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CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND DEMOCRACY IN RWANDA

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"One finger alone cannot pick up a stone".
Malian proverb

"Africa is not poor but poorly ruled".
Ousmane Sy, Mali
Prize winner of King Baudouin International Development Prize 2004-2005

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INTRODUCTION

Participation and democracy are closely related concepts. Democracy as a concept has been used to emphasize citizens' participation in choosing their representatives. In light of political evolution and economic development, democracy implies citizens' participation in choosing their representatives, in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes and policies. In theory, the local population, who vote play a key role in the decision-making process in matters related to citizens' welfare. Voters appoint and dismiss their representatives through the ballot, depending on the promises and/or performance of the elected. Citizens express their decision through a free and fair vote. The votes have the same value for all political organizations who subscribe to the principle of one man one vote. The political bond which unites all citizens considered as equal is the basis for the democracy concept, a contract advocated by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Democratic societies usually ensure that citizens participate equally and play a key role in deciding the future of their country.

Since the 1980s, donors adopted participation as a prerequisite for supporting developing countries. This approach has its consequences. Most developing countries did not trust the idea of tying financial support to participation and putting in place preconditions, which distort the idea behind the principle of participation.

What is the state of the principle of participation in Rwanda? Why is participation so important to the Rwandan context?

In 2002, the Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace (IRDP) launched nation-wide debate forums on the challenges facing sustainable peace. Democracy and good governance came out as prerequisites to lasting peace and development in Rwanda. Specifically, participation was repeatedly raised during the various debate forums and during the analysis and discussions around the issue of power sharing. According to a majority of the people interviewed by IRDP, effective participation is an essential pillar of power sharing. The National Group organized in 2006 included representatives of the various categories of Rwandans. It mandated IRDP to

carefully analyze the fundamental principles of participation in Rwanda and how it is implemented.

Rwanda experienced serious socio-political conflicts, culminating into the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. This calls for a deep analysis of the mechanisms required in order to ensure lasting social unity. Immediately after the end of the genocide, a national debate involving various categories of people in the Rwandan society was organized at Village Urugwiro (President's Office) from 1998-1999. Participants discussed the policies needed to address the post genocide challenges. Among the major recommendations adopted by the national debate forum was the need for citizens' participation in the design and implementation of national policies and in all decision making processes.

In January 1998, a debate on the need to shift from the emergency period to the development phase was organized, leading to the development and adoption of a national governance programme. Furthermore, the Government of Rwanda organized a national workshop on governance, in which priorities such as public administration reform, reinforcement of the judiciary, enhanced support to the Parliament, decentralization and local administration and the need for better coordination of activities in public institutions...were identified.

As a result, most of the subsequent policy documents do acknowledge participation as a key element in any change process leading to sustainable development. Major among these policy documents are: Vision 2020, the 2003 Constitution, the national decentralization policy and the various laws governing the functioning of public institutions from the grassroots to the top levels.

An analysis of these documents reveals a clear political will to promote good governance based on citizens' participation. However, the debate and research carried out by IRDP reveals a gap between this political will and the reality on the ground. It is within this framework, that the National Group raised a number of issues and questions which need to be analyzed in order to clarify and suggest possible solutions.

- ❖ Elections are organized because power cannot be exercised by everybody. Hence, the need for choosing accountable representatives. Accountability is essential in order to maintain the link between the elected representative and the voter. If this link does not exist, then representation is meaningless. However, questions are usually raised concerning the management of this process especially in countries characterized by serious conflicts, ethnic divisions and violence.

How can accountability be ensured and a link between the elected representatives and voters sustained?

- ❖ Sustainability of the national policies and programmes depends upon the level of participation of the citizens in the design, implementation and evaluation of such policies. How do the Rwandan citizens participate in this decision making process?
- ❖ Participation implies moderation of the power of a leader or an institution through political negotiation, in order to mitigate the abuse of absolute power. To ensure the effectiveness of this principle, citizens organize themselves in structures like political parties, trade unions, media and civil society. These structures give different points of view and create opportunities for negotiating how power can be exerted effectively. What could be the situation in Rwanda today?

At the end of the National Group meeting, representatives of the various categories of Rwandans recommended that IRDP should undertake a research process to clarify the three fundamental aspects of citizens' participation stated above.

Research Objectives

General Objective

To solicit for ideas on the establishment of an effective governance system based on the views of the local population in the design, implementation and evaluation of government programmes and policies.

Specific Objectives

The following are the specific objectives:

- ✓ To analyze the levels of representation, accountability and the relationship between the elected representatives and the voters on the one hand and the governance institutions (Local Administration, Parliament, Cabinet ...) on the other.
- ✓ To analyze the level of participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of government programmes and policies.
- ✓ To evaluate the effectiveness of the current structures in promoting citizens' participation and in influencing decision-making through civil society, media and political parties.

Methodology

▪ Data Collection Approaches and Tools

This research focused on three dimensions:

- Analysis of written documents;
- A quantitative approach;
- A qualitative approach

Information was drawn from programmes and policy documents related to citizens' participation particularly the laws, the national decentralization policy and Vision 2020. The analysis revealed their relevance, strengths and weaknesses. Literature on participation contributed to the analysis and formulation of possible solutions to improve citizens' participation.

The quantitative approach constitutes the main framework for this research. It allowed the research access to the points of view of various categories of citizens on participation in democratic governance. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to the people who took part in this research.

The qualitative approach provided the opportunity to understand certain social phenomena observed while carrying out the research. It brings out additional thoughts on the critical analysis of the phenomena highlighted by the quantitative approach. For this purpose, an interview guide was developed and used to guide the debates in the various focus groups consulted.

The qualitative dimension was worked out based on the philosophy of participatory research which characterizes Participatory Action Research (PAR) adopted by IRDP over the last ten years. PAR approach emphasizes debate, involvement of the citizens, objectivity and participation in explaining the issues under discussion during this research process.

- **Target Population and Sampling**

The aim of this research is to generate data, which can be extrapolated onto the whole nation. All the four provinces and Kigali City were included in the participatory research. Two districts in each province were chosen by random sampling. In each district, two sectors were selected through the same process.

The research was carried out in village settings, with one village (umudugudu) per sector randomly selected, totaling to 20 villages consulted. Guided interviews were also conducted with district authorities (Mayors and other local authorities). An interview guide was used to facilitate interviews in one district per province selected by random sampling.

Using the qualitative approach, guided interviews were organized in ten districts, randomly selected. In each of the districts, two sectors were also randomly selected. 40 focus group meetings were organized, two focus group meetings in each of the selected sectors. For the sake of varying and triangulation, two focus group meetings were organized in each sector, involving local leaders on one hand and the local population on the other.

It is important to emphasize the role of the debate forums formed by IRDP in this research process. These debate forums include 25 schools involved in the “school of debate” initiative, 19 dialogue clubs at the grassroots level and 3 permanent debate forums at the national level. The sample size was calculated based on the number of adults available in a given location: above 16 years. According to the Rwanda National Institute of Statistics, the population above 16 years of age makes about 56.3% of the total population, that is, 4 600 000 people approximately. From this data, a minimal sample size was calculated with a 5% confidence interval and an expected 50% prevalence.

The following formula was applied:

$$Ne = n * DE = N z^2 p (1-p) / d^2 (N-1) + Z^2 p (1-p) = 990$$

N = Total population: 4 600 000, Z = 95% confidence interval d = absolute precision: 4%, p = expected proportion in the population: 50%, De = Clustering effect: 2, ne = real sample. The total population which took part in this research is 1200 people, above 990.

- **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from the questionnaire was done using SPSS software which produces charts, while crosschecking results to enable a clear understanding of the views expressed by the interviewees. The interview guide was designed in line with the questionnaire. The data obtained from the debates and interviews are important in as far as they bring out the meaning of the graphics and percentages obtained from the quantitative questionnaire.

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CHAPTER I: FUNDAMENTALS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

Governance refers to governing. It is about ruling and leading a country or a state. Etymologically speaking, the word governance derives from a Greek verb ‘kubernân’ which means to pilot a ship or to drive a tank. This concept was used metaphorically for the first time by Plato to imply managing people. It gave rise to the Latin verb ‘gubernare’, which had the same meaning through its derivatives such as ‘gubernantia’, which generated several terms including ‘to govern’.

Initially, to govern implied the existence of a leader to manage/rule people, a country or a state. With time governance, evolved towards good governance, which requires involvement of the citizens, thereby, giving more opportunities to an individual or community members to play a major role in the decision-making process. The guiding principle is no longer who manages/leads but how the community manages through its representatives.

The debate on governance focuses more on the effectiveness of the institutions and rules which govern society: transparency, participation, response, accountability and rule of law. Although good governance and democracy are not synonymous, both concepts are closely related and emphasize the importance of citizens’ participation in the development of rules and laws governing a given society and the peoples’ role in the decision-making process. In the same context, A. Olukoshi quoted by S. Bellina, H. Magro and V. Villemeur (2008, p15) reminds us that one should not confuse governance and democracy although an ideal form of governance is democratic by nature.

The two concepts focus and tend to put the citizen at the vanguard as far as exercising power and decision-making processes are concerned. However, experts agree on the fact that the concept, good governance is broader than democracy. One will find many so called democratic countries where good governance problems are noticeable. In a broad sense, good governance refers to appropriate management of available resources by involving the citizens effectively.

Institutional capacity building constitutes a guarantee for the continuity of the efforts; it provides an opportunity for citizen's participation and therefore reduces the influence and dominance of one person over the social and political scene of a country. As President Obama made it clear, in a speech he delivered in Ghana in 2009, "Africa does not need strong men but strong institutions". There are others who think that in addition to strong institutions, Africa also needs competent people capable of managing the institutions. It is a matter of finding the necessary balance.

Ultimately, good governance can only exist when a culture of citizen's participation is well entrenched and effectively practiced. The main components of good governance include: accountability, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness as well as the rule of law. All these principles empower citizens to participate in the management of public affairs. Therefore, the concepts participation and good governance are closely related.

Since 2000, the political decision makers in Rwanda adopted decentralization as the governance system of choice, as a way of promoting good governance and participation. How then does decentralization contribute to the promotion of participation and how is it perceived by the people? This research intends to clarify this issue.

1. Good Governance in the Contemporary Times

The debate around good governance is far from being exhausted. The arguments vary from author to author and from organization to organization. According to the United Nations, «good governance, human rights and democracy cannot be dissociated. Therefore, the aim of good governance is sustainable human growth and development. Its characteristics are: transparency, responsibility, accountability, participation and taking into account people's needs». For the World Bank, «good governance implies the government's ability to effectively manage its resources, to implement relevant policies, to ensure the respect of the citizens' rights and the government institutions, and the existence of democratic control of government authorities ».

Before it was extended to the management of business/companies, under the concept of ‘*corporate governance*’, "governance" was initially used to indicate the manner in which a government exerts its economic, political and administrative power and manages a country’s resources for its development.

Speaking about Rwanda, in an interview with a French weekly magazine “Jeune Afrique”, President Paul Kagame, compares the president’s role with that of a Managing Director of a private company, where Rwandans are shareholders. Through this statement, one notes the importance he attributes to the social pact between a leader and the citizens in a joint management of public affairs. In practice, this principle hardly works because there are other factors which influence the exercise of power, especially the specificity of each context and the inevitable conflicts attributable to the exercise of power.

Governance as a concept gained renewed interest in the 1980s. According to KOULIBALY (...), it indicates «the way of running a policy, actions and public affairs». It designates a whole set of political conditions under which plans are implemented, including the legitimacy of policy implementation, the relationship with administration and between one governing group and the population in general.

Therefore, governance refers to the whole set of measures, rules, decision-making, information and monitoring which contribute to the smooth functioning and control of public affairs, an institution or an organization be it public or private, regional, national or international. Ultimately, Governance has to lead to democratic governance.

2. Good Governance for Development

An analysis of the recent history of emerging states reveals the extent to which the stability of a society and the dynamics of sustainable development are conditioned to good governance and citizen’s participation. Good governance implies good will to strengthen a country’s institutions and to ensure their sustainability beyond a serving leader. Similarly, the value of participation

involves a citizen defining his/her destiny and owning the national vision, which constitutes an undeniable guarantee of stability.

For purposes of illustration, an analysis of the African society reveals the extent to which the availability of resources and labour force alone are not enough to achieve sustainable development. As Stephen Smith said, “Japan is poor, the Japanese are rich, but Africa is rich and Africans are poor”. That development is conditioned to good governance is no longer controversial. However, this principle has not yet taken root in most African States.

In Rwanda, good governance is publicly declared to be the engine for achieving development. However, as is the case in most African countries, one notices a gap between the will to promote good governance and the reality on the ground. Through the various interviews conducted with the various categories of Rwandans, an attempt is made to clarify this issue.

3. Good Governance, a Tool for Social Cohesion

Social cohesion tends to strongly come out as a major challenge in societies affected by war. It is even more complicated in a multi-ethnic society. In order to develop and strengthen social cohesion, decision makers need to put in place appropriate governing structures to ensure freedom, human rights as well as equal opportunities. Good governance significantly contributes to the conditions which promote freedom to participate in the management of public affairs and to minimize exclusion.

Any system of governance which intends to promote social cohesion for sustainable development must take into account specific obligations, such as:

- Set up initiatives with a concerted, common approach. This enables the population to strengthen their solidarity and to gain ownership of the adopted projects.
- Effective participation is a prerequisite for laying the foundations of social cohesion. Taking part in major decisions and in the choice of leaders decreases tensions between people and promotes a common vision for the society.

- The principle of equal opportunity which cannot be dissociated from a culture of participation, allows people to negotiate when different points of view arise and gives more opportunities for complementarity.
- If members of a society can agree to share the failures and successes of their initiatives, social cohesion will be strengthened.

Jaime Rojas Elgueta, who researched on social cohesion, confirms some of these aspects. From the examples of Latino-American cities (Porto Allègre in Brazil, Villa el Salvador in Peru, Rosario in Argentina) and Hospitalet municipality in Spain, and Amsterdam in the Netherlands, the author highlights the importance of governance in strengthening social cohesion. In each of these cities, a program or an approach involving the citizens in governance was initiated, especially in matters related to participatory budgeting, self-management, collaboration with associations and collective participation.

From all these experiments, the author concludes with the required conditions for good governance which is capable of leading to social cohesion among community members and these include:

- Sufficient knowledge of the administrative entity concerned: know more about the potential and interests of the local population, their social relationships within the community and with other communities;
- Get a clear image of the objectives closely related to the identity of the entity: objectives are not defined in offices but in a participatory manner, they have an impact on the local population;
- Achievable and tangible objectives, which the population can adhere to and identify with.
- Representatives from organizations: the local population, various social sectors, the elderly, male and female from different areas can be organized in representative structures in order to ensure their individual and collective participation;
- A horizontal management of the citizen's participation process: it is not good to adopt a paternalistic attitude towards the socially disadvantaged groups, or towards the politically weak groups;

- To rely on the available resources: develop a program which starts with what is already available;
- Disseminating information in order to promote transparency: information is a prerequisite to transparent public administration.

Therefore, for a governance system to be considered as legitimate and acceptable, it must conform to the following principles: the leaders' responsibility, transparency and clear public decisions for the local population, the possibility of planning a better future for all, that is, long-term planning and, finally, the capacity to prevent or to settle historical conflicts.

In Rwanda, various observers agree that the consecutive conflicts may be linked to a lack of political will to promote citizen's participation, without any form of discrimination. Instead, political leaders emphasized and used disputes and conflicts as weapons. Can the promotion of good governance based on increased citizen participation constitute a solution to promoting social cohesion? The challenge appears big indeed.

4. Participation

Etymologically speaking, participation derives from the Latin word «participare», which means to take part in something, to distribute, to share, to have one's share of ... In politics, participation designates various means which enable citizens to contribute to the decisions concerning a community. As a priority, those charged with governance have to ensure that the interests of the "citizens" are taken into consideration and that their voices are heard in the management of public affairs. Citizens are treated like shareholders in a business. For their voice to be heard, they need to be provided with the means, especially the legal means, in order to take part in the management of public affairs.

