

Case study: Rwanda Joint Governance Assessment¹

The Rwanda Joint Governance Assessment (JGA) is a good example of a case in which the principles of harmonisation and alignment are built into an assessment, and it illustrates the opportunities and difficult challenges involved.

- You are going to analyse this case and discuss the value and feasibility of carrying out a joint assessment for local governance and decentralisation in the country context, subsequently answering the following questions:
- Could a joint governance assessment be useful for measuring local governance and decentralisation in sectors in your country? Why or why not?
- To what extent can a joint approach to local governance assessment help to improve aid effectiveness?

How did the Rwanda Joint Governance Assessment come about?

The Rwanda JGA arose from a particular context and set of circumstances. Among all parties there was a sense of dissatisfaction with existing processes of governance assessment and dialogue, which were fragmented and had led to miscommunication and misunderstanding. The weak evidence base on Rwanda's governance performance was a key obstacle to informed discussion. This was partly a reflection of the fact that "objective" assessment of governance problems is particularly challenging in Rwanda because there are still important social and political divisions in society left by sectarianism and genocide.

There are a number of existing information sources on governance in Rwanda, but their quality is mixed and coverage is incomplete. The report published in 2006 under the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM, 2006) is generally well regarded but has generated little in the way of follow-up actions and monitoring. While the increasing number of studies and indicators have brought many issues to attention, some stakeholders in Rwanda have criticised certain sources (indicators of corruption in particular) for being inaccurate or insensitive to Rwanda's specific history and institutional context. Because of Rwanda's troubled history, international comparative indicators are of only limited use in informing the design of governance reforms at the national level. There is a particular sense of frustration on the part of the Government of Rwanda that many of the indicators and commentaries on governance in the country appear to repeat the same message year after year, without acknowledging the important governance reforms that have taken place.

The JGA was initiated in response to the recognition by both the government and donors that processes for assessment of and dialogue on governance were not working well. At the Development Partners Meeting in November 2006, President Kagame called for governance issues and concerns to be discussed much more openly between the Government of Rwanda and its development partners. The President's challenge provided an important impetus for the JGA and a signal that the process would be taken seriously at the highest political levels.

Division of Tasks and Responsibilities

Reflecting the joint ownership of the JGA by the Government of Rwanda and the development agencies, the assessment was directed by a steering committee co-chaired by the Minister of Local Government (whose portfolio includes responsibilities for broad programmes of governance reform) and the Manager of the World Bank Country. Members included other government ministers and heads of agencies. Supporting functions were provided by a technical committee and the Rwanda Governance Advisory

¹ Adapted from Williams et al. (2009).

Council. A team of international and local consultants managed by The Policy Practice Ltd undertook the research and analysis, organised consultations with key stakeholders and drafted the report in consultation with the steering and technical committees. The primary responsibilities for each stage in the assessment process are shown below:

Action

Decision to conduct assessment	Government and development partners at 2006 Development Partners Meeting
Terms of reference for assessment	Joint Steering Committee
Funding of assessment	Selected development partners (DFID and EC)
Recruitment of consultant team	International competitive tender managed by UNDP. Decisions taken by Joint Steering Committee.
Research, consultations, logistics, drafting	Consultant team
Comments on first draft	Channelled through Joint Steering Committee
Preparation of final draft	Consultant team
Adoption of report	Joint Steering Committee, Cabinet
Dissemination of results	Government and development partners
Practical follow-up	Government and development partners

Objectives and Guiding Principles

The JGA was designed to be jointly owned and directed by the Government of Rwanda and its development partners, to strengthen donor coordination and to follow the principles set out below.

The Joint Steering Committee defined three objectives for the JGA:

1. to undertake a thorough and rigorous analysis of existing institutions, laws and practices affecting governance in Rwanda and to propose policy improvements
2. to define and monitor indicators to measure performance, assess progress, highlight weaknesses and establish priorities for action
3. to make recommendations on establishing an ongoing system for monitoring the agreed indicators, including training for the Rwanda Governance Advisory Council

The committee defined ten principles for the assessment, namely that it should

1. be jointly owned by the Government of Rwanda and its development partners
2. be conducted in an open and consultative manner

3. be forward looking and aim to provide a basis for identifying priorities for action
4. be acceptable to development partners as a basis for their own governance reporting
5. be credible by virtue of the thoroughness and rigour of the analysis
6. take due account of the specific governance and historical context of Rwanda
7. analyse underlying explanations of governance that need to be addressed to bring about improvements
8. be of high professional quality and based on sound evidence
9. provide a basis for well-informed ongoing dialogue among stakeholders on governance issues
10. establish a monitoring framework for continuing assessments over the coming years

It was recognised from the outset that there would sometimes be tradeoffs and compromises to be made between these objectives and principles. In resolving potential conflicts, it was agreed that the guiding principle of the joint governance assessment would be to provide a basis for joint ownership and constructive discussion in order to improve the quality and usefulness of dialogue around issues of good governance.

What did the Joint Governance Assessment achieve?

It is too early to judge the results of the Rwanda JGA, particularly because it is intended to be an ongoing process rather than a single report. However, the most significant thing is the strong government involvement: the initiative originated principally with the government, senior political figures reviewed drafts, the final report was approved by the cabinet, and the government has led in the development of a results matrix of governance indicators. In addition, initial reactions suggest that the JGA has so far been quite successful in creating a common focus on some priority issues, even though there are areas where the government's view differs from that of some of the donors. The report provides a wide-ranging analysis of governance issues, identifies clear priorities and recommendations, and proposes 45 indicators for ongoing monitoring. An implementation working group on governance under the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy is being set up and will be responsible for devising and implementing an integrated governance action plan.

Reaching this point has not been a straightforward process. At times there were difficult exchanges on the more politically sensitive issues raised by the report. Viewed positively, these difficulties are an indication that the process enabled meaningful discussion to take place. Although the final report represents a degree of compromise between the views of the various parties, it is by no means a lowest common denominator, and it has succeeded in opening up the debate on sensitive issues. However, it was also evident to the consultants that it was difficult to move the discussion beyond the functioning of formal institutions to examine the underlying structural political factors and informal power relationships that many governance professionals regard as being of fundamental importance. This reflected the limitations of the terms of reference, the preference given to easily measurable indicators and the sensitivity of some of the issues raised by the political-economy analysis. Consequently, the final report adopts a rather technocratic view of good governance and focuses its recommendations on reform options for improving formal institutions.

In making this observation, it is important to note that the JGA report does not ignore issues related to informal institutions and how power is perceived and operates in practice. There is a good deal of discussion in the report on sensitive questions relating to political space, the fairness of political competition, party financing, inclusiveness, non-discrimination and the use of laws to prevent sectarianism. In addition, issues of perception relating to government legitimacy and inclusiveness are also discussed and reflected in the framework of indicators. In the view of the consultants, these are essential elements of

the analysis, and the discussion needs to be taken further. It is hoped that the JGA has provided the groundwork for further analysis and dialogue.

Acknowledging the complexity and difficulty of the JGA, most participants have expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the process so far. It is recognised that the JGA represents a great improvement on previous processes for governance dialogue and assessment, and there has been a significant opening of the debate on challenging issues. The report is generally considered to be a balanced statement, which recognises the achievements that have been made, does not make light of the remaining governance challenges and sets out a substantial and meaningful agenda for change.