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Local Governance Capacity-Building for Full-Range Participation: Concepts, Frameworks and Experiences in African Countries

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Abstract

Good governance as an act of steering people's development involves full-range participation and embraces transparency, accountability and equity. It requires effective capacities on the part of all stakeholders at community, local, national, regional and global levels, and in all sectors, i.e., public, private and civil society. African countries that have experienced visible successes in decentralized governance have conceived their local governance policies and strategies both horizontally and vertically. There is currently a strong need for capacity-building in local governance to focus on empowering all stakeholders for their full-range socio-politico-economic participation in decentralized governance.

Keywords: good governance, local governance, vertical and horizontal decentralization, full-range participation.

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I. Introduction

Local governance is being promoted in a number of African countries because it is believed that it provides a structural arrangement through which local people and communities with support from other national, regional as well as international actors can participate in the fight against poverty at close range. However, it is acknowledged that various capacities of a multiplicity of stakeholders and actors need to be strengthened to meet the requirements of effective and responsive local governance. In this paper, issues and challenges related to capacity-building for local governance in Africa are discussed.

The first part of the paper discusses the understanding and various elements of good governance in general and local governance in particular. In the second part, the issue of vertical and horizontal capacity weaknesses currently experienced in most African countries is discussed, especially as it underpins approaches and focal points for local governance capacity-building in these countries. Questions concerning global actors in local governance and the deeper meanings of participation are raised and discussed, challenging the popular notion of participation, which focuses only on planning and production.

The third part of the paper presents a framework for holistic capacity-building going beyond training and focusing on objectives, socio-politico-bureaucratic will and commitment as well as institutional arrangements at the central government level to support sustained coordinated implementation of decentralized governance policies and at the local level for sustaining participation by the grass-root communities. The examples from Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda are used to illustrate the practical implications of the conceptual arguments of the paper.

II. A Working Understanding of Governance and “Local Governance”

While the quest for good governance has been ongoing in Africa¹ for quite some time now, a common understanding on what constitutes good governance is fairly elusive. To meaningfully have a focused discussion on good governance or local governance, one needs to first have a working understanding of the concept. The author has benefited from advisory work conducted in various African countries designing governance programmes with various stakeholders and actors in governance and has gained a credible understanding of governance and good governance, at least as expressed by these stakeholders.

A. Good governance

The word ‘governance’ has its origin in the Greek language and it refers to steering. Steering, for example a ship, is not only a matter of keeping the ship afloat and in forward, backward, or sideways motion. It strongly demands knowledge of the direction and ensuring that the ship is constantly on course in that direction. Above all, for everyone in the ship and those waiting for its arrival, a captain can claim good seamanship only when the ship gets to where it is expected safely and in good shape. As an act of steering a people's socio-politico-economic development, governance is a multifaceted compound situation of institutions, systems, structures, processes, procedures, practices, relationships, and leadership behaviour in the exercise of social, political, economic, and managerial/administrative authority in the running of public or private affairs. Good governance is the exercise of this authority with the participation, interest, and livelihood of the governed as the driving force.² In most discourse

¹ See United Nations Conference on Governance in Africa: “Governance: The Africa Experience: Working paper 1 (Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa 1998)

² This understanding of good governance was developed by the author during the consultative workshops with stakeholders for the design of programmes for strengthening good governance in Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania and Liberia. It incorporates also the definition of governance by

related to governance, the most debatable issue is not whether governance refers to the exercise of authority. What generates heated debate is mostly centred on the elements that would constitute good governance.

B. Elements of good governance³

A universally agreed position on what constitutes good governance is hard to come by. However, conceptually the following basic elements are found in a situation of what one would call good governance. The elements were arrived at during workshops for designing governance-strengthening programmes in Uganda, Rwanda, and Liberia. It is interesting to note that while they were proposed, discussed, and agreed to by various stakeholders at the national level, in a general way, they agree with the universal understanding of governance.

- Constitutionalism (guaranteeing separation of powers, checks and balances, and power sharing as well as a generalized societal attitude where both the governors and the governed refer to the constitution as the guiding law, especially in the resolution of conflicting public decisions. Constitutionalism refers to the structural and procedural provisions as well as to the behavioural attitude).
- Rule of law (where every activity, every conflict and every exercise of power respect the provisions of accepted laws, rules and regulations).
- Justice (an effective system of justice which is just, fair, and accessible to all, including the poor).
- Security of person and property (this should include security in all its aspects, e.g., food security, job security, social security, etc., to ensure that cosmetic peace which can erupt into violence any time is avoided).

the United Nations Development Programme. See UNDP Governance for Sustainable Development: (January 1997), page 3: "Governance can be seen as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels". See UNDP, Reconceptualizing Governance, Discussion Paper 2 of 1997.

³ Refer to the official documents of programmes for strengthening good governance in Rwanda, Liberia and Uganda. They can be viewed on www.unpan.org.

- Electoral and participatory democracy (where the population participates in deciding on their leaders through their voting power and also through their voice in deciding how and with what policies they are led and in determining the direction and quality of their development).
- Respect for human rights and basic freedoms (of the press, expression, worship, conscience, etc.).
- Transparency, accountability, ethics and integrity in the conduct of public and private corporate affairs (accountability from a political, managerial, legal, and moral point of view).
- Equity (both intra and inter-generation) encompassing cross-cutting issues of gender equity, environment management, health, and debt management to ensure that the generations of today do not create poor conditions for the generations of tomorrow.
- Informed citizenry (through an effective free media, education, and access to information).
- Effective and efficient delivery of public services. (These need not be delivered directly by state agents. Other stakeholders from the private and civil society sectors may participate in the delivery).
- At least the minimum of a decent standard of living for all. (This should be the guiding objective of any act of governance).

In discussing constituents of good governance, caution is always required to avoid mistaking structures of governance for good governance. Just for the sake of illustration, it is necessary to have in place laws on which to base the rule of law. However, the mere existence of laws in books does not constitute rule of law; it is only a structural or textual provision that has to be activated on a sustained basis into practice and behaviour of rule of law by both the governors and the governed.

C. Local governance

If we remain confined within this paper's working understanding of governance as a multifaceted

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compound situation of institutions, systems, structures, processes, procedures, practices, relationships, and leadership behaviour in the exercise of social, political, economic, and managerial/administrative authority in the running of public or private affairs, then we will understand “local governance” to refer to the exercise of authority at the local community level.

We need, however, to bear in mind that not every act of governance practised at a local level would constitute local governance. It is possible to have central governance or even foreign governance at the local level. What determines whether governance is local or not is the extent to which the local population is involved in the steering, i.e., in determining the direction according to their local needs, problems, and priorities⁴ and the level to which they are the beneficiaries of the governance.