Jaime Rojas Elguera et al (2008), describes the particular situation of Latin America where the obligation to promote participation grew more and more during the election campaigns and political agendas. In several Latin American countries, 14 Presidents were given a vote of no confidence - peacefully dismissing them from their duties without any military intervention.

They were dismissed by constitutional decisions, due to poor performance. This happens in situations where a culture of accountability and citizen's participation has become a reality.

The need to involve the local population has increased in response to the failure of the peoples' representatives who have not effectively defended the citizens' interests. In response to this concern, some societies have advocated for participatory democracy to compensate for the failures of representative democracy as summarized below.

The rights and duties of citizen participation are a reality established by the Rwandan Constitution. Article 45 stipulates: «all citizens have the right to participate in the governance of the country, whether directly or through representatives, in accordance with the law. All citizens have a right to equal access to public service in accordance their competence and abilities».

Similarly, Article 47 is devoted to citizen's participation by providing that «All citizens have the duty to participate, through work, in the development of the country, to safeguard peace, democracy, social justice and to participate in the defense of the motherland». In the same line, Article 48, 2 of the same text stipulates that «Every citizen has the right to defy orders received from his or her superior authority if the orders constitute a serious and manifest violation of human rights and public freedoms».

In addition, it is important to mention that the Rwandan Constitution advocates for a form of consensual democracy. The aim is to minimize conflicting debate in a post-genocide society. This however, goes with some risks insofar as different opinions need to be shaped in order to build a society which tolerates differences in opinion.

- **Participatory Democracy**

Participatory democracy is an expression which includes three dimensions: the people (dêmos), the power (kratos) and participation (participatio). It designates the mechanisms and procedures which promote the involvement of citizens in politics and increases their role in the decision-making process. It strives to address the weaknesses of representative democracy where the

citizens take part through a third party or an intermediary. In representative democracy, it is not always certain that various categories of people are represented, particularly in Parliament where the elected representatives have no idea of what is happening on the ground. Quite often, the citizens have the feeling that they are not understood by the politicians. This leads to mistrust of the politicians by the people, resulting in the local population supporting the "opposition", which is weak in general, and a high rate of abstention during the elections.

Participatory democracy implies concerted management of public affairs. Unlike representative democracy and direct democracy, participatory democracy is a mixed system where people delegate power to their representatives who suggest and vote laws, but keeps its role of addressing specific issues.

Within the system of participatory democracy one finds dynamic dialogue and consultations where leaders listen to the citizens' ideas. The latter even have the right to initiate laws through petitions. The debates and consultations which are organized at local and national levels deal with important issues and decisions. In order to ensure sustainability, the measures taken through "a participatory manner" are adopted by a majority of the people concerned and they are directed towards a common goal.

The main criticisms made of this form of democracy are: one is not sure whether the citizens are represented effectively in the debates, and the number of participants and their opinions can be influenced by other people who may be serving personal interests. In an attempt to assess the effectiveness of "participation", people tend to refer to some aspects of "consultation" and they forget the useful aspects of "dialogue among stakeholders".

- **Representative Democracy**

Representative democracy, also known as "delegative democracy", is a type of democracy where citizens express their opinions through elected representatives to whom they delegate their powers. The elected representatives, represent the general opinion and will, vote the laws and possibly control the cabinet activities. In theory, these elected representatives are selected on the

basis of the political agendas, which they suggest to the citizens. Under this system, it is not enough to be elected, it is more important to transform the promises into achievements, otherwise trust cannot be renewed. The representatives are elected for a term of office defined by the law, and in a democracy everybody abides by the law.

While the winner serves their term of office, other political parties (especially the ones that have won the elections) organize themselves in order to sensitize the voters for the next elections. They do so in two ways: they revise and adapt their political agenda on one hand, and criticize the weaknesses of the elected representatives on the other.

These political parties are generally known as opposition political parties. In Rwanda, the concept of political opposition is poorly perceived. Reference to public speeches by the politicians, reveals a problem related to the concept of political opposition in the sense that competition for power is done informally but not publicly. Focus is on individual identity, rather than on engaging in a competition based on political agendas. From an objective point of view, the opposition is a legitimate force; all political parties should be allowed to express their opinions within a context which gives hope to all people that one day they may be able to manage their public affairs.

Although representative democracy is quite evident in Rwanda's politics, it has significant weaknesses, which justify the growing tendency to involve the local population more or less directly in the governance process. The weaknesses include:

- The gap between the elected representatives and the voters from the social and economic point of view, especially in poor countries is big. Uneducated citizens can hardly analyze the promises made during the campaigns and neither can they resist political manipulations.
- Citizens are unable to distinguish between individual interest and the interests of their group.
- A voter who is afraid of what may happen the following day, be it real or not, gives priority to the interest of his/her community and neglects his/her own interests. This logic is harmful to the concept of representation. The elected representative only reports to the

community as a whole, and does not care about his/her real impact in improving the living standards of the citizen who voted for him/her.

- In the case of Rwanda, voluntarism, as done by the local leaders (who serve on a voluntary basis, without pay) completely distorts the function of representation. Performance of their duties is perceived as a burden as the elected representatives do not feel accountable to the local population because they are not paid for the services they render.
- The impact of the centralized administration distorts the concept of representation in the sense that the local authorities feel that they are accountable to the higher authorities rather than to the local population.

The findings mentioned above were highlighted by the population consulted during this and other research studies carried out by IRDP over the past years.

The research process conducted by IRDP highlighted the challenges to democracy in Rwanda in terms of:

- Power sharing and succession;
- Separation of powers;
- Sectarianism in democracy;
- Freedom of expression, room for debate and promotion of democracy;
- The role of political parties in the democratic process;
- The importance of economic freedom in promoting democracy.

As mentioned above, one of the main challenges encountered by Rwanda in the domain of democratic governance is the difficulty of having open and contradictory debate. This hampers participation and expression mechanisms, voice and accountability. The participants in IRDP research process (National Group, debate forums) believe that democracy should start with strengthening a culture of participation at all levels and among all stakeholders. Probably, it is within this logic that the government initiated and implemented the decentralization process in 2000 as a system of governance in order to promote a culture of participation.

Chapter 2:

DECENTRALIZATION: LOCAL PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN RWANDA.

1. Decentralization – Context

The history of public administration, especially in African, includes examples of mismanagement of public affairs characterized by centralized leadership, systems manipulated by one person and his click, who are not accountable to anyone. Military dictatorship which replaced the first post-colonial leadership in Rwanda, was characterized by personalization of power where the leader amassed lots of power as: Head of State; Head of the only authorized political party; Head of Government; Minister of Finance; and, at one time, also Minister of Defense. Political and administrative reforms were gradually introduced, shortly after the introduction and spread of democratic processes all-over Africa in the 1990s, with a tendency to get rid of single party regimes.

The need for a more inclusive participatory governance system inspired leaders to decentralize power to various administrative levels, down to the grassroots. During the Arusha Peace Talks between the Government of Rwanda and the then rebel Rwandese Patriotic Front, the idea of a governance system which gives power to the local population became the guiding principle. The negotiations led to the adoption of the protocol on power sharing, as a way of ensuring inclusivity.

Given that power solely rested in the hands of the President of the Republic, it was urgent to share it with the other political players, institutions and the people in accordance with the power sharing principle. Rwanda's national decentralization policy stipulates that: «The decentralization policy will strengthen power sharing by ensuring that the Rwandan population has the required power to determine their political, economic and social destiny». The

government introduced the decentralization system of governance in order to empower people with the right to have a say whenever decisions concerning their welfare are taken.

This called for a change of mentality after a long period of a highly centralized political culture. The idea therefore, was to promote citizens' participation by developing policies and programs, implementing and evaluating them through decentralization. However, efforts must be made to ensure that efficiency, effectiveness and transparency are taken into consideration within this change process. Consequently, if a responsible citizen expresses his/her opinions about matters affecting his/her life, he/she has the right to request for explanation from his/her representatives who seriously consider the next elections.

The decentralization policy document highlights the following objectives:

- ❖ To empower the local population and mobilize them to take part in the design, preparation, implementation and monitoring of the decisions and plans intended for them, taking into account local needs, priorities, capacities and resources, by shifting the central government's power, authority and resources to the local authorities.
- ❖ To promote accountability and transparency in Rwanda by helping local leaders to become more accountable to their communities and by establishing a clear link between the taxes paid by the local population and the services financed by those taxes;
- ❖ To strengthen the level of responsiveness of public administrators and their capacity to intervene, by establishing planning, funding, management and control of activities where such services are provided, and by enabling the local leadership to develop the organizational structures and capacities which take into consideration the local context and needs;
- ❖ To develop sustainable economic planning and management capacity at local levels, which will serve as an engine for planning, mobilization and implementation of social, political and economic development for poverty alleviation;
- ❖ To strengthen efficiency and skills in planning, monitoring and service delivery by reducing the workload for civil servants in central government, so as to give them more time to follow-up on local structures, where the services are provided.

The Rwandan Government hopes to use decentralization as a means for strengthening political power and citizens' capacity. This is expected to provide a sustainable democratization platform, a structure for energy mobilization, initiatives and resources, a useful tool for reconciliation and social welfare. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the contribution of the decentralization policy vis-à-vis the objectives stated in the policy document, as well as the beneficiaries' points of view in as far as its goals are concerned.

2. Scope of Political Decentralization

Through decentralization, the government transfers power, skills and resources to decentralized entities. The concept "decentralization" includes several concepts such as transference, delegation and devolution. These concepts express the different types of decentralization adopted by a given government. For example, devolution and transference are two different concepts although both are types of decentralization. Devolution means to transfer the means and decision-making powers from the central administration to other government agencies and services. The entities which inherit the power are subject to government control and have no autonomy. Devolution means political autonomy given to the decentralized entities; emphasis is placed on the election of leaders by the local population.

Although this type of administrative decentralization has clear theoretical criteria, it is evident that Rwanda has for long adopted transference instead of devolution which is described in the national decentralization policy document. In this document, emphasis is put on political decentralization or devolution. The document especially analyzes how such political decentralization is structured and how its implementation contributes to its goal of becoming a tool for boosting the participation of the citizens at the grassroots in key decision-making processes. This would then have an impact on their livelihood, and on their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Political Decentralization (Devolution) means:

- The central government transfers the power of choosing political leaders to the grassroots entities. Until 2001 (when decentralization was launched in Rwanda), burgomasters were appointed by the central government and the local population was never consulted. The local population was obliged to accept the decision of the central government.
- The central government gives power to the local authorities at the grassroots level to decide on social, political and economic matters.

Therefore, political decentralization inextricably includes two aspects none of which can work without the other. It is necessary for the citizens at the grassroots to appoint or nominate their own leaders. This is the primary stage at which the citizens participate in the exercise of power. It is also important to ensure that no interference or influence is exerted on the citizens as they elect or nominate their leaders. Otherwise, the process becomes meaningless. Political decentralization becomes complete only after the central government sets up the structures which give every citizen the right to vote. It is important to mention that in Rwanda, the legal and organizational structures are already in place.

3. Framework for Implementing Decentralization in Rwanda

From a formal point of view, decentralization is supported by coherent documents. The 2003 Constitution describes citizens' participation in the decision-making process as one of the key principles of governance. Article 167, in its first paragraph stipulates that «Public administration shall be decentralized in accordance with the provisions of the law».

Similarly, several policy documents and programs were adopted to frame the implementation of decentralization. These mainly include: the decentralization policy established in 2000, the community development policy, tax decentralization policy, vision 2020 and many others. In order to implement those policies, ad hoc laws were initiated and adopted by competent authorities. In addition, administrative and territorial reforms were undertaken to facilitate the implementation of the decentralization process and to create administrative entities which are

economically viable. As a result, the number of districts was drastically reduced from 156 to 30 since 2001. District are empowered and facilitated to become the pillars of development. The sector as an administrative entity is expected to provide the basic services.

To ensure that the decentralization process is effective, considerable efforts were gradually made to empower the districts with the necessary skills and means (material, human and financial). For instance, the CDF (Common Development Fund) takes 10% of the annual national budget to stimulate and promote development in the decentralized entities. Furthermore, 5% of the annual national budget is allocated to the districts to support the District operational budget. The law also grants considerable autonomy to the Districts to collect taxes as a way of making them more financially independent and functional.

Decentralization would hardly become a reality if no effective planning systems were scheduled. The performance contracts initiative and outcome based management (imihigo) respond to such a concern. Within the same context of coordinating and harmonizing the interventions of various development partners at the local level, the Joint Action Development Forum (JADF) was initiated in order to avoid duplication, rationalize and to make development initiatives more profitable. The national consultative meeting (umushyikirano) was also adopted to close the gap between the central government and the decentralized entities, to enable annual evaluation and to adopt appropriate corrective measures.

In spite of the significant achievements registered so far, decentralization in Rwanda still faces a number of challenges. The main challenges include: the failure to coordinate the activities carried out by the actors to decentralization; resistance to change which constantly brings back the centralized tendencies and the passivity of the local population in the decision making process as they prefer to wait for their leaders to take initiative. It is also important to note that the responsibilities given to the districts do not necessarily match with the available means. Finally, some elements in the social and political context of Rwanda, including personality cult, ethnic divisions, and illiteracy are perceived as additional barriers to effective decentralization.

Chapter 3:

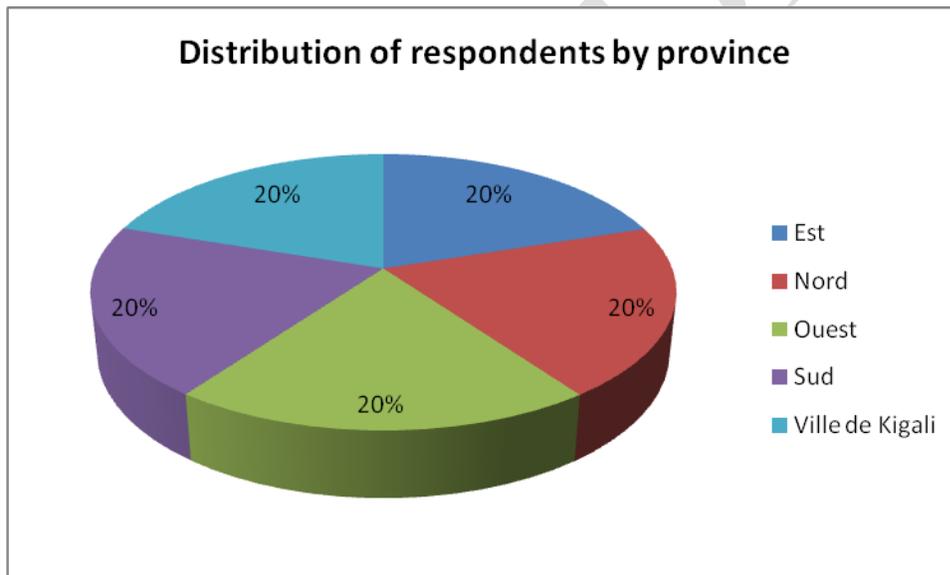
PARTICIPATION OF RWANDANS IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

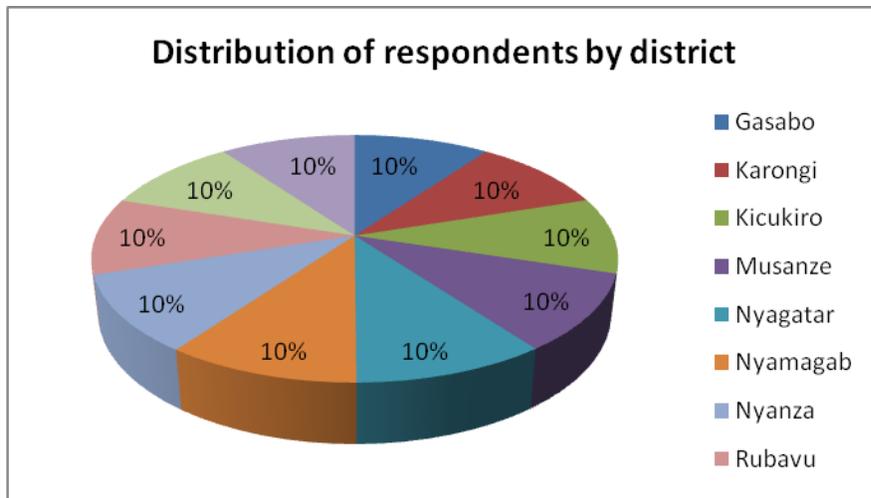
This chapter is mainly devoted to the opinions of the Rwandans interviewed, according to the sampling and methodology described in the introductory part of this document.

