned with District development priorities and a District wide plan of governance and decentralization activities by Governmental and non-governmental actors will be elaborated as part of the District Development strategy. This process will be facilitated by the District JADF framework.

At Sector level, the Sector administration shall be responsible for coordinating governance and decentralization interventions, working through Cell and Village level structures as necessary.

At District levels, civil society organizations intervening in the Governance sector will continue to actively participate in JADFs helping to ensure a coordinated approach to delivery.

Private sector

Will be responsible for mobilizing resources and delivering services as well as collaborating with Local Governments.

Development Partners

Will provide technical and financial support to the implementation of decentralization policy, ensuring that support is aligned with national policy and strategic priorities.

Civil Society Organizations and media

Will have key roles in decentralization dynamism in Rwanda, including, but not limited to:

- **Sensitization of citizens on their role**, rights and responsibilities and supporting citizens to hold service providers to account: civil society organizations and media are encouraged to actively empower citizens to understand their rights and responsibilities, to monitor service delivery quality and proactively engage with duty bearers where service delivery is found to be wanting.
- **Participation in policy and programme development:** Given their experience of delivering services at community level, civil society organizations and media are solicited to participate in policy formulation and programme development, implementation and evaluation processes.
- **Advocacy:** The civil society is the voice of non-state actors. Though their primary role shall be to deliver on transformational national agenda as defined in this policy, the civil society shall strive to conduct thorough well-informed analysis for evidence-based advocacy Communities

Will be responsible for:

- Actively participate in the planning and budgeting processes so that their needs and priorities are identified and catered for;
- Holding accountable their local leaders that compromise with decentralization principles;
- Participating regularly in the mechanisms aiming to empower them;
- Participating in evaluations of programs and provide other forms of feedback to policy makers and program managers;
- Increasing the engagement and ownership in the implementation of Government policies and programs aiming at improving their wellbeing;
- Provide feedback to service providers.

6.2. Implementation plan

The Government of Rwanda is committed to managing the decentralization implementation process of the policy in a transparent and participatory manner. In this context, the Ministry in charge of Local Government, designated as the lead institution for overseeing and coordinating the implementation of this policy will develop the medium-term plan for its implementation through the Decentralization Implementation Plan. The strategic and operational plans will, however, remain flexible frameworks to be adjusted as need arises.

6.3. Monitoring and Evaluation

The implementation of this policy will be monitored and evaluated to ensure that it is in line with the set objectives and that all institutions comply with the principles and practices of decentralization. A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework will be developed to accommodate different systems to enable all stakeholders to access information on a timely basis without jeopardizing the implementation process.

Proper documentation of processes, results and lessons learned during the implementation process will be a critical component of the M&E framework.

7 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Political will

This policy requires political will and engagement from Central Government leadership to decentralized levels. Ministries, Departments and Agencies in collaboration with relevant stakeholders are requested to actively contribute in the successful implementation of this policy.

7.2. Financial implication

The implementation of the national decentralization policy requires strong and supportive partnerships in terms of financial and technical resources. Given its broad and long-term nature, the accuracy in costing will be translated into specific strategies and actionable tasks. The Government of Rwanda will prepare realistic cost plans that consolidate inputs and interventions of various development actors linked to decentralization. To this end, the Government will ensure that resources are available, intergovernmental transfers are provided in suitable and appropriate manner; transfers are properly utilized, and Local Governments are able to mobilize additional local financing on their own.

The focus on strengthening Public Financial Management performance in Local Governments will require institutional and legal reforms to enable effective fiscal and financial decentralization.

7.3. Legal implications

The implementation of the national decentralization policy requires the support of a legal framework. The Government will streamline legislation to address gaps and to facilitate effective implementation of the policy.

8 COMMUNICATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Government appreciates the sensitivities and stakeholder interests in decentralization. To ensure effective involvement of stakeholders, the implementation process will emphasize communication and partnerships.

The Government will establish appropriate mechanisms to ensure that all stakeholders have access to up-to-date information on the implementation process as deemed necessary. The Ministry in charge of Local Governance and Decentralization in partnership with line Ministries will develop appropriate communication strategies, and facilitate alignment of sectoral policies, programs, and budgets with the decentralization policy.

The Ministry in charge of Local Governance and Decentralization will involve partners to assist in disseminating information about the policy contributing to its implementation. These partners will be encouraged to mainstream decentralization in their programs, participating in spurring its implementation throughout and dissemination of information.

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