In this sense, governance ceases to be a matter of government only. It is a situation of multiple inter-linkages and relationships in which different and various actors in the public and private sectors as well as civil society at the local, national and international levels play different roles, sometimes mutually conflicting and sometimes mutually reinforcing and complementary focusing on satisfying the interests and needs of the local community.

While it may be true that “local governments act more in accordance with the needs and priorities of local communities than would higher authorities” (Jeni Klugman, 1994), local governance on its part requires that even higher authorities, in accomplishing their share of the job, work in accordance with the needs and priorities of the

local community and in close partnership with them.

What, then, is local about local governance? Local governance does not make reference to local government or local populations alone. It refers to a situation where whatever a governance actor (an international NGO, a central government institution, a local government agency or a private sector enterprise) does, is planned, implemented, maintained, evaluated, and controlled with the needs, priorities, interests, participation, and well-being of the local population as the central and guiding consideration.

What is local about local governance need not be the actor but rather the needs, interests, priorities, participation, control and well-being of the local population. It is important to have this in mind. Otherwise, we will remain in the structural constraints of equating local governance to local government. For the sake of argument, we will recall that not all local governments work in the interests of the local populations. Some local governments can become dictatorial and exploit the local populations to serve the interests of local leaders.

D. Vertical and horizontal decentralization for effective local governance⁵

For effective local governance, decentralization policies, strategies, legal frameworks, programmes and activities must be conceived from two planes:

- The vertical plane, involving the transfer of authority, functions, responsibilities and resources from central government to local government structures; and

⁴ See John-Mary Kauzya: “Local Governance, Health and Nutrition for All: Problem Magnitude and Challenges with Examples from Uganda and Rwanda”, a paper presented during the Global Forum on Local Governance and Social Services for All (Stockholm, Sweden, 2 to 5 May 2000). An interesting discussion is presented in the report of the Forum: Responding to Citizens’ Needs: Local Governance and Social Services, UNDESA and UNDP, 2001. A fairly exhaustive survey of literature concerning local governance is presented by Jeni Klugman in “Decentralization: A survey of literature from a Human Development Perspective”, Occasional Papers by the Human Development Report Office, New York 1994.

⁵ Most decentralization policies, programmes and activities in African countries are being conceived within these two planes. The cases of the decentralization policies and programmes in Uganda, Rwanda and South Africa are illustrative of this. See Apolo Nsibambi (Ed.): *Decentralization and Civil Society in Uganda: The Quest for Good Governance* (Fontana Publishers, Kampala, 1998), and Government of Rwanda, Ministry of Local Government and Social Affairs: *Decentralization Policy*.

- The horizontal plane, involving the empowerment of grass-root communities to enable them to determine, plan, manage and implement their socio-politico-economic development.

While vertical decentralization requires shifts in central government policy, laws as well as institutional and structural arrangements to provide for the sharing of powers, authority, functions and resources, thus enabling local governments to perform fully, horizontal decentralization may take place without necessarily making adjustments in the laws. However, horizontal decentralization requires determined mobilization and organization of local communities to participate fully in the planning and implementation of socio-economic activities that are aimed at strengthening their capacities to determine and enjoy their socio-economic livelihood.

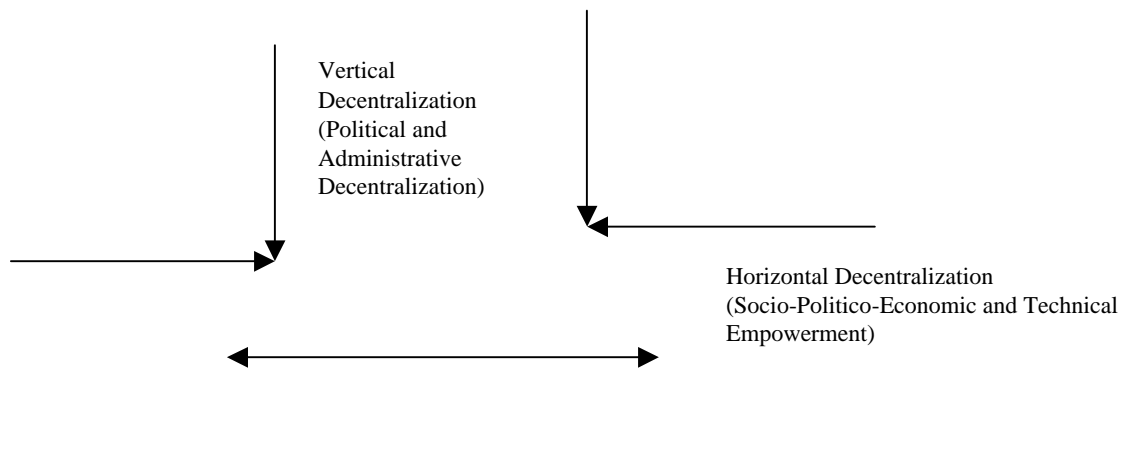
An important linkage between vertical and horizontal decentralization is that in countries used to highly centralized governments and/or dictatorships, horizontal decentralization empowers local populations and prepares them to be able to positively receive and utilize the powers, authority, and resources transferred to

them via vertical decentralization. It is very useful to always engineer efforts of decentralization on the two planes involving all stakeholders. As illustrated in the diagram below, this will achieve two crucial results:

- horizontal decentralization will empower local communities; and
- vertical decentralization will create conducive structural arrangements and transfer of powers, functions, responsibilities and resources that will supplement the empowerment created by vertical decentralization.

Conceiving the two planes of decentralization is also useful in situations where the debate and agreement on formal vertical decentralization involving the transfer of powers, authority, functions, and resources from central government to local governments for various reasons takes longer than needed. In such cases, it is possible and advisable to start establishing programmes, projects and activities that empower local communities via, for example, community-based organizations (CBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This is what happened in Rwanda before the current policy of decentralization.

Diagram one: Vertical and horizontal decentralization



III. Local Governance Capacity-Building

There is often a debate on whether decentralized governance policies should wait for local capacity to be adequate before they are put in place. This debate is not necessarily misplaced but it often misses the point of answering the question as to who are the actors in local governance and therefore whose and which capacities should be developed.

A. Should we wait for local governance capacity to develop?

The argument commonly presented is that local people do not have the requisite capacity for managing local governments, and therefore functions, responsibilities and resources should not be devolved to them. In most cases, such an argument stands in the way of decentralization. Admittedly, it is true that most developing countries, and African countries in particular, present peculiar conditions of multiple weaknesses in capacity where their public sector, civil society, and private sector are weak. However, within the argument of capacity-building for local governance are carried undertones of colonialism. Since the process of development is a process of capacity-building, a country cannot afford to wait for the local governance capacity to develop.

