

# An Empirical Review of Strategic Management in Rwanda's "IMIHIHO" Process

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## ABSTRACT

Organizations should see strategic Management as a bed rock for survival, economic stability, growth and development because any Nation or Firm's experiencing economic recession lack strategic management (Sunday & Idodo,2016).

The adoption of strategic management in the elaboration of local government Imihigo process are seen as the art of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions that enable an organization or government to achieve its goals and objectives. The implication of this is that, Imihigo and strategic management focuses on integrating various departments such as: marketing, personnel, finance, production, research and development, and information and communication technology to achieve organizational success. The current global situation demands that managers not only manage actions domestic to the firm/organization but must also adopt a strategy and laid down policies that will enhance its competitive position in the external environments of the firm's. The external environment constitute major threat to any business organization's and managers must monitor the activities of the political, competitors, financial conditions, technological advancement, amongst others in the environment, all of these must be expected and monitored in the decision making process of a manager's as the growth and profitability of firms depend largely on how well managers manage everything strategically using management techniques that will place the firm in its merit competitive position by utilizing and managing changes in its internal and external environment(Sunday & Idodo,2016).

Findings also reveal that strategic management of new government public policies enhances public self-reliance on the Rwandan leadership particularly when there is growing understanding on the part of many that policies have to be formulated through the vigorous participation of the concerned communities. A learned anointed professional would do better than unlearned but do anointed, therefore expert that are knowledgeable about strategic management should be allowed to be at the forefront of strategic management of government public policies. Strategic Management basically deals with discovery and description of the strategies that leaders or managers can take so as to realize improved competitive advantage and performance for their organization (Sunday & Idodo,2016).

On the other hand, the use of Rwanda's Imihigo (performance contracts), is one of those innovative and homegrown approaches that has strengthened service delivery and contributed significantly to improvements in the socio-economic well-being of citizens(BAD,2012). The performance contract (Imihigo) is an initiative that went into effect in 2006 by the Government of Rwanda as a tool to accelerate implementation of priority programs. In modern Rwanda the Imihigo practice was adopted as a means to accelerate the progress towards economic development and poverty reduction (MINAFFET, 2012).

This article explores the adoption of strategic management in local government's Imihigo process in Rwanda.

## INTRODUCTION

Although imihigo is recognized as a strong focus on results, which makes it an invaluable tool in the planning, accountability and monitoring

(UNDP,2015). Playing a big role in triggering economic growth and improvements in health and education (Verpoorten, 2014). According to EICV3

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more than one million Rwandans broke poverty. Imihigo increased the number of pupils going to school at the right age (Tumwebaze, 2012). Furthermore, through Imihigo, the country has significantly reduced the number of pregnant women that die to 487/100,000 in 2010 from 750 women in 2005 and 1071 in 2000. Significant improvement was noticed in antenatal care, delivery. On the other hand, Imihigo can also have negative impact by being seen as imposed mechanisms to meet targets whereby some of them are extremely ambitious. This goes with false data for gaining good rank as affirmed by researchers above together with Scher (2010), Chemouni (2014) and IPAR (2015) found that the pressure exerted by the Imihigo led to falsification of data for occupying the good rank without any link to improved socioeconomic development of the population. In this sense, the socio-economic development cannot be effectively achieved.

However, according to Van der Waldt and Du Toit (1997:286), strategic management is already used successfully in many public institutions provided it is adapted for the unique context of the public sector. They further suggested that because of the importance of proactive management and planning to keep pace with a changing environment, strategic management is a major alternative to traditional planning. Rhyne (1986) in his study to determine the relationship between an organization's performance and strategic planning concluded that organizations that have planning systems that resemble the strategic management concept, have superior long-term performances in terms of finances than other organizations. A study by Hart and Banbury (1994) also concluded that organizations that have high capabilities to perform strategic management, demonstrate higher performance levels. The effectiveness of strategic management in the public sector is relevant in the quest to enhance service delivery by public sector organizations (Ramovha, 2009).

However, Researcher argued that these repetitive problems in each and every Imihigo (Performance Contract) evaluation results which end up firing some of Mayors and Staff in the office may be attributed to non-fully adopting the strategic management processes and steps in the elaboration of Local Government's Imihigo.

This is the fact that we are eager to conduct this study for seeing how Strategic Management is adopted in Local Government's imihigo process in Rwanda.