Section One: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

1. Geographical Distribution of Respondents

Figure 1.





N=1196

Distribution of respondents by sector

Table 1

	Frequency	%
Busasamana	60	5.0
Bushoki	60	5.0
Busogo	60	5.0
Bwishyura	60	5.0
Cyanzarwe	60	5.0
Gasaka	60	5.0
Kaduha	60	5.0
Kagarama	59	4.9
Kimihurura	59	4.9
Kinyinya	60	5.0
Kisaro	60	5.0
Matimba	60	5.0
Muhazi	60	5.0
Muhoza	60	5.0
Munyaga	59	4.9
Niboye	60	5.0
Ntyazo	60	5.0
Nyagatare	60	5.0
Rugabano	59	4.9
Rugerero	60	5.0
Total	1196	100.0

As outlined in the section on sampling, the study on participation in democratic governance covered all the four provinces and Kigali City. As presented in the pie chart above, respondents were drawn from all administrative entities, in almost equal proportions. This is more or less 240 households (at a rate of one person per household or 20% of respondents) per Province and Kigali City, out of a sample of 1196 people.

At the district level, respondents came from 10 districts (two districts per province and Kigali City), and distributed in almost equal proportions, or 120 people (10% of the sample) by district. It is the same for all sectors, so more or less 60 people (5% of the sample) by sector (2 areas sampled by District) responded to the survey questionnaire. It should be noted from the foregoing that the respondents represent in an acceptable manner the geographical and administrative distribution of Rwanda.

2. Distribution of Respondents by Age, Sex and Level of Education

Age, sex and educational level are important variables in the analysis of participation in democratic governance. Thus, age shows the level at which people are physically active, how they enjoy their rights and also how they fulfill their civic obligations.

Regarding the parameter sex, it is now recognized that sustainable development cannot be achieved without joint efforts from both men and women. In the same perspective, democratic governance, both as a means and purpose, cannot become a reality without involving men and women. The consideration of the sex parameter is also useful especially because, since 2003, Rwanda has attained the reputation of being successful in mainstreaming gender in decision making.

The variable 'level of education' is also taken into account in considering participation in democratic governance, because, it has an influence on participation. This is not only because of the intellectual capacity acquired in school but also because the school is an agent of political socialization as mentioned by Maurice Duverger (1973) and Philippe Braud (2004).

Figure 2

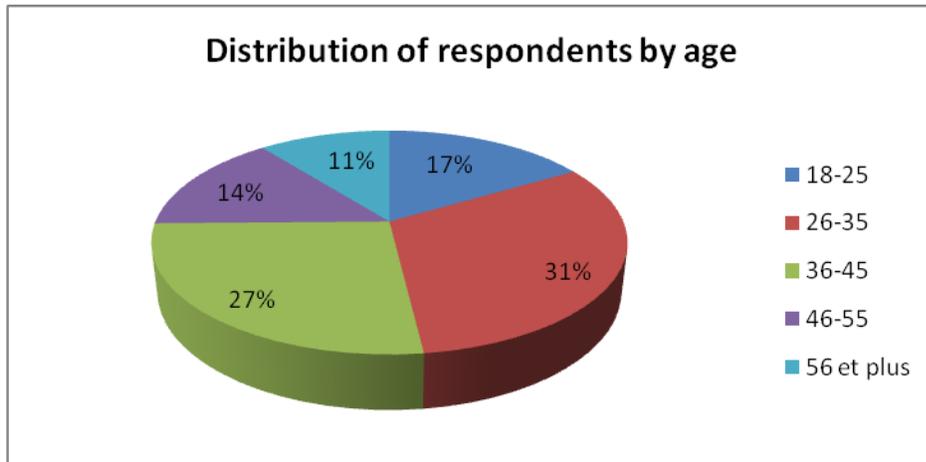
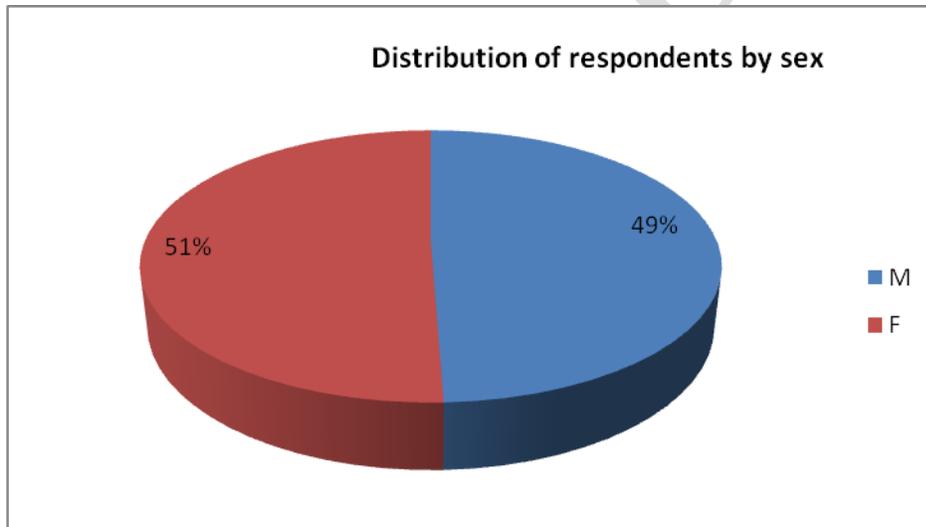


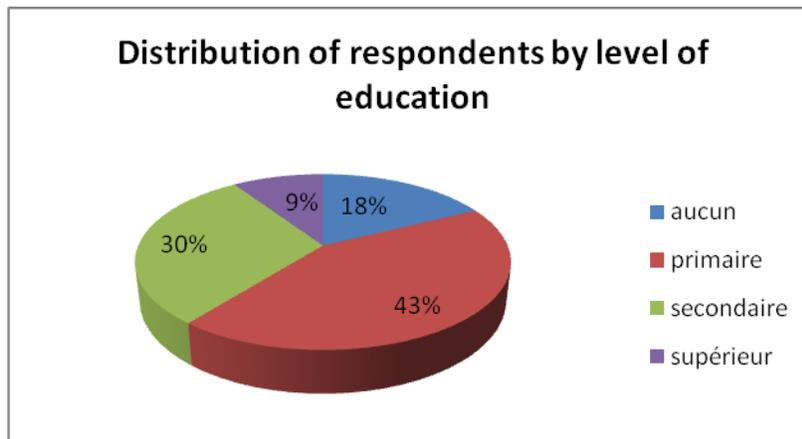
Figure 2, presents adult respondents, above 18 years of age, therefore active. This criterion is one among many which guided the selection of the respondents in order to ensure that they are from the right target population.

Figure 3



As for the gender variable, the graph shows that the proportion of women is slightly higher than that of men, 51% and 49% respectively. These proportions are similar to the ones revealed by the national population census and habitat held in Rwanda in 2002.

Figure 4



Regarding the variable, “educational level”, figure 4 shows that a majority of the respondents (61%) did not reach the secondary level of education and almost 2 out of 10 respondents (18%) have never been to school. Although these proportions seem alarming, it is important to note that this is an adult target population (18 years) a majority of whom - like in other developing countries - have not had access to secondary education as a result of factors that are not addressed in this research.

Finally, it would not be wrong to point out another factor often overlooked by household surveys using education level as a variable. Indeed, given that most, if not all of these surveys are conducted during the day, the respondents often present in a household are adults. These are generally less educated or uneducated with the more educated employees going to work only to return home in the evening or on weekends. This often reduces the number of educated people in the sample size and misleads readers in believing that the target population is not sufficiently educated.

Section 2: Participation of Citizens in Decision Making

1. Establishment of Laws

Figure 5

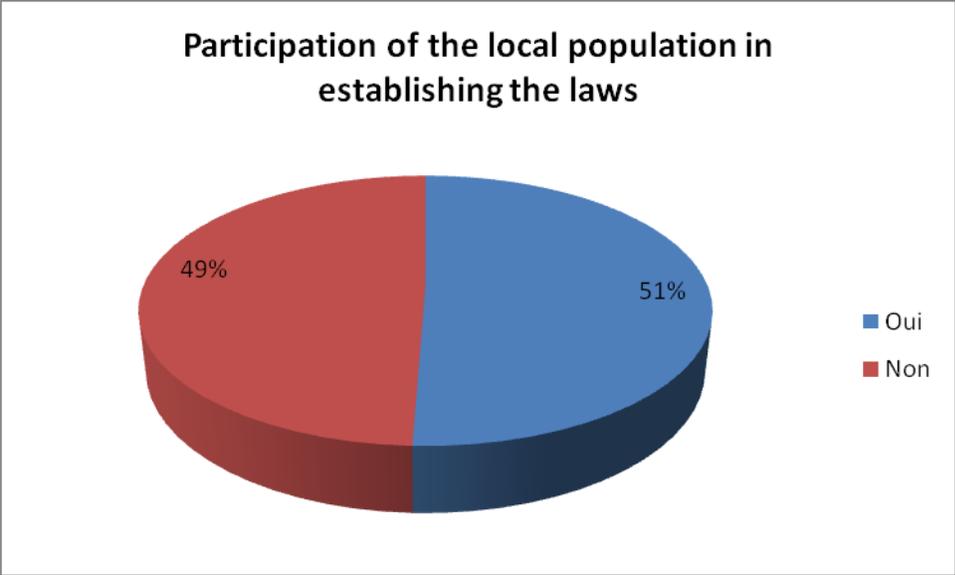
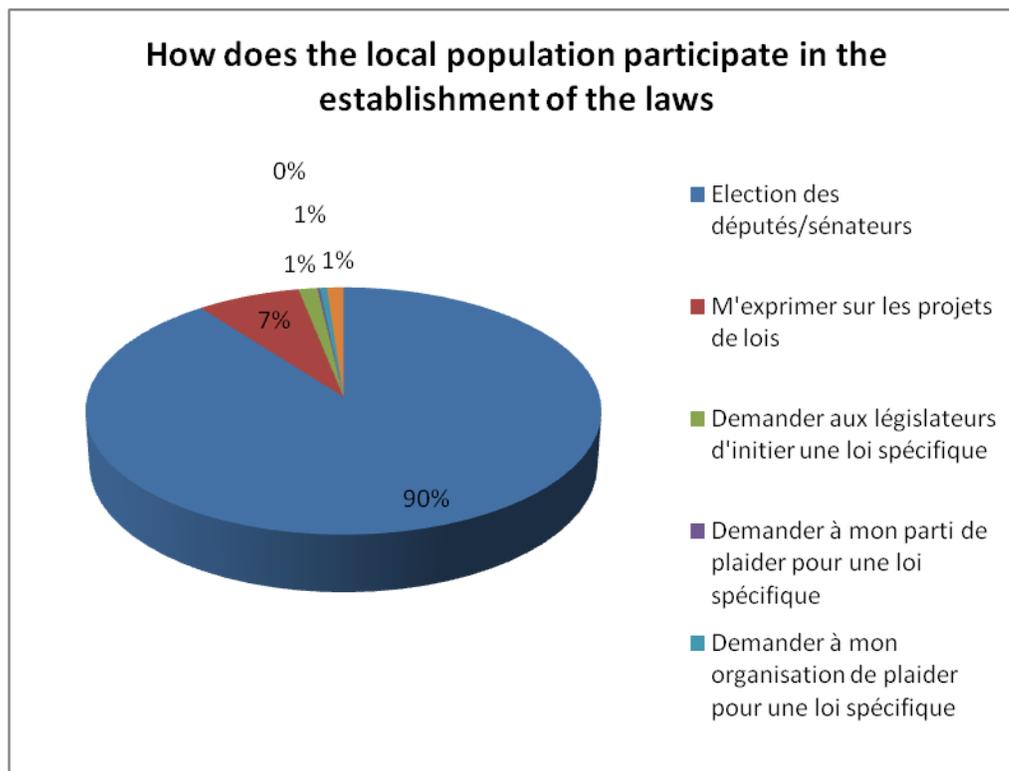


Figure 5 above, shows that 51% of the total population who participated in the study, believes that they have a role in the establishment of laws. This is an interesting outcome, which calls for close examination of how that proportion participates in this process.

Figure 6:



n= 605

- Election of members of parliament/senators
- Express my point of view on the draft laws
- Request lawyers to put in place a specific law
- Request my political party to lobby for a specific law
- Request my organization to lobby for a specific law
- Other

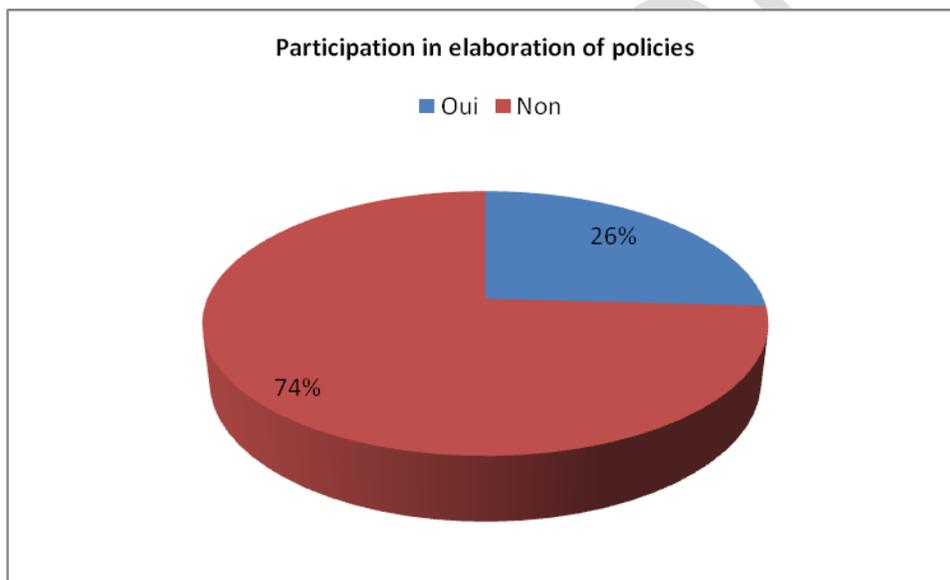
It can be noted in the illustrations given in Figures 3 and 4, that a respectable percentage of 51% of the total sample states that they have a role in the establishment of laws. In the logic of representative democracy, the population estimated to participate, is an overwhelming majority (90%) through their involvement in electing members of parliament as their representatives. The

other modalities of participation through non-governmental organizations and other associations do not seem to work; only 2% say that they use this process.

Direct participation in establishing the laws remains very low (7%) as shown in figure 6. It is also surprising to note that the possibility for the citizens to have a direct relationship with their representatives in parliament is low (1%). Therefore, the population does not have the possibility of giving their opinion or initiating a law through their representatives. This is quite contradictory, given that the citizen bases his hope of participation on his/her role in electing the members of parliament.

2. Elaboration of Policies

Figure 7:



n= 1167

Participation in the development of policies covers several areas. It is first and foremost about making the decision to initiate a policy, which in several countries is a political act. Even in such a case, the politician keeps in mind that in any initiative the needs of the population must be met. Mandatory participation of the citizens is also required in the design and development of policies in order to minimize the gap between what is written and the needs of the population.

Implementation of the policy must also be done with the citizen's participation. Finally, monitoring and evaluation of the policy and its implementation requires the participation of citizens if consistency is to be ensured.