During the 1950s, when Africa started clamouring for political emancipation, the colonial powers at the time were quick to respond that Africans had no capacity to govern themselves. The response from Africa was unanimous. Capacity or no capacity, they had a right to determine their destiny. “By what God-given right are you, the British, empowered to decide the fitness or otherwise of we Africans to govern ourselves?” one of the characters in the famous novel *A Wreath for Udomo*⁶ by Peter Abrahams⁶ asked.

It should not be for the same African leaders who posed this question to reject decentralized local governance telling their compatriots that

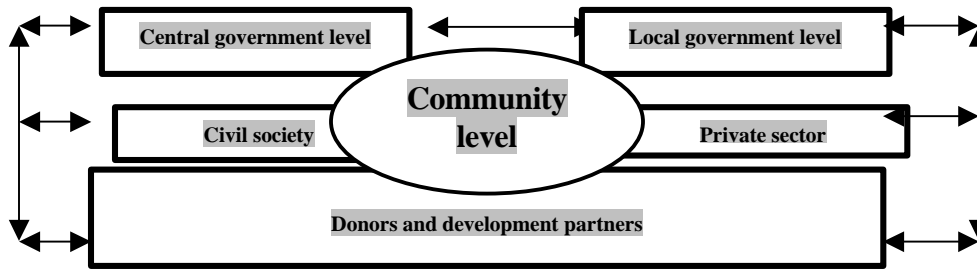
they lack the capacity to govern themselves. This would be local colonialism. Development is a process of progressive and qualitative movement from inability to ability, from incapacity to capacity. Therefore, it is conceptually normal to start from a point of weak local governance capacity and work towards strong local governance capacity. Without this pre-disposition, decentralized governance in most developing countries may never be embarked on.

We could use an analogy of building the capacity of a soccer team. It is impossible to build the capacity of a team if the team is not constituted in the first place. It is impossible to build the capacity of local governments if local governance structures are not put in place within a clear policy that provides for, among other things, building local governance capacity. How would the capacity of a local council, a local executive committee, a local community development non-governmental organization, a local development planning committee, etc. develop if such structures were not constituted in the first place?

B. Whose capacity to develop for local governance?

In addressing issues related to capacity-building for local governance, the tendency is to focus on local government structures such as local government councils, civil servants, local government executive committees, etc. However, taking the understanding of local governance we have adopted, this would be inadequate, for it leaves many players in local governance out of capacity-building efforts. The appropriate way to address the issues and problems of capacity-building for local governance is to first conduct the identification and analysis of the stakeholders and key players. This would enable us first to know who they are, and second to understand what capacities they possess as well as what capacities they lack. We would propose a stakeholders analysis model that departs from a simple question. Who are the stakeholders and key players in local governance? The diagram below gives a simple framework for the analysis of local governance actors.

⁶ See Peter Abrahams: *A Wreath for Udomo*, (African Writers Series).

Diagram two: Simple model for analysing local governance stakeholders

When it comes to local governance, there are many stakeholders and players. They are in the public sector, in the private sector, in civil society, among donors and development partners, and at the local community, national, regional and international levels. The capacity, or lack of it, for local governance can not and should not be pinned only on the local community in question. The appropriate predisposition for capacity-building for local governance is to assess each player's capacity vis-à-vis their roles so that each one's capacity is strengthened to play that role effectively. For example:

- While in many countries central government authorities hesitate to embark on decentralized governance policies for reasons related to inadequate capacity at the local level, it has been discovered that the same central governments do not possess the adequate capacity to analyse, formulate, and effectively manage decentralized governance policies.
- While many donors and development partners have a tendency of blaming local governments of having no capacities to implement local-level development projects, it is often the case that the same donors and development partners do not have the requisite capacity in terms of understanding and working within the local community's cultural and social environments to promote community sensitive development.

The real situation in many developing countries is that inadequate capacity is a problem found among almost all players involved in decentralized governance. The difference is in the ex-

tent and degree to which the capacity is lacking.

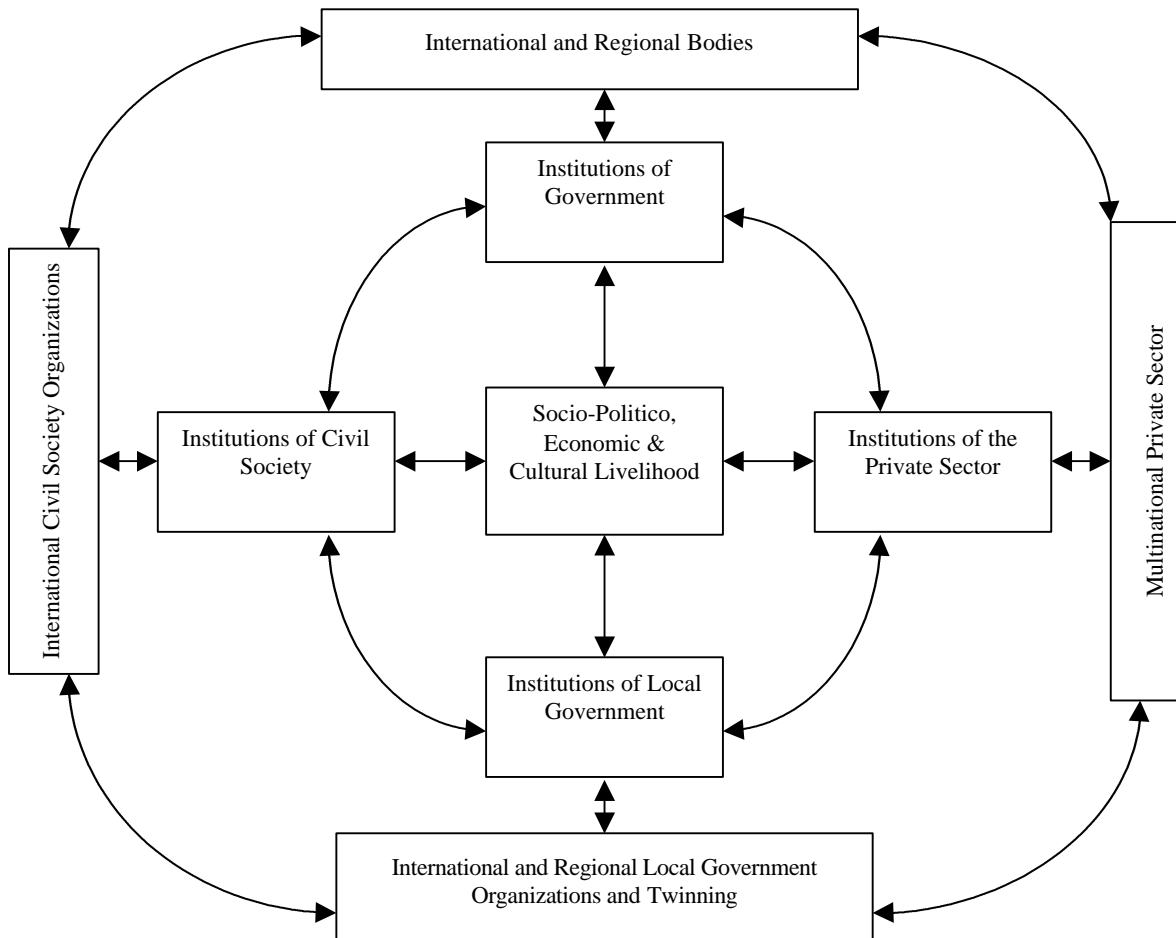
In the context of an increasingly globalizing world, the challenges and requirements of capacity-building for local governance should always be analysed and diagnosed, taking into account the full range of stakeholders' and actors' analysis at the community, local, national, regional and international levels. Such an analysis should always be conducted in a participative manner to allow the stakeholders and actors involved in local governance to share a common understanding of one another's strengths and weaknesses. This would in turn facilitate the process of cooperation, harmonization, and synergy in capacity-building activities. The framework given in the diagram below was used by the author to conduct a governance capacity assessment in Uganda, Rwanda, Liberia, and Tanzania, and was found to be very useful.