## METHODS

The Rwandan Imihigo system is one of the homegrown initiatives and is deepened to depict its

impacts on social economic development. A research methodology is defined as a science of how to make a research decision, and it includes the practices of evaluating the goodness and badness of a decision made in the course of doing a research (Hessler; Social Research Methods). Hoover (1988: 33), adds that, 'The scientific method is the method that seeks to test though against reality in a disciplined manner with each step in the process made explicit'. It is imperative for the success of the work, as it sets a standard for the methodology that is adopted, while the methodology itself is a compilation of conceived rules that are logical for gaining insight into a course of action, (Ghuri and Gronhaug, 2005). In view of the nature and importance of imihigo performance contract, as regarding factors that contributes and impedes the smooth adoption of strategic management in Rwanda local government approach so as to be able to determine and solve the research problems satisfactory.

### Research Design

This researcher used a mixed of exploratory, descriptive and explanatory design. In fact, the researcher explored the ways Strategic Management is adopted during the elaboration of imihigo process in Rwanda thus achieving the intended results.

#### ➤ Exploratory Research Design

According to Burns and Bush (2006) exploratory research design is referred as gathering information in an informal and unstructured manner. The exploratory research design is proper when the researchers knows small about the opportunity or issue. Exploratory research design is not limited to one specific paradigm but may use either qualitative or quantitative approaches. On the other hand, exploratory research is defined as the most useful (and appropriate) research design for those projects that are addressing a subject about which there are high levels of uncertainty about the subject, and when the problem is not very well understood (i.e. very little existing research on the subject matter). The main aim of exploratory research is to identify the boundaries of the environment in which the problems, opportunities or situations of interest are likely to reside and to identify the salient factors or variables that might be found there and be of relevance to the research. This is the reason why this research will employ mixed methods.

#### ➤ Qualitative Research Design

The researcher used qualitative method of data collection and analysis so as to capture the details and adequate information identified to be qualitative. The use of this method also ensured that the qualitative data is effectively interpreted using the narrative.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There are several reasons given by scholars as to why Government or firms should engage in strategic management. Both financial and nonfinancial benefits can be derived from strategic management techniques.

**Financial Benefits:** as approved by McDonald and Eastlack (1970), House and Thune (1970), Ansoff et al. (1971), Malik and Karger (1975), and Schendel and Hofer (1978), the strategic management does results in organizational performance and profitability. They conclude that formalized strategic management process does make a difference in the recorded measurement of profits, sales and return on investment. Firms that adopt strategic management Approach can expect that the new system will lead to improved financial performance.

**Nonfinancial Benefits:** Regardless of the profitability of strategic management, several behavioural effects can be expected to improve the welfare of the firm.

**Nonfinancial Benefits:** Regardless of the profitability of strategic management, several behavioral effects can be expected to improve the welfare of the firm. Yoo and Digman emphasize that strategic management is needed to cope with and manage uncertainty in decision making.

They present several benefits of strategic management which include the following:

1. It provides a way to predict future tribulations and opportunities.
2. It results in more effective and better performance compared to non-strategic management organization.
3. It provides employees with clear objectives and directions for the future of the organization.
4. It increases employee satisfaction and motivation.
5. It results in fast and better decision making, and
6. It results in cost savings

Furthermore, greenly maintained that strategic management offers the following personal benefits:

1. It allows for identification, prioritization, and exploitation of opportunities.
2. It provides an objective view of management problems.
3. It represents a framework for improved coordination and control of activities.
4. It minimizes the effects of adverse conditions and changes.
5. It allows major decisions to better support established objectives.
6. It allows more effective allocation of time and resources to identified opportunities.