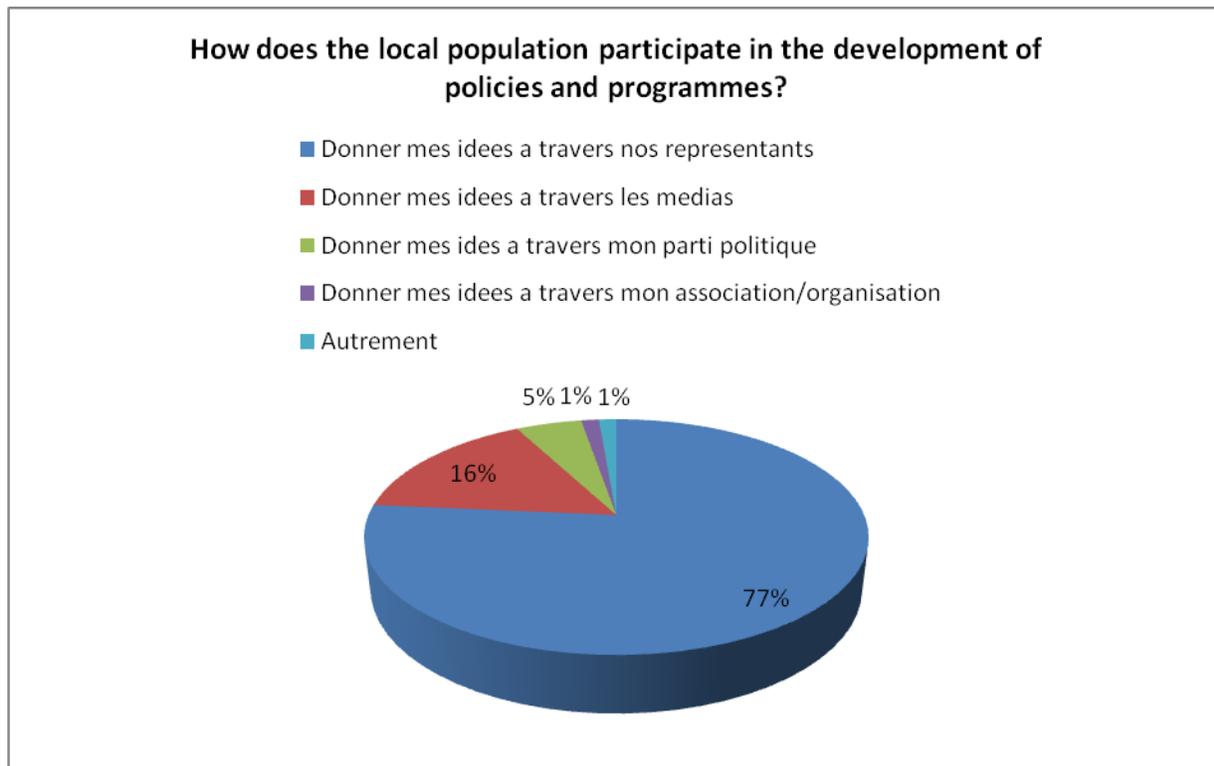
Figure 7 shows a participation rate of 26% in the development of policies. However, the actual level at which such participation takes place is not clear. Is it the level of initiation, design, implementation or monitoring? To answer this question, focus groups across all the sampled sectors were consulted. The focus group discussions revealed that citizen participation is usually applied at the level of implementing a given policy, with the rest of the levels excluding the participation of the citizens. During the focus group discussions, several examples were given; two of them deserve mention as they were repeated several times in all the focus groups held.

- Towards the end of 2008, the Rwandan government put in place a policy making English the only language of instruction in schools. The decision had a significant impact on the citizens. Through the discussions, participants deplored the lack of debate, and citizens' involvement on such a crucial issue, which not only affects the quality of education but also affects access to opportunities in the labor market.
- The land consolidation policy and regionalization of food crops, though appropriate and strategic, was considered by the participants as a decision imposed on them, as it affected the immediate and vital interests of the citizen. This policy would have benefited from greater ownership if citizen participation in its design and implementation would have been easier. The people would have had the opportunity to address various specific and practical aspects based on given contexts.

The examples given illustrate the value of participation and how essential it is to development as Issaga Diallo (2003: 1) said, "Everything you do for me without me is not for me."

Next, the question as to how citizens participate in the development of policies is addressed.

Figure 8:



n= 302

- Give my ideas through our elected representatives
- Give my ideas through the media
- Give my ideas through my political party
- Give my ideas through the association/organization where I belong
- Others

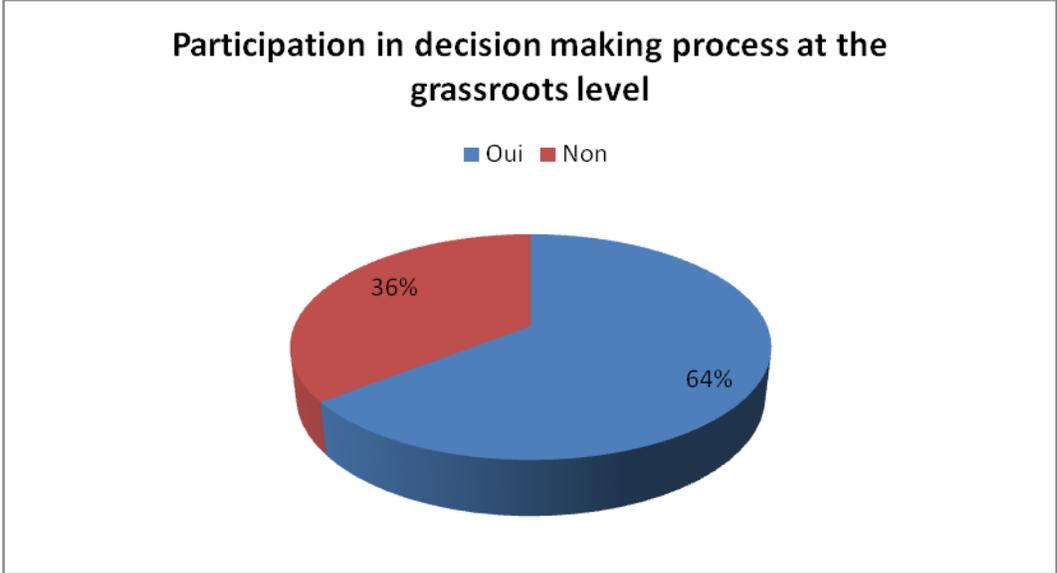
Figure 8 shows, that 26% of the aggregated sample participates in policy development. Among these, 77% participate through direct discussions with the local government authorities. Non-governmental organizations and other local associations do not seem to be a way by which citizens participate (1%).

The rest of the possible modalities for participation such as the media (16%), political parties (5%) were stated as needed more and more to further citizens' participation. For example, whenever a participant referred to a political party, it turned out that the party being referred to is

the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF), which seems to be the dominant party in the political arena. Political parties however, do not seem to be the ideal channel through which citizens can influence public policy (5%) as shown in Figure 8.

3. Participation in Decision Making at the Grassroots Level

Figure 9.



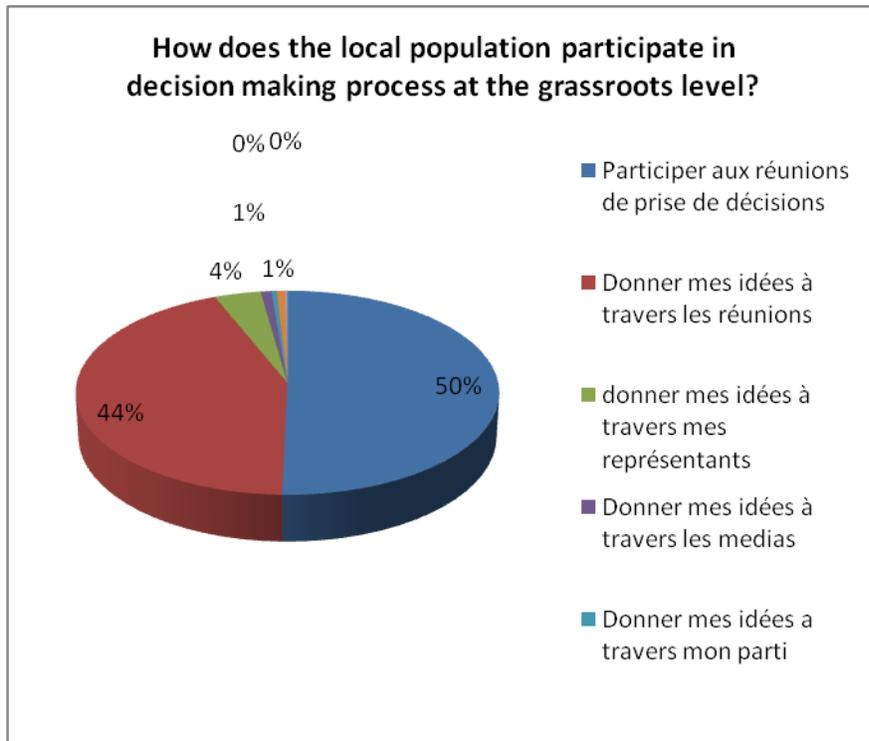
n= 1196

Participation in decision-making is presented as possible at the grassroots level because of the proximity between citizens and their representatives. This explains why citizens are involved in decision-making when authorities are close to them (umudugudu), with a participation rate of 64%. It can be noted that there is a relatively low participation rate in the non-educated population (13.1%) on one hand and among the academia on the other hand (11%). (See table 9 in appendix).

In trying to understand and explain this phenomenon, one may propose a hypothesis that an uneducated population is not well equipped to understand the implications of the decisions taken by the administration. Similarly, the highly educated population has a relatively clear

understanding of the effectiveness of the population, but when involved in decision making, the educated do not find interest in participating. This is often the case in urban areas where the elite and the intellectuals, rarely participate in matters of national or community interest.

Figure 10



N= 670

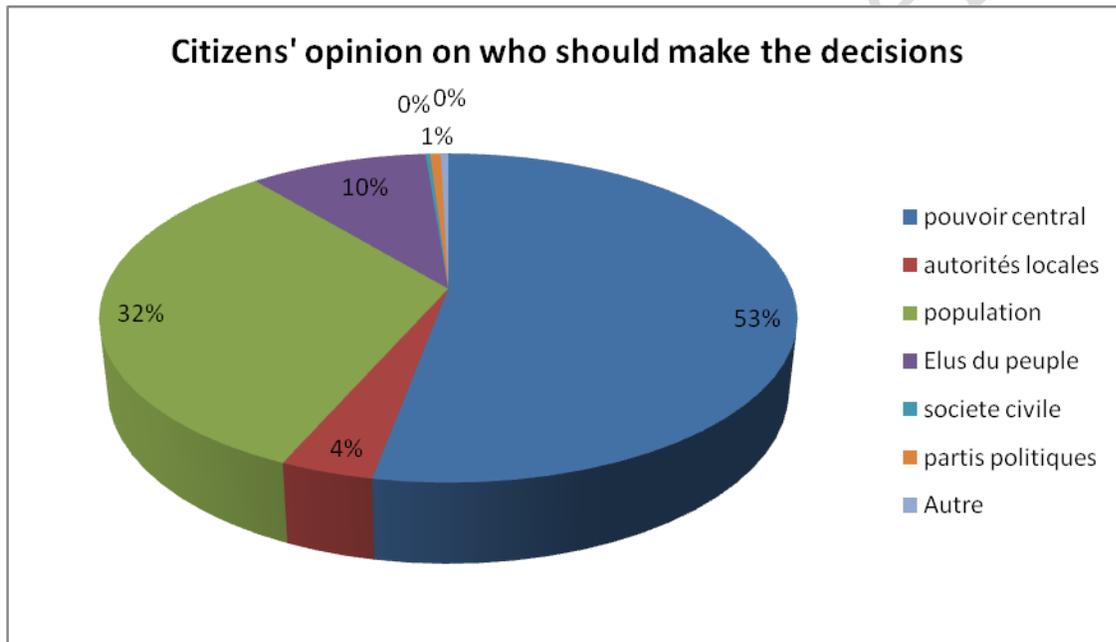
- Attend decision making meetings
- Give my ideas during the meetings
- Give my ideas through the representatives
- Give my ideas through the media
- Give my ideas through my political party
- Give my ideas through an organization I belong to

Figure 10 focuses on two elements: the number of people who take part in decision-making at the local level and the importance of the meetings held at imidugudu and cells that provide opportunities for broader participation. This state of affairs explains why over 90% of the

population says that they participate when they meet with their leaders or when they attend meetings. This brings out two questions: Can this kind of participation significantly influence the development of a culture of critical thinking essential for any democratic process? Is attending meetings sufficient or is it also necessary to acquire the ability to analyze or question in order to ultimately arrive at a consensus on appropriate decisions. This idea emerged from the various groups that participated in the debates within the focus groups.

- **Levels of Decision Making**

Figure 11:



N=1196

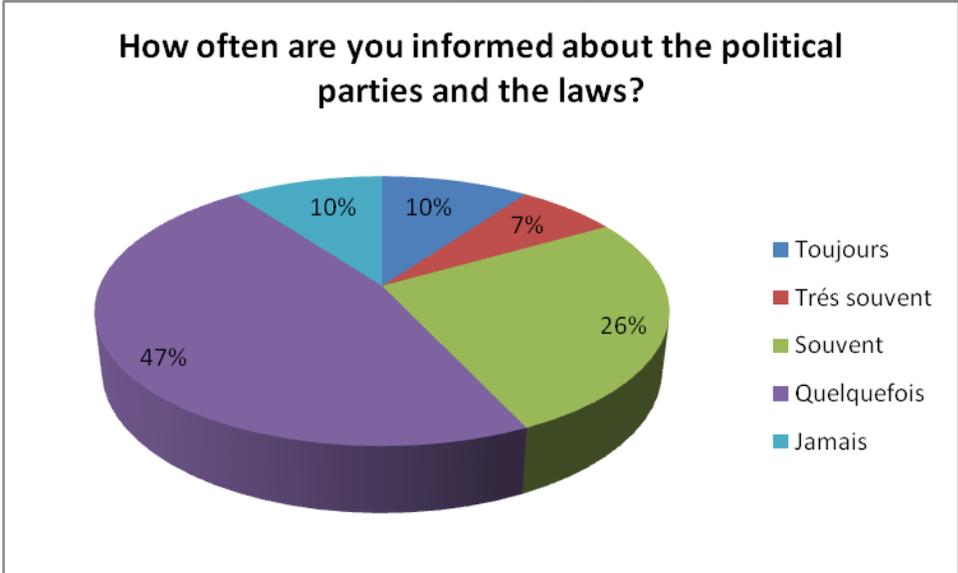
- The cabinet
- The local authorities
- Population
- Members of Parliament
- Civil society
- Political parties
- Others

With decentralization in place since 2000, it is expected, that it is a process that requires time and a change of mindset for both the rulers and the ruled. The information in figure11 presents the perception that a good portion of the population (53%) expects the central government to be the major decision making organ. Only 37% of the population (32% +4%), believes that decisions should be taken at the grassroots level with citizens as the lead decision makers.

The population also does not expect political parties and civil society to play a role in the decision making process. This is because both civil society and political parties are not visible on the ground or else, there is a misunderstanding of the role that these bodies should play in the decision making process. From the discussions held in the focus groups, it was realized that even the ruling party, the RPF does not seem to be the preferred channel for the population to influence decision-making. The main role is given to authorities operating at the central level. At the grassroots level, there seems to be confusion between the authorities at the central level and the ruling party.