C. Local governance capacity-building for full-range participation (Four Ps +C)

We have belaboured the point on local governance as an all-actors-embracing situation, because experience has shown that in most cases local governance capacity-building programmes, projects and activities concentrate on local governments. We need to maintain the distinction between local governments' capacity-building, which would concentrate on local governments, and local governance capacity-building, which would emphasize strengthening the capacities of all the actors in governance at the local level. This would set the appropriate parameters for effective participation in the development process by all actors.

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Diagram three: Grass-roots local governance stakeholders and actors analysis framework

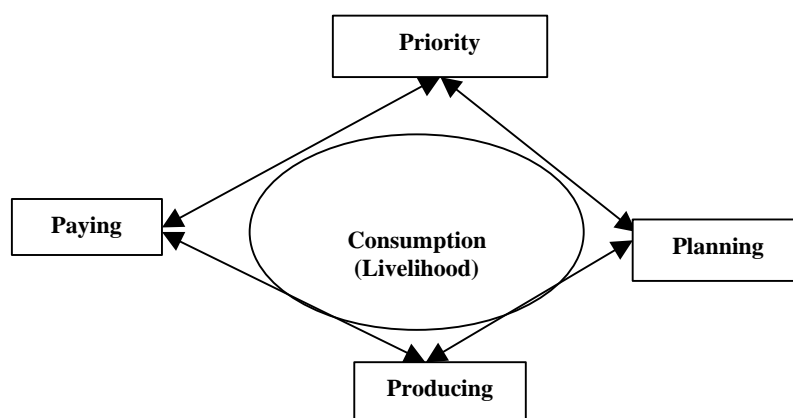


Participation is not a matter of only structural arrangements. It is also a matter of will and capacity. Most advocates of local governance as a vehicle for promoting socio-political-economic development always bank very strongly on the argument that decentralization encourages participation of the local people in determining their development and well-being. However, in the context of poor countries, the extent and nature of the participation itself needs to be understood more deeply.

We are proposing to examine it using the 4 Ps plus C of participation. If participation has to be complete, it must be done at five levels: Priority setting, Planning, Producing, Paying (financing) and Consumption. It is the consumption that

leads to livelihood, but when it is not supported by participation in setting priorities, planning, production and paying, then it is not sustainable. The biggest problem for developing countries is that because of very low or sometimes no income, people expect to participate in consumption without participating in paying. This makes consumption unsustainable because there is no support for production⁷.

⁷ We must add that the causes of low participation of grass-root people in Africa is not only a consequence of poverty in terms of income. The whole issue of participative capacity needs to be assessed to include knowledge, skills, institutional arrangements, awareness, opportunity, etc.

Diagram four: The four Ps plus C of effective participation

On the other hand, often those in positions of authority concentrate on promoting the participation of local people in the four Ps, but they do not provide for participation in consumption. The consequence is that the poor do not see any change in their livelihood even when they have participated.⁸ It should be noted that for purposes of mobilizing the local people to participate, an objective that points to the possible improvement in their consumption is more attractive than any other and therefore worth mentioning.

Local governance, when well practised, more easily and more evidently encourages political participation (e.g., in taking decisions and having a say in who takes up leadership positions), production and delivery by narrowing the physical distance between the service producers/deliverers and consumers as well as by allowing the private sector and NGOs to engage in service production and provision.

⁸ As an example, the Mombela Local Municipality Integrated Development Plan states the objectives of the participation in the IDP to include: obtaining inputs, ensuring acceptable levels of representation, ensuring mutual consensus, ensuring focus on resource mobilization, and promotion of good governance. There is no objective concerning shifts and increases in consumption of the poor.

However, it has to be recognized that when it comes to participation in financing the production and provision of these services, the poor are at a loss. The challenge for developing countries, given their situation of extremely low incomes, is how to encourage the poor to participate in financing the services they need. Most poor populations are quick to advocate for participation but when it reaches the level of participating in the financing they still want some donor or central government to foot the whole bill. The central government on its part gets money from taxes paid by the people; but however efficient and effective a tax system is, if it is taxing a poor population, it will yield poor revenues. There is a limit beyond which a hungry person can milk a hungry cow. The fundamental problem with most African societies is that they suffer from a double weakness: their central and local governments are weak while at the same time their private and civil society sectors are also weak (vertical and horizontal weakness). This double weakness is not only in terms of resources (human, material and financial), it is also in terms of institutions, systems, information, networking, skills, knowledge, etc.

