



COMMONWEALTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE

Kampala, 16th May 2013

- ✚ **Honourable Chairperson of the Commonwealth Local Governments Forum (CGLF), Mr. Lawrence Yule;**
- ✚ **Mr. Adolf Mwesige, Vice Chairperson, and Mr. Carl Wright, Secretary General of the CLGF;**
- ✚ **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;**

I thank you for inviting me to participate in a discussion that seeks to reaffirm the purpose of local government and democracy as drivers of change.

In Rwanda we believe the principal role of any government – central or local – to be transformational, improving the well-being of citizens and empowering them to participate fully in their development.

This view is informed by experience and evidence that the benefits of good governance and the development that it unleashes have the greatest impact at the local level, as policies and programmes are customised to community needs, with citizens participating actively, and entrenching democracy.

Clearly, local democracy practices are not always the same and transferrable, because they are context-specific. However, aspiration to a better life is universal and therefore the path taken in some of our countries to realise this may be worth sharing. Let me now present some of Rwanda's experiences in local government that have produced the kind of progress witnessed over the last decade and half.



Rwanda's path to effective local government has been through decentralisation that we have steered for more than a decade now.

Decentralisation ensured that Rwandans are empowered to fully participate in planning, implementing and managing their own development processes.

The framework we adopted was a result of wide consultations, aiming for an innovative approach to inclusive government and to fast track development. It was also in response to popular demand to break with the centralised authority of the past in which decision-making and resources were tightly controlled leading to corruption, manipulation and promotion of dependency.

We are now in the third phase and have learnt that when the citizens take responsibility for their development processes, a lot can be achieved in a relatively short time – and although this approach may take time, the results are worth the effort.

Precisely because local democracy is a priority for us, and is therefore supported constitutionally, we have managed to attain satisfactory results in this regard, and the attendant development. More crucially, we have designed home-grown initiatives aimed at bringing about better governance, greater economic development as well as social protection for the most vulnerable.

Such initiatives include:

- **Performance contracts (imihigo) to spur competitiveness and effectiveness, ensure responsiveness to local needs and timely delivery of services, promote accountability and transparency;**
- **Social protection and poverty eradication mechanisms such as Girinka, which is not only a poverty-reduction programme but also a social**



solidarity mechanism through a continuation of giving a cow to the next needy person, and the Vision Umurenge (local entity called “sector”) Programme (VUP), which creates a local cash economy and integrates the local population into it.

- **Arbitration of local disputes by volunteer mediators, we call them abunzi in Rwanda;**
- **Community development and voluntarism in activities like constructing schools and houses for the vulnerable, and maintaining infrastructure like roads and wells , called umuganda in Rwanda;**
- **Citizen participation through local councils at various administrative levels that act as consultative and oversight forums, again in Kinyarwanda called “inteko z’abaturage”;**
- **Partnership among all stakeholders through the Joint Action Development Framework (JADF) that brings together the public and private sectors and civil society; and many more.**

We believe that effective decentralisation does not only require autonomy of the local government institutions, but most importantly the requisite capacities to deliver on their mandate, as well as continued support from, and coordination with, the central government.

In Rwanda, we have consciously secured up to 15% of our domestic revenues as direct transfers to the local government. Additional resources earmarked to specific projects are also transferred to the district level for implementation.



But this comes with responsibilities for proper accountability. Local leaders are required to be accountable both to their communities and the central government, and to show results for the money.

Moreover, every year we rank the districts in terms of meeting their own priorities, which has spurred healthy competition that draws together all stakeholders to improve their own communities. This is the essence of Imihigo, or Performance Contracts.

🚩 Distinguished Audience;

The impact all this had on the lives of ordinary Rwandans has been just as important as the specific form it took. In the last 13 years that we have had a decentralised system, local government units have truly become engines of social and economic transformation.

Citizens choose their local leaders through regular elections, and the fact that leaders are elected and not appointed ensures that they are accountable to the people and must transact their business in a transparent and accountable manner.

This level of accountability and transparency has been institutionalised in several measures – a peer review mechanism and open governance day when citizens freely examine local leaders’ work, a citizens’ report card and governance score card, and public evaluation of performance contracts.

The knowledge that services can actually be delivered has created confidence among the population to the extent that decentralised entities will get more budget autonomy and manage increased share of local revenues. Similar confidence in their ability to decide on and contribute to



national development can be seen in such efforts as the creation of the Agaciro Development Fund.

Empowerment of the people has meant that they are able to demand more and better services, such as clean water supply, roads, electricity, health care facilities, and so on, from their leaders.

Perhaps the greatest proof of the effectiveness of local government as the base for both national and local policies has been in attaining a degree of food security and poverty reduction. Over a five-year period, Rwandans reduced poverty levels by about 13% and raised one million people out of poverty.

It is evident therefore that there are significant dividends to be gained from greater local; democracy and more efficient local government. However, despite the gains made so far and ongoing efforts, gaps still exist and there are still many things to improve before we can have an efficient developmental local government, mainly in the area of building capacities for quality participation.

It is imperative that we develop the necessary skills capacity to match the political will that exists, so as to be able to translate more policies into concrete action and results.

Furthermore, shortages in infrastructure like roads and energy need to be addressed as a matter of priority.

Then there must be greater coordination between government, the private sector and civil society to raise the quality of delivery of services.



Finally, we should have a common understanding about our development choices with our partners so that we save the time and effort spent on issues that do not give us good results.

✚ Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Citizens of our respective countries expect and deserve better and more efficient services. They aspire to better lives and are prepared to work hard to achieve that. It is the duty of local government authorities to harness their aspirations, energy and resolve so as to create the right conditions for the realisation of their collective ambitions. When we do that, we shall have written an important chapter in the history of our countries and of the Commonwealth.

Thank you for your kind attention.