- **Information Sharing on Matters of Public Interest**

Figure 12:



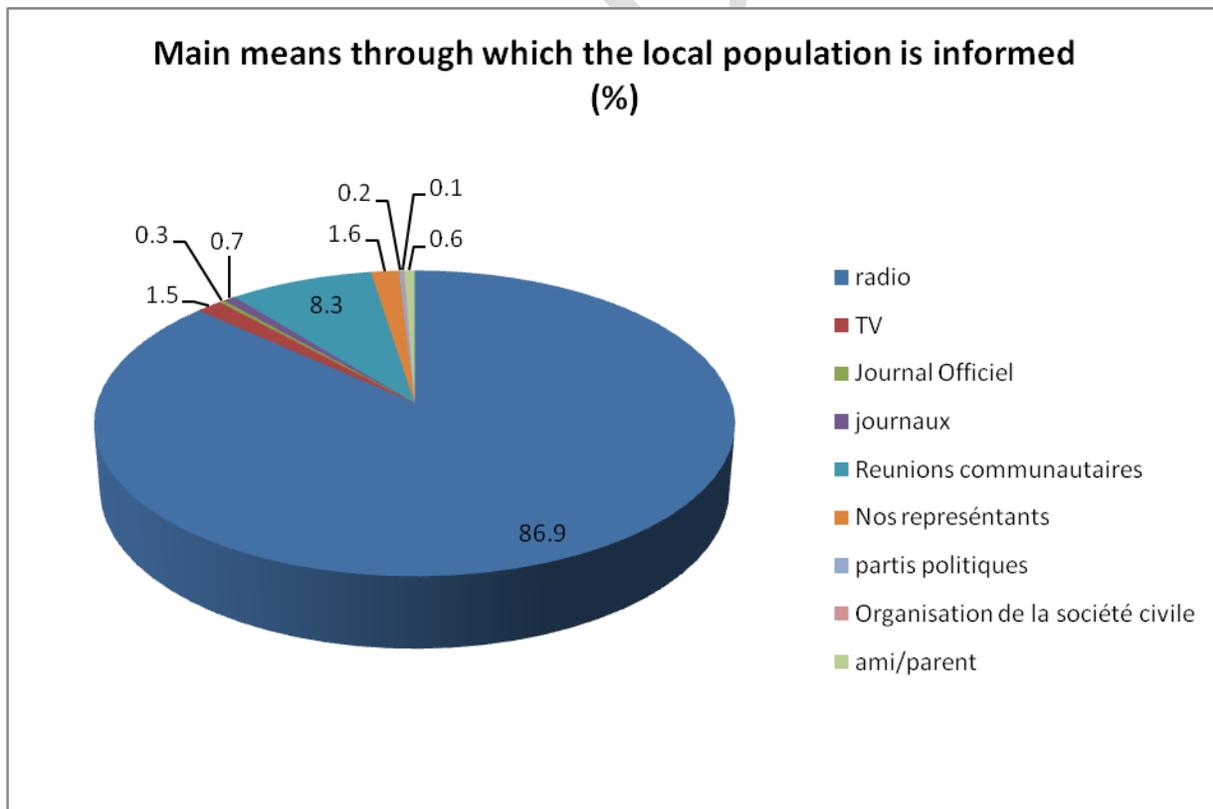
N= 1196

- Always
- Quite often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

Figure 12 illustrates weaknesses in the dissemination of information regarding public policy. Over 50% (10% +47%) of the interviewees consider themselves insufficiently informed. This outcome may either result from a population with no culture of searching for information or a low level of importance given to information dissemination by the public authority. Given that a significant portion of the sampled population feel well informed, a need to find out what and how they get the information was undertaken.

Main Channel of Communication for the Local Population

Figure 13



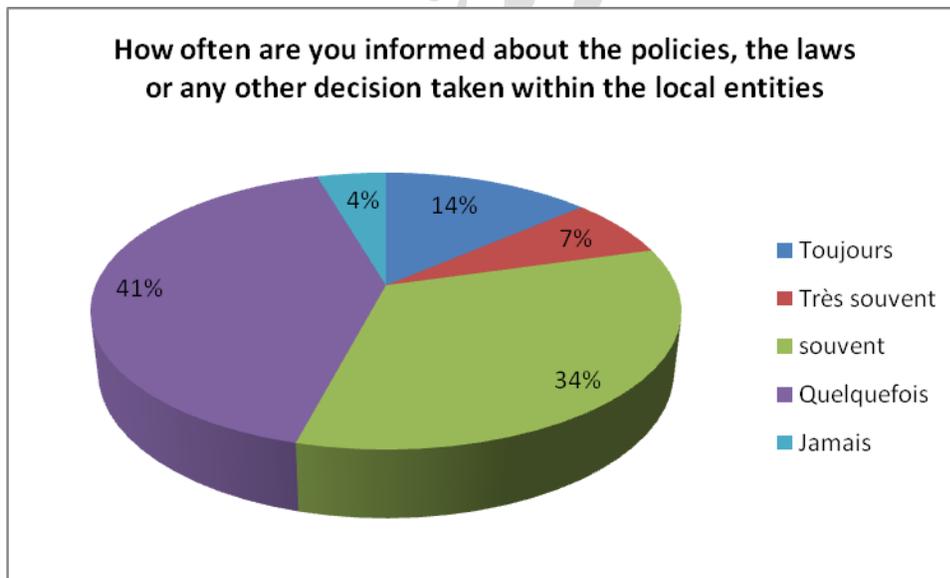
N=1086

- Radio
- TV
- Official Gazette
- Newspapers
- Community meetings
- Our representatives
- Political parties
- Civil society organizations
- Friend/parent

In terms of communication channels, it appears indisputable that the oral culture weighs heavily. Indeed, 87% of the population gets information mainly through the radio. Meetings in the framework of umuganda take second place with 8%. Other communication channels like: print media, television, elected officials at different levels do not seem to play a significant role in information dissemination.

- **Information Dissemination on Decisions Taken by Local Authorities**

Figure 14



- Always

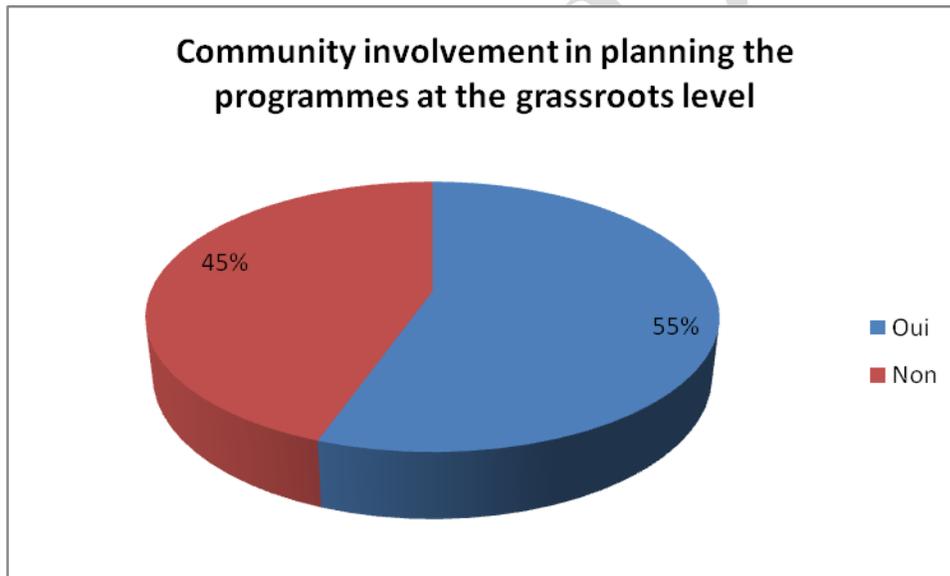
- Quite often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

Figure 14 reveals that 55% of the sampled population is well informed on decisions taken at the decentralized level. This percentage should be higher given the proximity of the decentralized entities to the population. Clearly, more efforts are needed to ensure improved circulation of information.

4. Community Involvement in Decision Making at Various Levels.

Planning Phase

Figure 15



N=1196

The planning phase is an important one since it determines the choices and priorities of community programs. Figure 15 highlights the finding that 55% of the sampled population considers itself involved at the planning phase. The focus group meetings revealed that most of

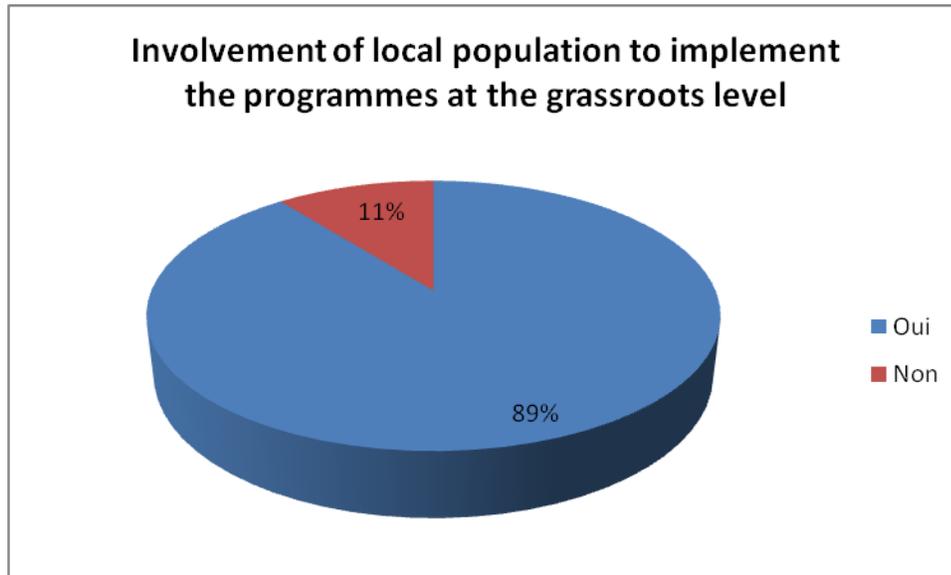
the decisions implemented at the local level are either taken by the central government or the district authorities, without consulting the local population.

According to the district and sector authorities interviewed during this research plus Minister Musoni Protais (Minister of Local Government), participation of the local population in decision making is not always direct. Some of the indirect channels of communication include representatives of the local population like the consultative council at all levels of local administration. However, the focus group meetings held with the local authorities and the local population revealed a gap between the members of the consultative council and the citizens, as far as consultations are concerned.

A majority of those consulted revealed that they are usually contacted by the members of the consultative council through meetings only when the local population is mobilized to implement the policies, laws and decisions taken by higher authorities. It is quite rare that during such meetings the citizens are given a chance to provide inputs or suggest solutions to their problems. Considering the fact that the members of the consultative council are also members of the same community, opportunities abound for the local community members to express their individual problems which need to be solved by the local administration.

- **Implementation Phase**

Figure 16

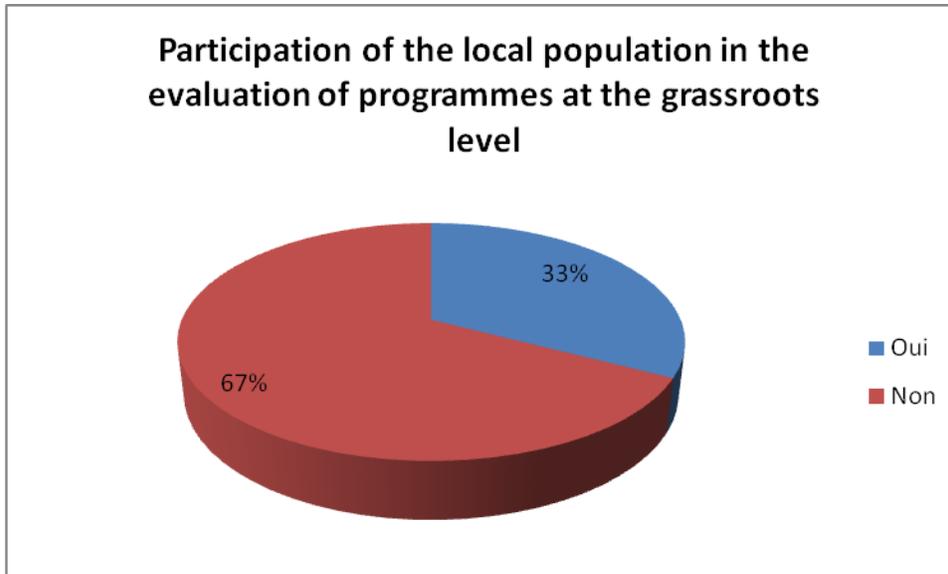


N=1170

Implementation of government policies and programmes requires the participation of the local population, as shown in figure 15. Indeed 89% of the population claims to be involved in this phase. Their participation is seen through community work known as *umuganda*, the obligation to support projects of public interest (construction of schools), *ubudehe* and the Labour Intensive Program (HIMO). However, this participation was reported to be a heavy burden on the daily life of citizens consulted during the focus group discussions. A participant in one of the focus groups had this to say: "We recognize the necessity for the population to participate in policy implementation. However, the contribution that we are required to make by the authorities rather pushes us into poverty. Often, the implementation of [these policies] takes much of our time and money that it is very difficult to carry out our family and personal activities".

- Assessment Phase

Figure 17



N=1196

The three phases of the decision-making process: planning, implementation and evaluation are closely related and necessary for effective participation. It should be noted that the degree of participation in the planning phase and the modalities used are still at a respectable level (55 %.). The population participates effectively in the formulation of development priorities through meetings at the lowest level of umudugudu and cells. This is very encouraging.

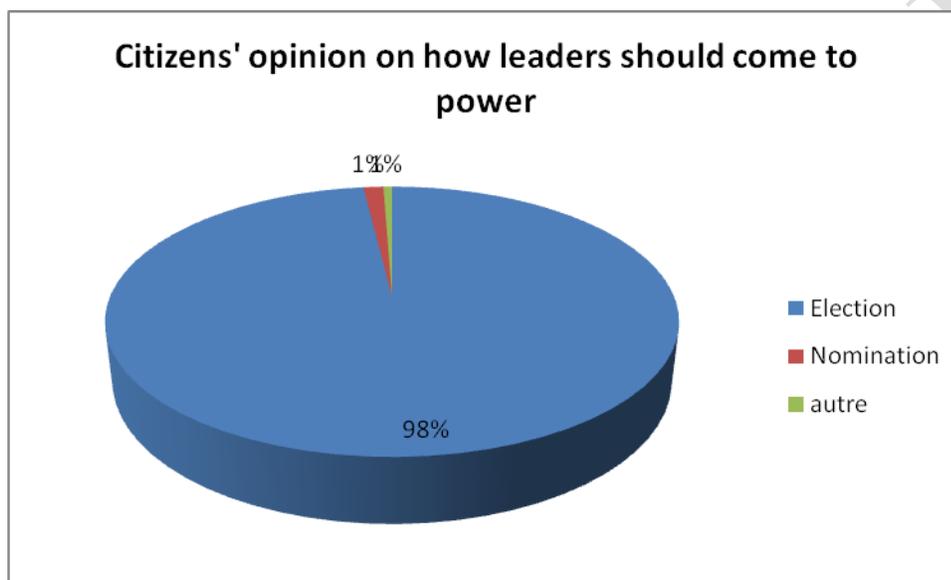
However, according to the participants in the focus groups, there is a gap between the priorities identified and the activities actually performed. One of the explanations given is the weaknesses associated with the evaluation phase. Indeed, 33% of the sampled population, a relatively low rate, says that it participates in this phase. It appears, policy implementers are not bound by the priorities agreed upon during the planning phase due to the minor importance given to the participation of the population in the evaluation phase. Similarly, the district level is stuck in a conflict of loyalty vis-à-vis the population on one hand and the central government on the other hand. Accountability to the central government is given priority over the local people. This produces a perverse situation whereby government priorities are favored even when they do not meet those defined by the population at the grassroots.

Initiatives like "open day" and "accountability day" could be strengthened and used as an assessment framework that can increase the level of citizen participation.

Section 3: Participation in Choosing Leaders

1. Citizens' Views on Accession to Power

Figure 18



N=1196

- Election
- Appointment
- Other

In democratic societies, the way people come to power is important because it determines the legitimacy of the leader. It also enables the citizens to choose between the different political policies and programs offered by the prospective leaders. In Rwanda, the post independence electoral processes were characterized by violence, making the local population loose trust in the electoral process. One may wonder what the situation is today. Are the citizens effectively involved in the electoral process?

Figure 18, above, shows a high rate of 98% of the population consulted who believe that today, electoral processes do provide opportunities for playing a role in public affairs. However, it is important to mention that the issue of elections in Rwanda faces significant challenges due to the social and political context. These challenges will be discussed later in this document.