Conceptually, all countries could be placed in four categories as follows: the strong ones where the central and local governments as well as the civil

Diagram five: The double weakness of African countries

		CIVIL SOCIETY & PRIVATE SECTOR	
		STRONG	WEAK
CENTRAL & LOCAL GOVTS.	STRONG	A	B
	WEAK	C	D (African countries)

society and the private sector are all strong (A); the partly strong ones where the central and local governments are strong but with a relatively weak civil society and private sector (B); the partly weak ones where the central and local governments are weak but the civil society and private sector are relatively strong (C); and the weak ones where the central and local governments are weak as well as the civil society and the private sector (D). Most sub-Saharan African countries, especially those that are LDCs, are in category D.⁹

A fundamental component of local governance capacity-building should be dedicated to strengthening the capacity of local communities to generate sustainable income. It is true that the common practice in African countries where the central government controls a lion's share of revenue at the detriment of local governments undermines local governance capacity-building in respect to priority setting, planning, local capital investment, and eventually consumption. However, the point that the revenue of local governments is just a component of the financial capacity of local governance should not be lost. Local governance financing should not be seen

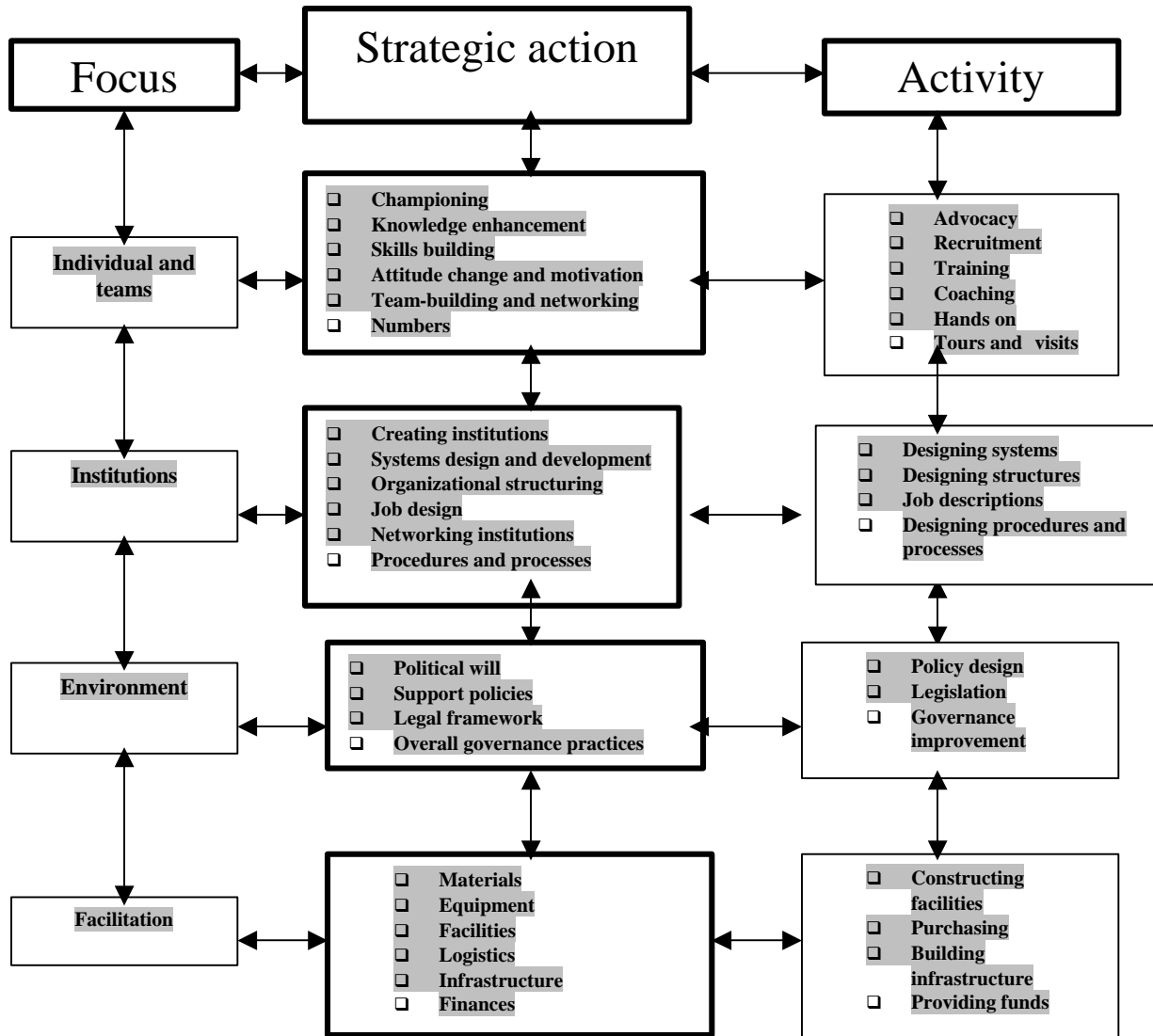
from the point of view of central government and local government revenue-sharing alone. It should be examined in the light of the finance deployment policies of all actors as well. There are many financing institutions—local, regional as well as international—who hesitate to disburse funds to the local community level either because the local levels do not provide guarantees for the funds or because the central government does not accept such disbursements, or both. This jeopardizes the development of the capacities of local communities to manage programmes, projects, and funds even when they have participated in the formulation of such programmes.

A local governance policy that is conceived with capacity-building in mind should include provisions for financing systems that would put funds at the disposal of the local level so that such funds not only cater to the needs of local communities but also provide opportunities for them to develop revenue generation and financial management capacity.¹⁰

⁹ This idea was discussed by Ejevieme Eloho Otopo in his paper "Globalization, economic governance and African Countries" during the Expert Group Meeting organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 28 September 1999.

¹⁰ The Community Development Fund in the Decentralization Policy of Rwanda has such an objective. It provides that 10% of the annual revenue of the Government be put in the fund for community development. The arrangement minimizes the administrative cost of the funds so that as little as possible of the disbursed funds gets to the local level without being reduced.

Diagram six: Framework for holistic capacity-building



IV. Holistic Local Governance Capacity-Building

Diagram six summarizes a framework for holistic capacity-building. One of the mistakes often committed by players in local governance capacity-building is to equate capacity-building to training. Most capacity-building activities include workshops, seminars and long or relatively short courses. Such activities constitute just a small portion of capacity-building if it is taken holistically. A holistic capacity-building approach would assess the capacity of the policy

environment, institutions, individuals and teams before assessing whether there are adequate facilities, funds and logistics. The important point to note here is that trying to build capacity in one area and not others often wastes efforts, time and resources, because in the final analysis the ultimate results can not be achieved. For example, no matter how much computer training and skill-building is done to strengthen the capacity of a secretary, if the same secretary does not have computer hardware and software to do the work, the effort, the resources and the time spent on the training will have been wasted.