2. Election of Leaders

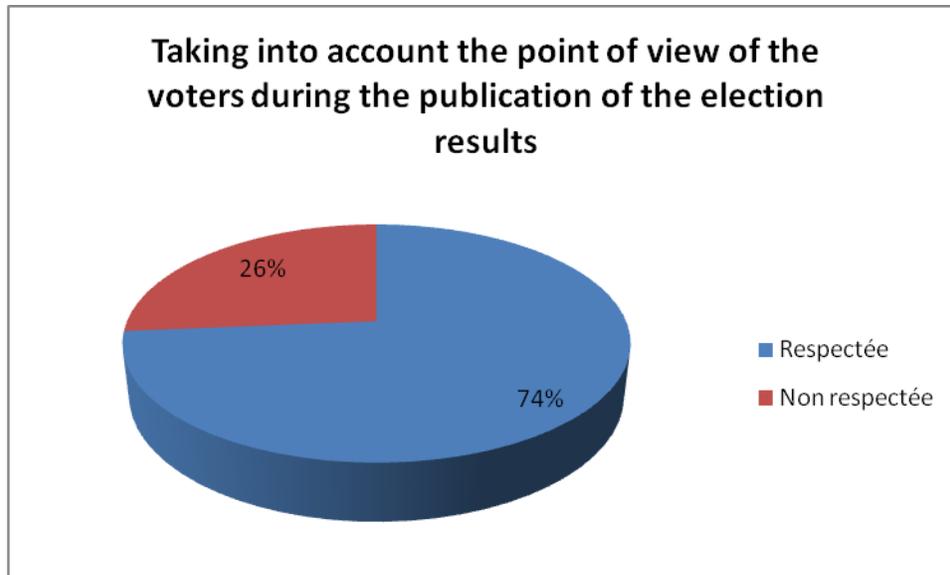
Figure 19:



A significant proportion of Rwandans 97% believe that they take part in choosing their leaders. This percentage is undoubtedly very encouraging. However, participation through elections is not enough in itself if accountability mechanisms are not working effectively. Discussions in the focus groups reveal that the local population is involved in choosing their leaders but lack the strategies to hold the leaders accountable. In such a context, elections become a formality.

3. Citizen's Trust in the Electoral Process

Figure 20:



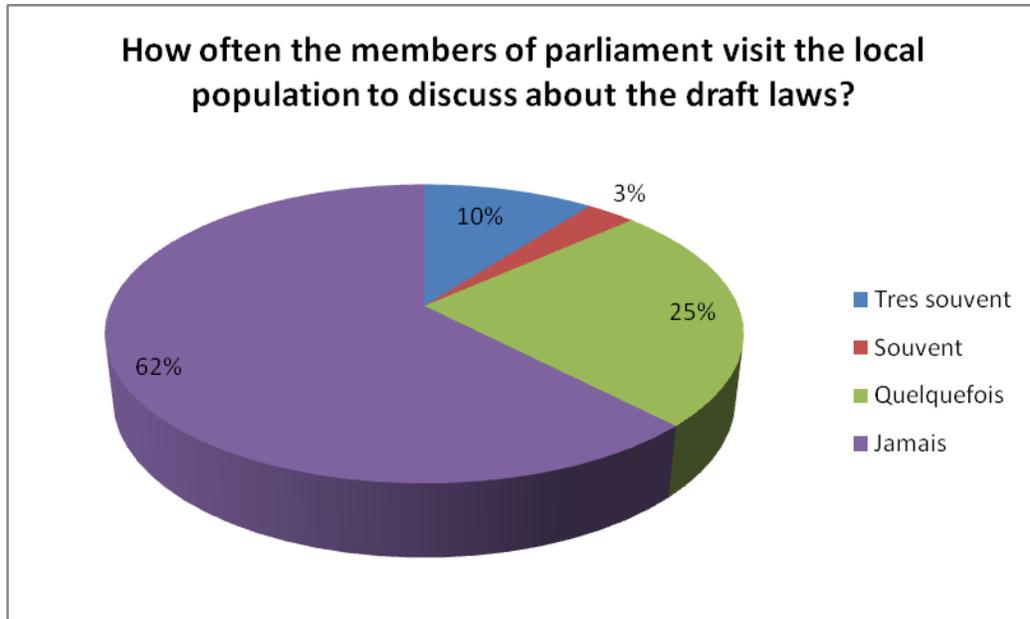
N=1196

The trust citizens have in the electoral process is partly based on a transparent system of vote counting and publication of results. 74% of the sampled population is convinced that the right decision is taken while the remaining 26% thinks the opposite. An analysis of the opinions expressed during the focus groups, reveals that what the people refer to is casting the ballot whereas the indirect suffrage used does not guarantee the same trust.

Section 4: Accountability and Transparency

1. Consultations by Parliamentarians to Assess the Peoples' Views of the Passed Laws

Figure 21:



N=1169

- Quite often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

Figure 19 shows a rate of 62% of the respondents who claimed that they have never been consulted by the parliamentarians before they pass new laws. This means that dialogue between citizens and parliamentarians remains a big challenge. The participants in the focus groups organized with the local population the local leaders declared that the members of parliament meet people only during the election campaign. However, some participants mentioned that some members of parliament attend the district consultative council meetings and of recent,

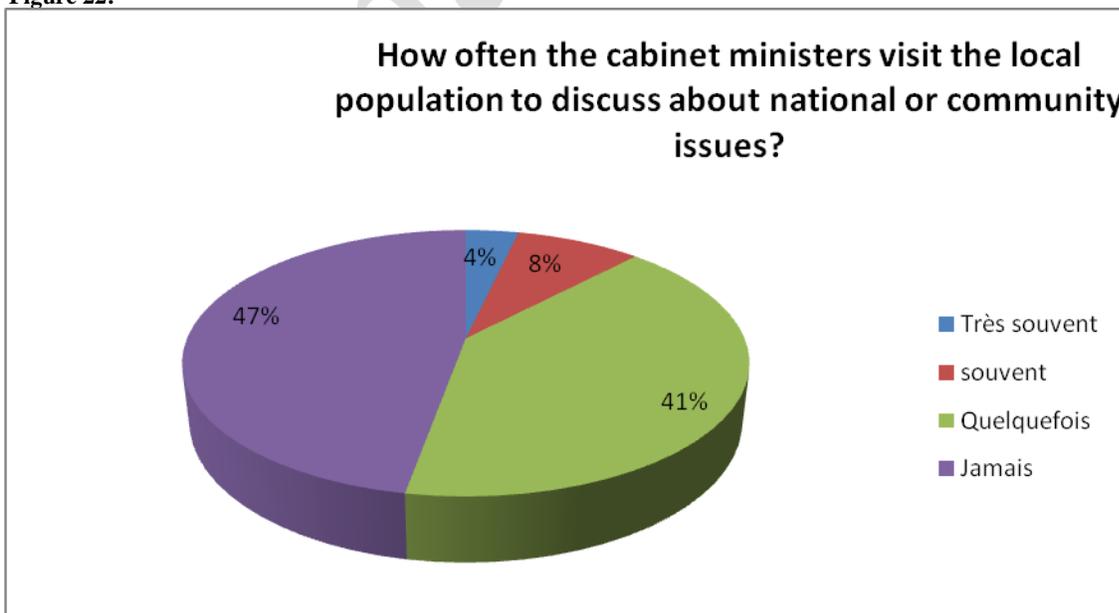
some have started to participate in the community work known as umuganda. All participants in the focus groups mentioned that the members of parliament have never consulted them before they pass new laws, except for the Constitution of 2003.

The deputy speaker of Parliament, Dr. Jean Damascène Ntawukuriryayo who was also interviewed during this research acknowledged that the members of parliament do not visit the local population often enough. He added: “this is a serious challenge and efforts must be made to address the issue”. As a solution, Parliament decided to have at least 20 members of parliament visit the districts not only to give a good example during the community work (umuganda) but also to know more about the problems encountered by the citizens.

During focus group discussions, the issue of legitimacy of the laws was raised quite often. Laws are responses to the societal needs that the legislators identify through consultations with the local population. When this process is ignored, it puts to question the legitimacy of the law and the commitment of the citizens to follow such laws. One may wonder what the role of the Rwandan executive is in fulfilling this need.

2. Government Consultations of the Citizens in the Decision Making Process.

Figure 22:

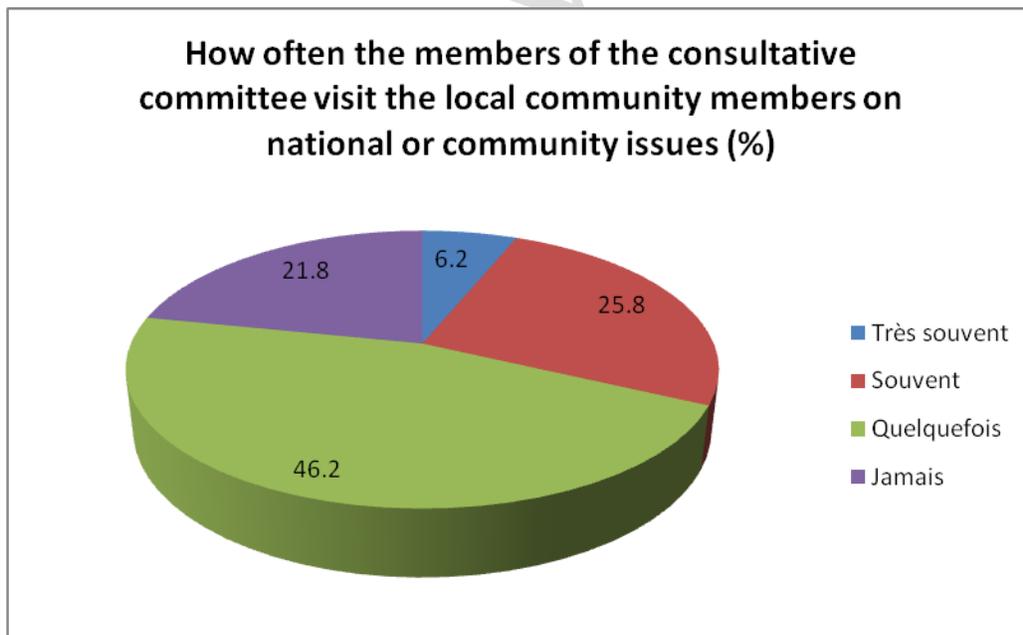


N=1194

- Quite often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

According to the people consulted throughout the country, their level of communication with cabinet ministers is not different from that with the members of parliament. The answer to the question as to how often cabinet ministers visit the local population revealed that 55% (47% +8%) say that they are visited regularly by the cabinet ministers while 41% say that they have never been visited. In general, at the national level, there is a policy which encourages citizens' contributions to the decision-making process. However, existing figures indicate that there is still a lot to be done in order to address this challenge.

Figure 23: How often do Members of the Consultative Council Visit the Local Population on National or Community issues?



n= 1196

- Quite often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

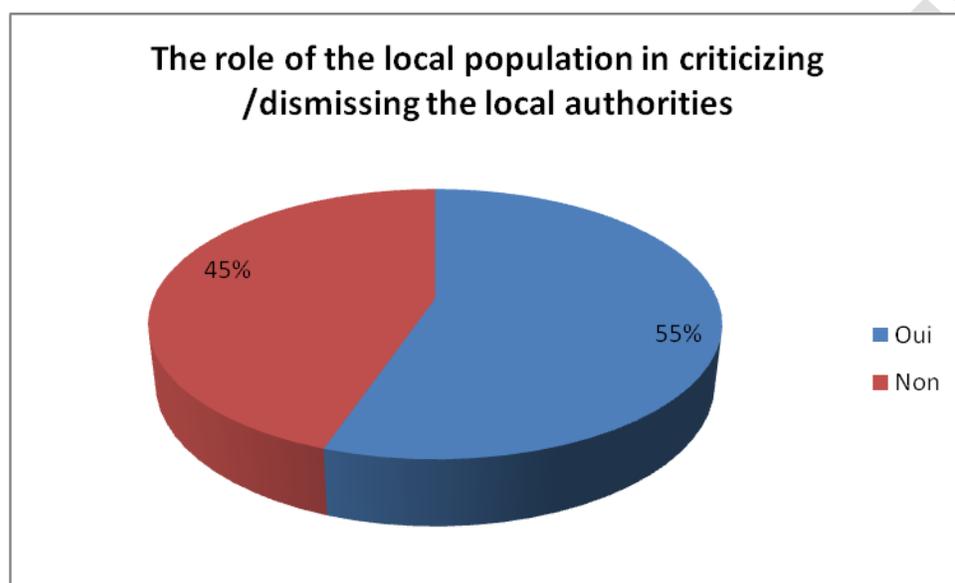
The government of Rwanda has established consultative councils at the level of the decentralized entities following the adoption of the principle of representative democracy and the decentralization policy. These committees are not only expected to report the citizens' concerns to higher authorities, they are also expected to represent the local population in the decision making processes at cell, sector and district levels. In order to achieve this goal, members of the consultative council have to consult the citizens in order to get their opinions and expectations before taking any decision which impact their lives.

Figure 23 highlights how often the members of the consultative council visit the local population in order to get their opinions on national and community issues. The data reveals that 32% (25.8+6.2%) of respondents are visited 'quite often' by the members of the consultative council. 46.2% are visited sometimes, whereas 21.8% declare that they have never been visited. Considering that there are serious challenges of accountability and transparency, what role can voters play in addressing such issues? Can they criticize or dismiss their elected representatives on account of their lack of accountability and/or transparency?

Section 5: Dismissing an Elected Representative at the Local Level

1. The Role of the Local Population in Criticizing/Dismissing Local Authorities

Figure 24

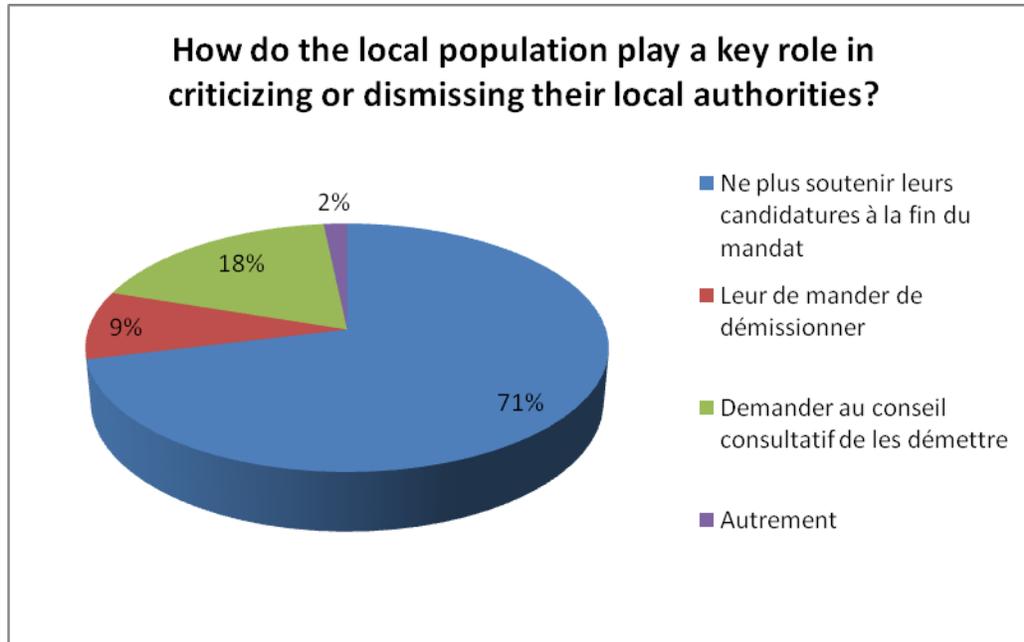


N=1196

As mentioned by Musoni Protais, Minister in charge of Cabinet Affairs and former minister of local government, citizens' ability to criticize and to dismiss incompetent local authorities is good and necessary. It motivates the local leaders to be accountable to the electorate. Figure 24 shows that the local population plays a key role in renewing the mandate of their elected leaders. The same role is played to dismiss poorly performing leaders during their term in office or through the protest vote. 55% of the sampled population believes that they have the power to decide on the fate of their local authorities.

2. Practical Ways of Dismissing Elected Authorities

Figure 25:



N=661

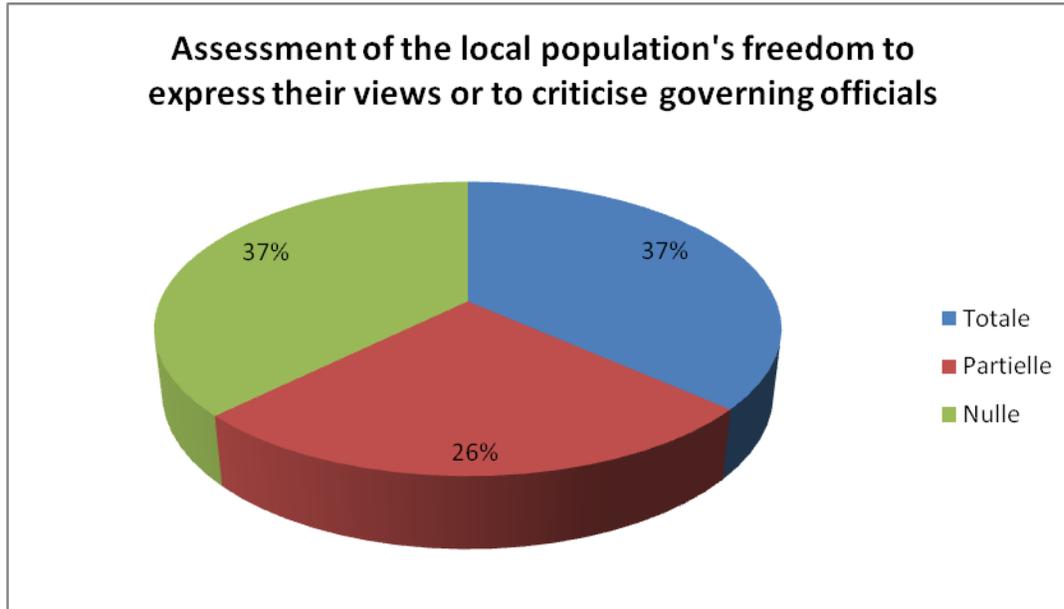
- They do not support their leaders for a new term in office
- They oblige the leaders to resign
- They request the consultative council to dismiss them
- Other

Figure 25 reveals that 27% of the respondents can request the resignation of poorly performing officials either directly or through the Advisory Council of the decentralized entities. In other words, through the protest vote, a citizen obliges the elected leader to be accountable for his/her decisions. Although this is implemented more effectively at the sector, cell and village level, the discussions in the focus groups revealed that the reality is quite different at the district level. The majority of participants in the debate declared that the resignation of the district mayors as well as the renewal of their term in office remain an informal decision of the central government.

3. The Right to Challenge a Decision taken by a Governing Authority

- Central Level

Figure 26:



N=1196

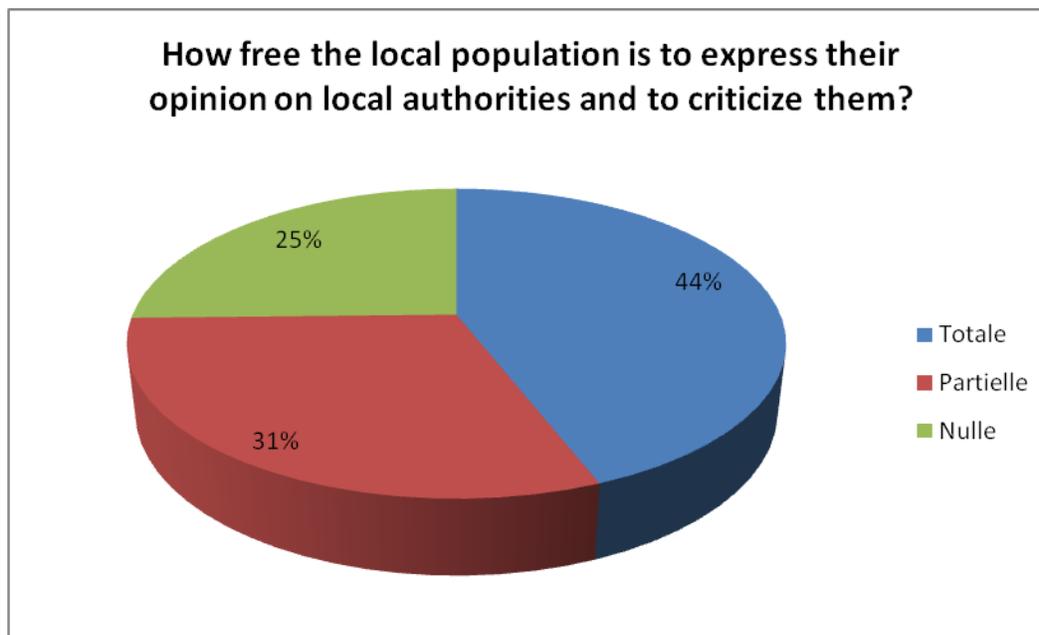
.....

- Totally free
- Somehow free
- Not free at all

In a democracy, accountability involves the citizens' ability to express their opinion on the implementation of public policies and programs. A citizen may agree or disagree with the government authority without any repercussions. In addition to the principle of accountability, participation is also ensured otherwise, the wait-and-see culture prevails. Figure 24 shows 63% (37% +26%) of citizens who think that they do not have enough freedom to make constructive criticism with regard to programs established by the state. The lack of a culture of controversial debate, which is detrimental to diversity of opinion, may affect the optimal functioning of institutions in a democratic state, based on the principle of "checks and balances".

• Local level

Figure 27:



N=1196

- Totally free
- Not quite free
- Not free at all

Figure 27, above, shows 44% of the total sample as having total freedom to criticize and to express their opinions on the decisions taken at the grassroots levels. This observation was expressed by some among the district mayors and executive secretaries interviewed. They believe that the local population is no longer afraid and dares to publicly criticize local authorities. One of the mayors said:

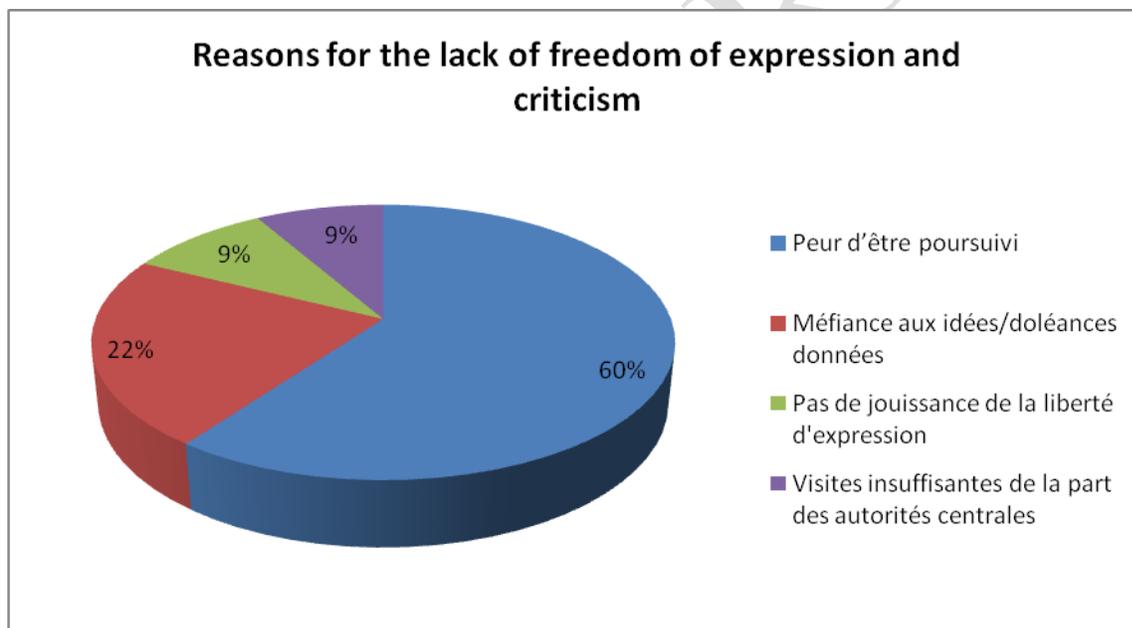
«Today, it is almost impossible for a local leader to consider a citizen as hostage. They are so confident that they dare to publicly denounce incompetent local authorities or leaders who are not able to provide quality services. Moreover, there are many channels of communication including telephone calls and short messages (SMS) which can be used to denounce poorly performing authorities».

The percentage (44) is quite high, and given that the local authorities are very close to the citizens, it is possible that the level of freedom of expression could become even higher. As presented by figure 27, half of the respondents (56%) feel that they are not free to express their opinions to the local leaders and neither can they criticize them.

If figure 27 is something to go by, then how do the citizens participate fully in decision-making when they are not fully capable of making constructive criticism vis-à-vis the decisions taken by local authorities? What are the factors which may be hampering freedom of opinion in the given context?

• **Challenges to Freedom of Opinion.**

Figure 28:



N=754

- Fear of being prosecuted or punished
- The local leaders do not care about/do not take into consideration our ideas/requests
- We do not enjoy our freedom of expression
- Government officials do not visit us quite often

Whether justified or not, citizens tend to harbor fears of reprisal if they dare criticize or challenge the decisions taken at different levels of governance. This is true for 60% of the people involved in this study, which is a high rate. A smaller percentage (22%), prefer not to express their opinion because they are convinced that this will not help as nobody will take their opinions into account. One might wonder if this situation is a result of a political legacy of conflict, which is likely to phase out with time. The district and sector authorities interviewed in this research acknowledge that some local authorities intimidate the citizens who dare to criticize them, adding that the fear of expressing one's opinion was inherited from former regimes that censored people's ideas and punished daring critics.

Dr Jean Damascène Ntawukuriryayo, the deputy speaker in the lower chamber of parliament, Minister Protais Musoni in charge of Cabinet Affairs and Minister Protais Mitali of Youth, contend that citizen's freedom to express their opinions on good governance and to criticize their leaders is essential. Unfortunately, some leaders and some among the citizens have not yet understood this need.

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Section 5: Institutional Actors and Participation in Democratic Governance

The stability of a country depends on the efforts put into establishing strong institutions and in putting in place the rules governing those institutions. Indeed, power counteracts power as Montesquieu asserts. In a democracy, a citizen expects his participation to be reflected in the running of the public institutions and in the major decisions taken at the national level. This is possible if the institutions' control and accountability mechanisms are inter-dependent, providing the most important pillars in the dynamics of citizen participation.

Citizen participation can only be effective if all the three powers of government operate in a complementary manner, while remaining independent of each other. More specifically, the legislative arm of government (parliament) needs to assume its role of monitoring government actions, thereby increasing accountability and the responsibility of government vis-à-vis the promises made to the citizens. Similarly, parliament ensures that the laws and decisions taken are not arbitrary.

An analysis of the history of democracy reveals the importance of giving up some of the powers to others other than the state in order to limit arbitrariness and to promote citizen participation. These include civil society, the media, trade unions... These institutions provide the necessary balance to enable proper functioning of the state especially with regards to the protection of citizen's interests.

Civil society as defined by Sabine Freizer (2004) is a set of group activities, formal or informal that connects individuals, generates mutual trust and facilitates an exchange of views on issues of public debate. It is that debate, which ultimately protects the interests of citizens.

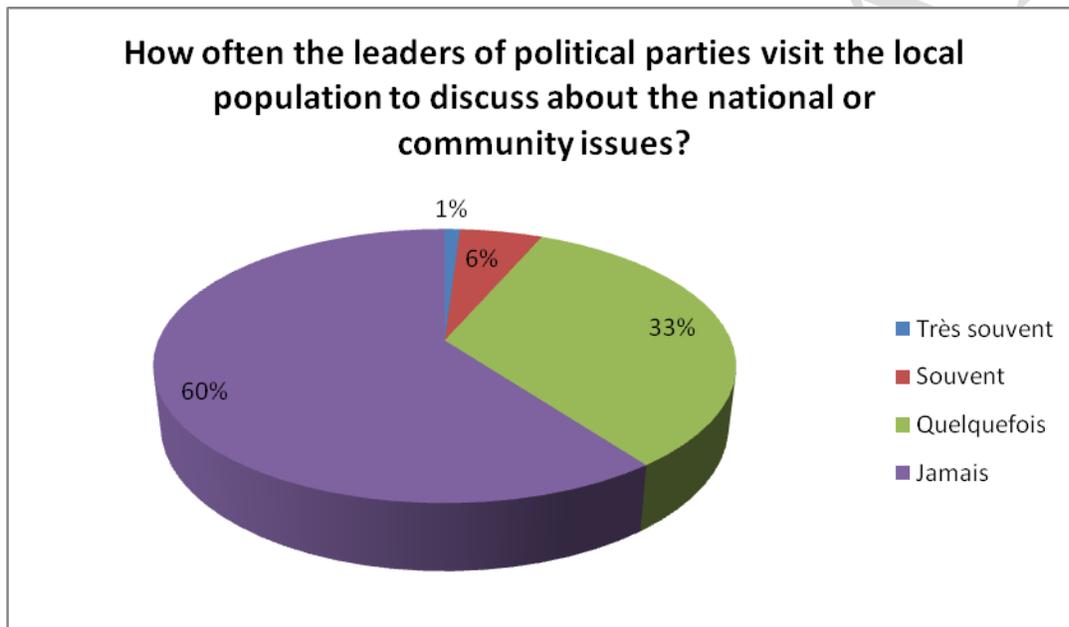
In their joint article, Sauquet Vielajus Michael and Martin (year?) (Legitimacy, Actors and Territories: Embedding Governance in the Diversity of Cultures in Bellina, Megro...) talk about the plurality of forms of civil society and their ambiguous role in promoting democratic governance. One of the fundamental aspects of the approach "governance" in development policies is the involvement of many stakeholders in the development and management of public

affairs: this includes providing a new place to non-governmental actors such as civil society organizations (NGOs, social movements, trade unions, companies etc).

Another aspect of participation relates to the functioning of the multiparty system provided that political parties are capable of facilitating freedom of opinion in various sustainable projects of society. How is this implemented in Rwanda today?

1. The Level of Citizen's Contact with Political Parties

Figure 29:



N=1181

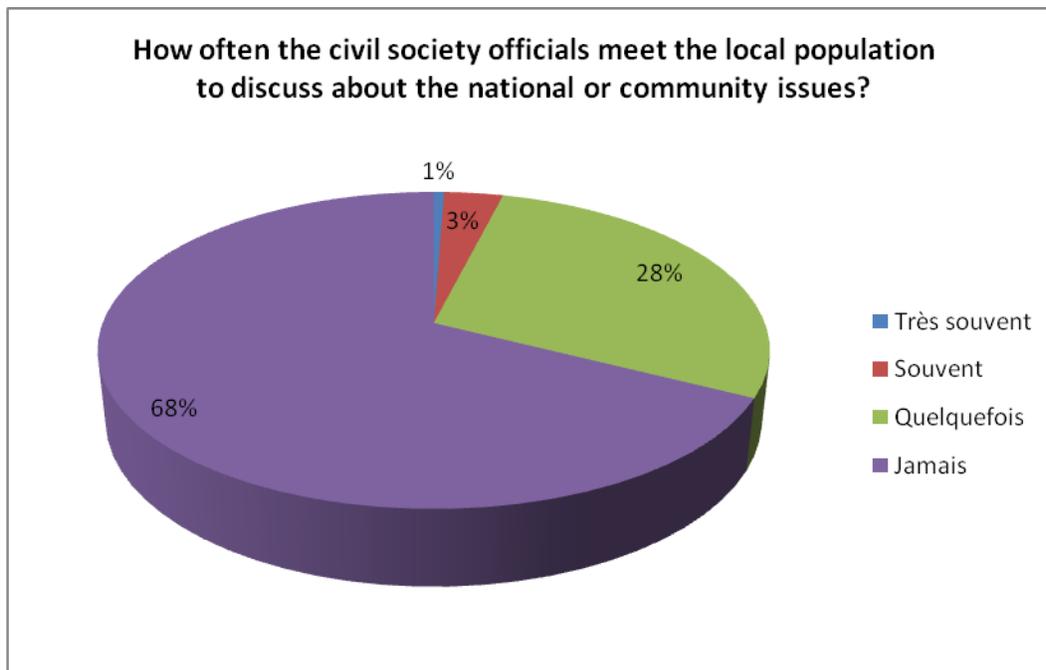
- Quite often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

When asked if they often meet with leaders of political parties beyond the election related events,

the response is almost nil (1.0%). 60% estimate that they are not in contact with their party members beyond the election period.