Faced with the situation of having knowledge and skills that she/he cannot apply, the secretary will be demotivated, and if she/he finds the opportunity, she/he will leave for another job. Another example would be where the policy environment is not appropriate. If the decentralization policy is not well designed in terms of goals, objectives, institutional arrangements, etc., no matter how much funds are provided for its implementation, very little will be achieved.

A. Local governance capacity assessment

A crucial element in the process of capacity-building is the assessment of available and lacking capacities in all local governance actors. In Rwanda, the strategy for implementing the decentralization policy was hinged on an attempt to envisage a comprehensive capacity assessment and capacity-building during the entire process. The policy implementation strategy document states this as follows (see Box 1).

Box 1: Envisaged comprehensive local governance capacity assessment and building in Rwanda

Existing Capacities

“Although it is a fact that for a long time Rwanda has been a highly centralized State, there are aspects of the current situation that could be harnessed to support the beginning of the decentralization process. The following are some of the strengths that will be built upon to start the decentralization and local governance process:

- (i) **Government will and commitment to people empowerment:** The present Government of National Unity is willing and committed to decentralization for empowering the local communities to engage in political, social, and economic development activities. This will and commitment are crucial for mobilizing the entire country and development partners to support and facilitate decentralization and good local governance.
- (ii) **An Administrative and political structure:** There was recently created a Ministry of Local Government with the promotion of good governance including decentralization as one of its mandates. This structural empowerment at the highest level of government will be taken advantage of to flag off, monitor, and guide the implementation of the decentralization policy.

In addition to the ministerial establishment, there are local authority structures that will be harnessed to spearhead the implementation of the decentralization policy. These are: the Prefectures (now named the *Intara*), the Commune (now named the *Akarere*), the sectors (now named *Umurenge*), and the cells (now named *Akagari*). Though largely lacking in essential capacities, these structures will serve as points of departure through which local populations and resources will be mobilized to implement local governance at the local levels. Within these structures, (for example at *Akarere*, *Akagari*, and *Umurenge* levels), there are already Community Development Committees with whom development activities have been going on with support from local and international NGOs and donors. The implementation of decentralization will not only benefit from such structures but will also strengthen them further. In addition, financial resources have already been deconcentrated to the *Intara* level.

- (iii) **Human resources:** The existing personnel in Ministries, *Intara*, and *Akarere* can be assessed and reoriented through appropriate training and other capacity development mechanisms to support the implementation of the decentralization policy and the sustainability of local governance. The project will focus on training of the newly elected leaders and technicians in the areas of management, human resources development, accounting, budgeting and finance, administrative procedures and methods.
- (iv) **Tools and facilities:** The existing tools and facilities such as buildings, furniture and vehicles, communication systems, and equipment at *Intara* and *Akarere* levels, though mostly inadequate, will serve as initial take-off support for the decentralization process.

- (v) **Funding:** Given the level of poverty of the country and the low levels of government revenue with an overstretched budget, funding will pose a very big challenge for decentralization. However, the beginning of financing the decentralization policy will be to continue with the current government policy of deconcentrating appropriate and relevant ministerial budgets to the Intara. The management of these funds will permit personnel in the Intara to master financial management, which is one of the crucial skills in decentralization.
- (vi) **Networks:** There are existing networks among different actors (NGOs, donors, Ministry of Local Government, other ministries, government agencies, and local authorities) that will be strengthened to facilitate and support the implementation of decentralization.

The above capacity available will be harnessed to start off decentralization and the rest will be developed and mobilized as the process of developing local governance goes on.

Capacity shortages

A country like Rwanda, which has been governed by highly centralized and dictatorial systems, inevitably has a lot of capacity shortages to manage a decentralized and local governance system. However, the Government of National Unity is committed to installing a decentralized and good local governance system, and will implement an incremental, gradual decentralization process that will build the capacity as it progresses.

Although a clear picture of what capacity is lacking and in what magnitude will be specified after a series of capacity assessment exercises to be conducted as part of the decentralization implementation process, deep capacity gaps exist in the following areas:

- (i) **Inappropriate legal provisions:** Most of the laws, including the Constitution, were constructed to support the centralized system. They will have to be reformed to be supportive to decentralization and local governance.
- (ii) **Human resources:** (number, skills, knowledge, motivation, and networks). It should be borne in mind that most of the personnel existing are used to managing a highly centralized system and therefore are not predisposed to managing local governance.
- (iii) **Facilities:** Some *Imirenge* do not have office buildings and office equipment. The *Akarere* will need better and more facilities if they are to attract better qualified personnel.
- (iv) **Organization structures:** Most of the existing structures were designed to facilitate centralization and they are not appropriate for facilitating decentralization.
- (v) **Systems, procedures and processes:** The existing ones were probably suitable for centralized governance but certainly not for decentralized governance.
- (vi) **Data, records, information systems as well as information technology (both hard and software):** Generally this is a weak area in the administrative system of Rwanda, but it is acute in local government structures which have not been using information technology.
- (vii) **Funds:** Government revenue is very low and local revenues are even lower. As a postcolonial state with a centralized system of administration, Rwanda's population is not adequately sensitized about tax payment. This is a considerable handicap for decentralization.
- (viii) **Networks** (e.g., local government associations): It is understandable that these could not have developed under a highly centralized governance system.”

Source: Decentralization Policy, Government of Rwanda, Ministry of Local Government and Social Affairs

B. Local governance capacity-building to achieve what? Clear decentralization policy objectives as a basic element of capacity

Any capacity-building endeavour should be premised on solid and clear objectives. To use the management jargon, these should be objectives that are S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-bound). Most developing countries, especially those in Africa, have put in place decentralization measures/policies, but not all of them have the same objectives. As an example, below are the objectives pursued by the decentralization policy in Rwanda (Government of Rwanda: Ministry of Local Government and Social Affairs 2000).

- i. To enable and reactivate local people to participate in initiating, making, implementing, and monitoring decisions and plans that concern them, taking into consideration their local needs, priorities, capacities and resources by transferring power, authority and resources from central to local government and lower levels.
- ii. 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.
- iii. To enhance the sensitivity and responsiveness of public administration to the local environment by placing the planning, financing, management, and control of service provision at the point where services are provided, and by enabling local leadership to develop organization structures and capacities that take into consideration the local needs.
- iv. To develop sustainable economic planning and management capacity at local levels that will serve as the driving motor for planning, mobilization, and implementation of social, political, and economic development.

- v. 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.

The Government of Rwanda takes decentralization as a high-value policy which it is using as an instrument of people's empowerment, a platform for sustainable democratization, a structure for mobilization of economic development, a weapon for people's reconciliation, social integration and well-being, and a vehicle for the promotion of a culture of political, economic, civic and managerial/administrative good governance.

The nature and extent of the objectives pursued will determine the extent of capacity-building for implementation. In the case of Rwanda, the recently concluded assessment of the decentralization policy implementation emphasizes the point. While at the beginning civil society organizations and the private sector were not involved in the policy analysis, the implementation process, given the objectives, which are clearly centred on empowering the local communities, has necessitated an increasing involvement of the two.

“The availed information and discussions indicate that there has been limited involvement of the civil society in the initiation and formulation of the decentralization policies and programmes, owing to the nature of the Rwandan civil society and the way most policies have been introduced (top-down). It should, nonetheless, be noted that the consultation of civil society representatives has progressively improved so that increasingly, policy documents are representative of different interest groups. In this respect, the process of formulating the fiscal and financial decentralization policy involved wide consultations and inputs from civil society organizations, the private sector, institutions of higher learning, local

government councils, local government executive committees and other interest groups and individuals.”¹¹

This case shows that once the objectives are comprehensively formulated, targeting all local governance actors, the implementation process is more likely to also involve a wide spectrum of stakeholders. Therefore, the very first element of building local governance capacity is to ensure that the objectives for decentralization or for supporting local governance are clear and give room to the involvement of all the stakeholders.

C. Political, bureaucratic and social will

Political will: Most decentralization policies and programmes falter during implementation because they are introduced with political hesitation, bureaucratic resentment, and suspicion or incomprehension from the general society.

Political will and support for decentralized governance is a very crucial component of capacity for local governance. Political systems and politicians who are not predisposed to entrench democratic participation in local leadership as well as socio-politico-economic development do not support the kind of local governance that would empower grass-root communities in these respects. The tendency is to adopt lukewarm decentralization policies with unclear objectives or to effect policies that are geared towards simple deconcentration which only serve to make central government agents the principle actors at the local level with no local government as such. The fear of decentralized governance is in fact just a characteristic of undemocratic leadership. But it is misguided. The deeper truth is that a regime that empowers its local communities via strong local governance is very difficult to remove because its support and power will be rooted in the grass-root level. People are less inclined to advocate for the removal of a regime that has given to them socio-politico-economic power.

Bureaucratic will: Another aspect of support and will that is critical for successful local governance is from central government bureaucrats. Accustomed to wielding enormous bureaucratic power, central government bureaucrats always get the impression that decentralization will diminish their bureaucratic empire and power. Consequently, they tend to oppose or quietly sabotage it. Yet they are the very ones who are supposed to plan for decentralization and coordinate its implementation. To overcome this attitudinal capacity constraint, decentralization policies must be conceived with extensive involvement of the central government bureaucrats to ensure that they comprehend the real objectives of the policy, their role in its implementation and coordination, and dispel their fears and threats about the policy by fathoming the benefits that they will accrue from the policy.

Social will: There is a tendency to believe that local communities will accept decentralization policies automatically. This is not true. If local communities have to be involved in implementing decentralized governance, they need to understand the objectives and benefits of the decentralization policy. In countries used to highly centralized governance, people are accustomed to receiving services from central governments; so they tend to perceive decentralization as a way of central governments shying away from their service provision roles and neglecting the people.

No public policy can succeed without the will and support from its formulators (in this case the central government bureaucrats), its deciders (in this case politicians), and its beneficiaries (in this case the local communities). Therefore, the very initial capacity-building activities for effective local governance should be geared towards creating awareness and sensitization as well as mobilization of political and administrative powers and authorities to campaign for decentralized governance. While inadequacies in the other aspects of capacity may slow down the implementation of the policy, insufficient political, administrative and social support will altogether kill the policy.

¹¹ See “Rwanda Decentralization Assessment” by Strategies 200 SARL Under Contract of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), July 2002.

Sustained publicity and communication is a crucial element in the process of capacity-building. People tend to take time to assimilate policies and new ways of doing things. In assessing the decentralization implementation in Rwanda, it was discovered that:

“The new legal and regulatory framework is not yet well known at the district levels. It is rare to find an official gazette at the district levels, despite that it is a valuable source of information and reference. For example, during training in December 2001, the District Executive Secretaries showed that they did not share the understanding of their responsibilities not because they interpreted differently what is written in the laws, but because many of them had not read the laws. The consequence is that, in many cases people act according to what they think is right and not in according with what is defined by the regulations.”¹²

D. Institution-building and strengthening

Effective local governance requires strong institutions at the central and local government levels as well as institutions that bring together all actors and stakeholders. For example, it is not adequate to create and strengthen local governments' councils if they are not supported by a national legislature that advocates their work at higher levels and puts in place national legal frameworks that guide and facilitate their work at local governance levels. Institutions of central government and local government must all be strengthened in order to work in partnership for local governance development. The need for institution-building for local governance expresses itself at several levels and in all sectors. There are three crucial questions that have sparked debate in Rwanda and in Uganda:

- What institutional arrangements should be put in place at the central government level to best plan, coordinate and monitor the implementation of decentralized governance?

- What institutional arrangements should be put in place at the local governance level to best create a sustainable forum for involving local community actors in the planning of development at the grass-roots level?
- What institutional arrangements should be put in place to ensure sustainable, adequate and equitable financing of development projects at the grass-roots level?

(i) What technical institutional arrangements should be established at the central government level to facilitate the decentralization process: Regarding the first question, the debate has been whether the planning, facilitating and monitoring of the implementation of the decentralization policies should be left entirely to the bureaucrats in the Ministry responsible for local government or whether a relatively independent specialized structure should be put in place and given adequate capacity to solely do the work in collaboration with the Ministry responsible for local government.

The Uganda Decentralization Secretariat: In Uganda it was decided to establish the Decentralization Secretariat, which was given adequate capacity (human resources, facilities, logistics, funds, etc.) that was far beyond the capacity of the Ministry of Local Government. The Decentralization Secretariat did commendable work that can be testified to by the relative success decentralization has witnessed in the country.

However, recently the Uganda Government and its development partners have been engaged in the discussion of what to do with the Decentralization Secretariat, especially when donors and development partners started believing that the process of decentralized governance had reached a stage where it could most effectively be facilitated at the local government level.

All in all, one would say that the Decentralization Secretariat in Uganda was an appropriate technical institutional arrangement that was suitable for facilitating the implementation of the decentralization policy, and it did it successfully. But in the process of planning the establishment of the Decentralization Secretariat, the strategy for phasing it out was not put

¹² Op cit

in place. This has made its last days look less successful than the days when it got the policy implementation process successfully completed.