2. Level of Citizen's Contact with Civil Society Organizations

Figure 30:



N=1017

- Quite often
- Often
- Sometimes
- Never

Figure 28, shows that civil society encounters some problems in getting close to the citizens. Indeed, 68% of the population contends that they have never come into contact with civil society to discuss important decisions that affect their lives. This reflects the weaknesses of civil society in the current Rwandan context. The different focus groups consulted identified factors that explain this weakness and which are connected to the recent history and political context of the country. These include: lack of effective interventions by civil society; lack of organizational capacity and the ambiguous relationship between civil society and the state, characterized by the

latter's desire to control professional and associative action in the country. In addition to the organizational weaknesses, lack of a vision makes it difficult for civil society to achieve its mandate, namely advocacy, policy and legislation analysis and monitoring and evaluation of plans/programs and policies on the field.

In principle, civil society is expected to provide the required counter-balance to political power. In order to play this role, civil society organizations must be in constant contact with the different categories of the population they represent. They can do this by collecting information from their members and channeling it to their target beneficiaries including policy makers. They are also expected to provide feedback to their members in connection with the steps undertaken and possible outcomes.

The discussions in the focus groups revealed that most people do not work with civil society organizations except cooperatives and local associations. Many citizens also seem to be ignorant of the concept of civil society and its role in decision-making. As a result, very few respondents cited civil society organizations as possible sources of information or expression frameworks with regards to public debate. Most of these organizations seem to be ignored by citizens at local level.

Section 6: Challenges to Citizen Participation in Rwanda

In a democracy, participation depends, to a large extent on the functionality of the state and non-state institutions. Additionally, it depends on the particularities of a given context and the role of the citizen in the decision-making process.

Through this study, citizens were able to express themselves on the issues at hand, while the decision makers at various levels had the opportunity to shed light on several issues, and the criticisms leveled against them. It appears from this research-debate process that development in Rwanda is taking place at the expense of analyzing the challenges of citizen participation in decision-making processes and their effective involvement in the actions undertaken on their behalf.

A look into the functioning of state and non-state actors brings into question the actions taken to date and the challenges facing participation. The results emerging from this study shed light on participation, representation, and accountability, which are all largely dependent on the quality of the relationship between citizens and their representatives. It is also about the effectiveness of citizen involvement in the process of implementation of public policies and programs. A reflection is done in light of the lessons learned from the population but also in line with an analysis of the context in which participation takes place.

1. Participation and Institutional Functionality

The government institutions entrusted with promoting citizen participation are guarantors of effective representation and accountability. Through this study, citizens showed a great deal of interest in the functionality of the structures of representation and their effectiveness in the realization of the principle of participation. A look into some of the major organs is necessary.

• Parliament

The establishment of parliament as an institution emanates from the will to separate power.

While power belongs to the people, all citizens as an aggregate whole cannot exercise the power. They instead delegate their representatives who exercise it by proxy. As a result, elected officials have an absolute obligation to be accountable to those they represent throughout the exercise of their mandate. This way, the relationship between the elected and the electorate is legitimized. Without this link, the existence of parliament would be futile, devoid of the principle of representation, a major pillar of participation.

From this research, the act of electing members of parliament is seen by the public as a modality of participation. As noted, 89.8% of the sampled population contends that they are involved in the establishment of laws and in the election of parliamentarians. This is a significant development, marking a change of mentality vis-à-vis the citizen's involvement in electing their representatives. The act of electing one's representatives is sufficient in itself as it makes the principle of participation effective. In addition, the nature of the dialogue that links citizens to the parliamentarians is a prerequisite to transforming the needs of the population into policies and programs. Unfortunately, such dialogue was reported to be missing.

Responding to the question whether the citizen maintains contact with the elected parliamentarians beyond the election related events, a whopping 91.5% (61.6 + 29.9) say that they have never been consulted and if so, rarely. What are the major reasons that underlie this dysfunction that may compromise the logic of participation?

The reported dysfunction is dependent primarily on the notion of accountability and to whom one is accountable. To whom in Rwanda, are the members of parliament accountable? Is it the population? The response of the sampled population is overwhelmingly, a 'no'! Rwanda has opted for a closed list system of electing the members of parliament. This choice was dictated by the post-genocide context, marred by ethnic divisions, which still exists. The approach seemed to be the most appropriate in minimizing the possible contamination of the electoral process by the ethnic-related rhetoric. Through this approach, it is hoped that citizens will be educated on the principle of voting based on a political program of a given political party, rather than being driven by ethnic sentiments. Voters are encouraged to vote for a party with a program that addresses their issues, instead of simply voting for a party or a person from one's ethnic group or

region. However, the practice of a closed list presents challenges to the notion of accountability, a major pillar of citizen participation.

It emerged from the research process that parliamentarians feel more accountable to the individual and/or the political party with the powers to decide who is included on the list, rather than to the ordinary citizen. The lack of connection between the elected and the electorate becomes a major unforeseen outcome with adverse effects. The observation is shared by both the elected officials as well as the voters. One way of escaping from this political trap may be the introduction of the concept of geographical representation with constituencies as electoral bases.

More specifically, it entails the election of parliamentarians through a competitive process of primaries by the different political parties, in the various regions of the country. That way, successful candidates who end up on the closed lists will have political connections to the electorate, giving value to the notion of representation. The notion of constituency will also enhance the concept of national representation.

On the other hand, representation of citizens' interests depends largely on the means availed to the parliamentarians to enable them to accomplish such a task. According to the people consulted, there is no way the members of parliament can control government actions if the necessary human, financial and technical means are not availed to enable them to accomplish the task. Parliament has to rely on teams of experts serving various committees and providing the necessary expertise vis-à-vis the key issues facing society, to effectively control government actions.

Similarly, parliamentarians need to create a functional relationship with the District Councils, if they are to get as close as possible to the real needs of the population. The existing law on the functioning of districts provides for this relationship in Article 19. However, that opportunity is yet to be exploited by the concerned parties.

- **Central Government and the Decentralized Entities.**

The population consulted had great appreciation for the government's policy of putting in place several frameworks for participation and for their growing involvement in the local decision making processes. These include the CDCS at the grassroots level (district, sectors, cells and imidugudu councils). However, the population deplors the lack of consultation in the process of making decisions that directly affect their lives and interests. Indeed, 89% (48% +41%) of the respondents asserted that they are rarely, if ever, consulted by the authorities during the decision making process.

On the other hand, it may not be easy for the leaders to simply break away from a long culture of centralized governance and replace it with the logic of decentralized, people-centred governance. For example, the District Mayors' daily programs are usually interrupted and diverted by various government officials, with diverse priorities and deadlines and in an uncoordinated manner. The result is having a Mayor whose attention is distracted from the priorities identified by the local people.

A close examination of the functioning of decentralized entities reveals a number of hindrances to effective participation:

- A mayor as the elected representative of his constituency is expected to be well conversant with the realities of the district under his jurisdiction. He should also have a vested interest in the geographical sphere he is required to manage. This aspect of belonging, expected by the population, has not always been the reality. Furthermore, the law governing the functioning of the districts remains silent on this subject. A mayor who does not enjoy that kind of belonging runs the risk of relying more on his own powers than local legitimacy.
- In principle, the District Council is the supreme decision making organ of a district. However, in practice this principle has proven difficult to materialize. While the Mayor is the manager of the day-to-day activities of the district, the staff and the rest of the people in the district, including the members of the District Councils (often teachers and officials in other private fields) all fall under the authority of the mayor. Therefore, it is hard for

them to hold the mayor accountable for his actions. Naturally, the Councilors have difficulties in imposing any authority over the mayor, which challenges the logic of participation and representation.

Rwanda's adoption of the decentralization policy is a commendable step towards increased citizen participation. However, decentralization will only become effective if the decentralized organs truly become local governing entities enjoying full autonomy. Furthermore, such autonomy cannot be realized unless adequate means and resources are provided for the functioning of the decentralized organs of governance. From 2000, significant efforts were put into increasing the resources allocated to the decentralized entities. However, responsibilities transferred from the central to the local levels, are not necessarily accompanied by adequate means and resources. In order to incorporate corrective measures, a study designed to analyze the mismatch between transferred responsibilities and resources is necessary.

On the political scene, significant advances in the field of local governance were registered. Leadership is no longer a myth; rather, it is a function accessible to all citizens. This is an undeniable achievement. On the other hand, an impressive number of citizens are local leaders serving on a voluntary basis. This was reported by the respondents as unacceptable to citizens who need to maximize their working time for their survival and to provide for their families. In some respects, this implication of the citizens in leadership, which tends to impoverish them, is seen by some as arbitrary. There is need for a rigorous analysis of organizational needs, to determine the number of local leaders that the government can support financially. If volunteerism is perceived as a value which promotes participation, the government and the citizens should together determine the modalities for such collaboration. This will help in avoiding the negative effects and misinterpretations which distort the real image and value of participation.

2. Involving Citizens in the Development of Public Policies and Programs

The sustainability of public programs and policies developed for the benefit of the population cannot be guaranteed if the whole decision-making chain is not followed.

Although initiation of public actions is a political act, the stages of design, planning and implementation must take into account the needs of the population if citizen participation is to be realized. 55% of the population consulted feels involved at this stage, but also complains when a debate is opened on the matter. This reveals a discrepancy between the priorities they highlighted and the actual programs put in place. Such discrepancy is partly explained by the weaknesses associated with the limited involvement of the population at the evaluation phase. On the other hand, district leaders find themselves in a difficult position as they are torn between following orders from the central government and respecting the priorities defined by the population. This is a challenge facing the implementation of the decentralization policy in Rwanda.

The reality presented above distorts the claim of the citizens who feel involved in decision making. Indeed, if citizens are not sufficiently involved at this phase (33%), the obligations of the leader to be accountable are compromised. At the central level, new political dynamics were created to include "open day" and "accountability day" which can be used to involve citizens in the assessment phase.

During the focus group discussions, it became clear that both legislators and authorities from the sector to the central level primarily follow a vertical chain of accountability. This is dependent on the powers of those who dismiss and appoint the leaders. Thus the system promotes a culture of clientelism at the expense of accountability vis-à-vis the voters. The recent "resignations" by district mayors exposed the weight of the centralist culture, weakening the very essence of decentralization. Priority therefore, should be given to creating a new dynamic to strengthen the link between decentralized authorities and the citizens and to limit dependency on the central government.

This research shows that the implementation phase requires the participation of citizens with a much higher rate (89.5%). This means that without the population's participation in the implementation phase, public policy would be null and void.

3. The Role of Civil Society and Political Parties in Promoting Citizen Participation

In a democracy, political parties compete for votes, shape public opinion and provide or promise support to vulnerable groups. As a result, political parties contribute towards the definition of public policies and programs. In a functional multiparty system, political parties counter the powers of the ruling party and act as a significant channel of influence in the decision making process. Political parties are a privileged channel of communication for the population in the dynamics of citizen participation. Similarly, civil society contributes by channeling the needs of the citizens to the leaders and playing an essential role of a go-between, in the dialogue between leaders and those they lead.

The link between citizens and political parties on one hand and civil society on the other appears stalled when it comes to using these channels to express the views of citizens on public decisions taken. Indeed, only 1% of the population declares that they often come into contact with political parties outside the election period, a rate that is as low as that of civil society (5%). Yet in Rwanda, the Constitution stipulates that multiparty system is a way to access power and to engage citizens in building society. It is the same for the law on civil society which does not limit their freedom of action. Why then, is there a discrepancy between what is legally permissible and the reality on the ground? Debate on this issue during the focus group discussions revealed a number of findings.

1) Critical Thinking

A society's development is determined by the extent to which it attains freedom of expression in the face of prevailing beliefs and challenges. This means that questioning a given thought relies heavily on the critical opinion of the other person. In politics, political parties have that vital role in society; to provide a channel through which the other side is heard. In Rwanda, political parties in general struggle with structuring and defending an alternative way of thinking. Civil society is no exception to the consequent culture of conformity.

About 64% of the research respondents say that they do not feel free to express critical opinions vis-à-vis the decisions made by the authorities for fear of retaliation. 22% of the respondents think that there is no need to be critical because nobody will take the criticism into account. Given that democracy implies diversity of opinion and freedom of expression, lack of such a culture only serves to limit the powers of those in power.

2) The Need for Control

A society emerging from episodes of deep violence like genocide will out of necessity put in place measures to thwart excess prejudice to social cohesion. This approach has helped post-genocide Rwanda on its way towards stabilization. However, the approach makes sense only if it can meet temporary needs and be limited to the short term. It would be dangerous to consistently apply control in the management of public affairs and in the exercise of power. The values of participation would be affected seriously. Many participants in this debate and research process made this observation and wondered how sustainable citizen participation can be ensured, if the reflex of control is not nuanced.

3) The Legacy of the Past.

An analysis of the history of the Rwandan society reveals a particular relationship between the rulers and the ruled. This relationship is characterized by the 'cult of a leader', whereby a leader is never contradicted lest one faces serious repercussions. This culture seems to persist through generations in the psychic of both the leaders and the led.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research sought to clarify the main challenges encountered by the Rwandan citizens in participating in the decision-making process. Rwanda created conditions for the emergence of various participation frameworks, and the quality of their implementation was discussed in this research. Strengths and constraints were also analyzed. The findings revealed that there is still a long way to go with regards to the imperative of accountability to the citizens. Some of the factors contributing to the failure of effective citizen participation are related to weaknesses in both governmental and non-governmental structures in developing and communicating the idea of critical thinking.

The findings also revealed a need to strengthen the capacity and competence of the participation structures. In Rwanda, like the rest of Africa, the tendency is to have strong men and weak institutions. This is illustrated by the low visibility of Parliament, political parties and civil society. However, the country seems to be governed by strong individuals with a clear vision.

Through the analysis of essential documents, this research highlights a clear political will to establish a policy for citizens' participation in the decision-making process. However, an analysis of the reality on ground shows inconsistencies between this political will and the effectiveness of citizens' participation. Taking into consideration these different observations and findings, a number of recommendations were formulated. An outline of some of the recommendations is given below:

- a)** Accountability is not a trivial word, it is imperative that public institutions (Government, Parliament, the decentralized entities) carry out their plans in accordance with the duty to accountability. In concrete terms, emphasis should be put on restoring the link between a citizen and a Parliamentarian as a representative of the people. Parliament should request Parliamentarians to show their action plan clearly indicating a functional relationship with participation bodies at grassroots levels, particularly with the District Councils. This action plan would put emphasis on the need to involve the population in various phases of the decision-making process, such as planning, implementation and evaluation. The

collected information would become the basis for government control and action. With regard to such actions, the means allocated to Parliament should be adapted to the requirements of such an approach. A report resulting from such an exercise should be communicated to the public by using the radio, a channel identified as a powerful means of communication by this study.

- b)** Non-governmental institutions including civil society, political parties, and the media are called upon through this research to play a more significant role in the citizens' participation process. To accomplish this, it is important to create a technical framework to analyze the laws and policies adopted by the Government with a high concern for the interests of the citizens. In practical terms, debates organized on the basis of critical analysis and which inform the public should be held regularly. From such participatory debates, a document should be written for public authorities. More particularly, political parties should have the obligation of making a statement on such and such a policy implemented by the public authority, without necessarily getting confrontational.
- c)** It is clear that a culture of critical thinking is taking long to be internalized in Rwanda. However, as revealed by this study, radio seems to be the preferred channel of information flow to the citizens. There is need for a study aimed at identifying strategies to replace the practice of informing and sensitizing citizens and instead adopt strategies to encourage open and contradictory debate on issues of national interest.

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