The Rwanda Decentralization Management Unit: Possibly having learnt of the experience of the Decentralization Secretariat in Uganda, in Rwanda an attempt was made to institute a structure that was less independent from the Ministry responsible for local government and give it less extensive capacity. The Decentralization Management Unit, as it is called, started off with problems of inadequate capacity and hence made the decentralization process look like it began hesitantly. Given two options—a light, less independent Decentralization Management Unit or a heavy, independent Decentralization Secretariat—the author would opt for the strong, more independent Decentralization Secretariat, because it is necessary for pushing the decentralization process in its initial stages. However, it is necessary that in conceiving such an institution, an exit strategy be built in to ensure a smooth phasing out of the secretariat once its job is done.

(ii) What institutional arrangements should be put in place at the local governance level to best create a sustainable forum for involving local community actors in the planning of development at the grass-roots level? Mostly in establishing local governments, care is only taken to create legislative institutions (Local Governments Councils), executive institutions (Executive Committees) and civil service institutions. It is always hoped that through the Local governments Councils which are elected representative bodies the grass-root populations will participate in deciding and planning their development and that the Executive committees and Civil Servants will spearhead the implementation.

But experience has shown that there is a difference between representative structures and participative structures. Clearly the representative local governments' councils have limitations when it comes to people's participation in planning. There is need to create local governance institutions that bring together the stakeholders and actors in the private sector, in civil

society and the local governments themselves to plan for development. South Africa's Integrated Development Planning Process (IDP) and Rwanda's Community Development Committees (CDCs) approximate this concept.

Institutional arrangements for Integrated Development Planning in South Africa's Local Governance: There are efforts in several Municipal Councils in South Africa to put in place structural arrangements to support sustained processes of participatory integrated development planning (IDP) in local governance. This has more or less institutionalized the IDP process, enabling the effective management of the drafting of outputs envisaged, giving affected parties access to contribute to the decision-making process and institutionalizing public participation to include all residents equally. Participation has been accepted as a real interactive planning process through which a variety of stakeholders have influence and share in the control over development initiatives. We have chosen the example of the Mombela Local Municipality and presented its structural arrangement for IDP to illustrate this important aspect of institutional capacity-building for effective and sustainable participation at the local governance level.

Institutional arrangement for local community development in Rwanda: the Community Development Committees (CDCs): The current Government and society of Rwanda has a vision of community development as a process where the local population, in collaboration with and support from its partners, orients and takes charge of its own destiny in order to achieve durable, just and egalitarian development. For this purpose, within the locus of decentralized governance, there has been established an institutional and structural arrangement called the Community Development Committees at each level of local government and administration to facilitate people's participation in planning for their development. These committees have been formed and operate at the cell, sector, district, and provincial levels both in urban and rural areas.

Box 2: Mombela Local Municipality Integrated Development Consultative Structure (South Africa)

- Mombela Local Municipal Council’s goal was to involve as many people as possible by working through community structure, thereby striving for optimum participation. The following structures were established to facilitate participation:
- The Council appointed a Steering Committee that involved officials, thereby ensuring that the end product will be institutionalized, as officials will understand how the outcomes were derived;
- The Council engaged underrepresented and unorganized social groupings such as organizations of disabled people, youth groups, women’s organizations, organizations working in the field of children’s rights and the rights of the elderly, as well as the informal sector in sector-specific forums;
- Community-based consultation took place through interim ward and area committees where local structures could express their aspirations and provide solutions;
- The IDP Representative Forum brought together Council officials, the Mayoral Committee, Ward Councillors, Provincial Government Departments, the Ehlanzeni District Council, and sectoral representatives to integrate the needs identified and assess the proposals made. Sectoral representatives were responsible for reporting back to their respective constituencies. Ward Councillors took responsibility to report back to their local communities and structures.

The global objective of establishing this institutional arrangement is stated as: “to enable the entrenchment of the national policy of decentralization by proposing the ways and means for ensuring effective and sustainable participation

of the community in its development and poverty reduction”. The major objectives in creating the CDCs included the following:

- Enabling the local population to acquire capacities to manage the process of participatory development;
- Ensuring that the population owns the process of their development; and
- Ensuring proper management and coordinated distribution of available resources and products of decentralized community development.

The composition and responsibilities of the District Development Committee as given in the

law are produced in Box 3 as an example. (Government of Rwanda, Law establishing the organization and functioning of the District, August 2000).

It is interesting to note the meeting point between the different levels of the local governments’ structures. For example, the Chairpersons of the sub-committees in charge of the welfare of the population, the economy and the promotion of development in the Sector, which is a level lower in the structure of local governance in the country are members of the District Development Committee. It is equally significant and a critical point of participative development planning that all those having development projects in the district are legally members of the District Development Committee. This opens the CDC to NGOs, private enterprises and international donors and development partners.

Box 3: Composition of the District Development Committee (Rwanda)

The Development Committee is composed of the following persons:

- (i) The secretary for Finance and Economic Affairs in the District Executive Committee, who is also the Chairperson;
- (ii) The Executive Secretary of the District;
- (iii) Chairpersons of Sub-Committees in charge of the welfare of the population, the economy and the promotion of development in the Sectors (*a level below the District*);
- (iv) The Coordinator in charge of Women's Affairs within the District Executive Committee;
- (v) The Coordinator in charge of youth welfare in the District Executive Committee; and
- (vi) All those having development projects in the District.

Responsibilities of the District Development Committee include:

- (i) To prepare the District development action plan;
- (ii) To follow-up and control activities and development projects of the District;
- (iii) To supervise the administration and finances of projects in the District;
- (iv) To prepare the draft of the development budget of the District; and
- (v) To organize the sensitization of the population with regard to development activities.

V. Conclusion

In this paper we have proposed an understanding of local governance that is people-centred, focusing on the participation, interests and well-being of the local community. The strengthening of capacities for effective local governance needs to be holistic in nature, encompassing horizontal capacity-building to empower local grass-root communities, NGOs, community-based organizations and the private sector (both formal and informal), as well as vertical capacity-building to strengthen institutions at the central and local government levels.

We need to bear in mind that capacity-building for effective and responsive local governance should include strengthening the capacities of all actors in local governance. This means going beyond the

local level to include global actors (especially in the context of increasing globalization) who may be operating at the local level but may lack the requisite capacities to be relevant and responsive to the needs of the local people.

The central pillar of good local governance is the participation of the local people. Participation should be promoted in its full range to embrace the participation of local people in planning, priority setting, production, paying (financing) and consumption if their livelihood has to be sustained through local governance. The real reason for building local governance capacity should be to strengthen and empower local communities to engage in full range participation, which is the only guarantee for their sustained livelihood.

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