7. It allows fewer resources and less time to be devoted to correcting erroneous or ad hoc decisions.
8. It creates a framework for internal communication among personnel.
9. It helps to integrate the behavior of individuals into a total effort.
10. It provides a basis for the clarification of individual responsibilities.
11. It gives encouragement to forward thinking.
12. It provides a cooperative, integrated and enthusiastic approach to tackling problems and opportunities.
13. It encourages a favorable attitude towards change.
14. It gives a degree of discipline and formality to the management of a business. These and other research studies have concluded that strategic management is an integral and important function of organization life. Nevertheless, successful organizations are successful for many reasons: adequate resources, good products and services, among others

### Benefits of Imihigo

IPAR, 2015 recognized that the following benefits were brought by Imihigo:

1. It is clear that Imihigo play a major role in fast-tracking different commitments made by the central and local government concerning different development programmes and projects meant to accelerate socio-economic transformation of Rwandans.
2. It is well noted that most of planned activities under Imihigo reflect national and sub-national development priorities as stipulated in Vision 2020, the 7Years Government Program and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS2)

As for Tumwebaze, (2012) he found positive impact of Imihigo on the socio- economic development. The researcher cites the following benefits:

1. the benefits accrued from simple household-led initiatives such as nutritional garden (akarimak'igikoni) to huge-impact projects such as the construction of schools nationwide to provide free and steadfast education to the future leaders of Rwanda;
2. According to EICV3 more than one million Rwandans broke poverty. The survey results indicate that poverty levels dropped to 44.9% in 2010/11 from 56.7% in 2005/6. Over 45.2 % (over 4 million) of the Rwandan population has a mobile phone while over 215,000 households have access to electricity;

3. Imihigo increased the number of pupils going to school at the right age;
4. Through Imihigo, the country has significantly reduced the number of pregnant women that die to 487/100,000 in 2010 from 750 women in 2005 and 1071 in 2000. Significant improvement was noticed in antenatal care, delivery assisted by skilled provider and delivery in a health facility.

Verpoorten (2014) found that increased upward accountability from the local to the central government level through Imihigo have played a role in triggering economic growth and improvements in health and education.

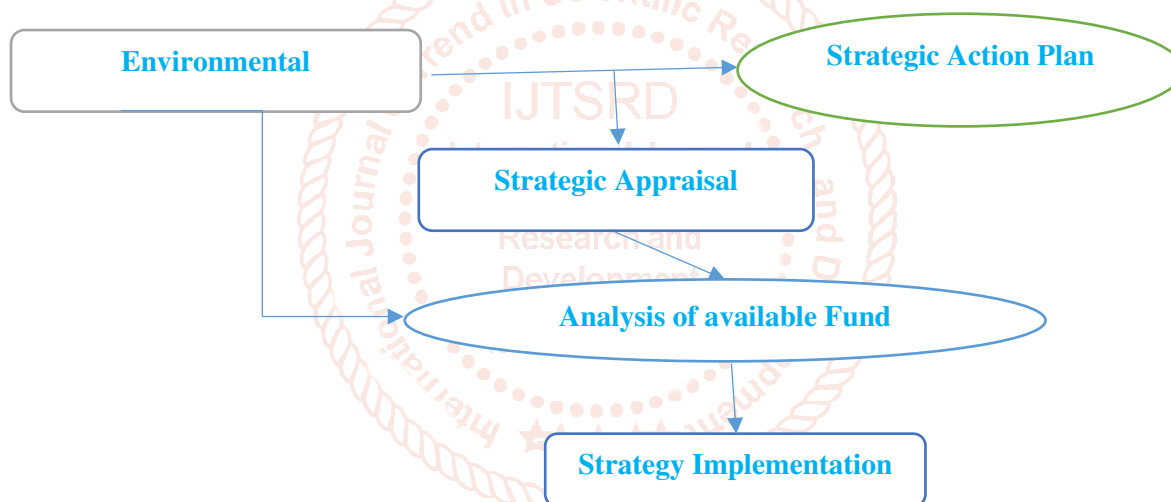
UNDP (2015) found that Imihigo practice was adapted as a means of planning to accelerate progress towards economic development and poverty reduction. Imihigo has a strong focus on results, which makes it an invaluable tool in the planning, accountability and monitoring.

The research lists the following achievements in socio- economic development through Imihigo such as infrastructure (mostly roads, electricity), agricultural production, tourism promotion, and more recently, mining. Imihigo has improved:

1. food security,
2. nutrition,
3. household incomes (farmers) and employment (farm and non-farm agricultural labour),
4. revenue generation for local governments. From previous researches it is found that Imihigo constitute effective tool for socio- economic development.

### Strategic Management Steps and Processes

Process of strategic management basically deals with defining organizational strategy, by which manager's make a choice out of a set of strategies for a firm that will enhance better organizational performance. These steps are necessary component required in chronological order when creating a new strategic management plan (Sunday & Idodo, 2016).



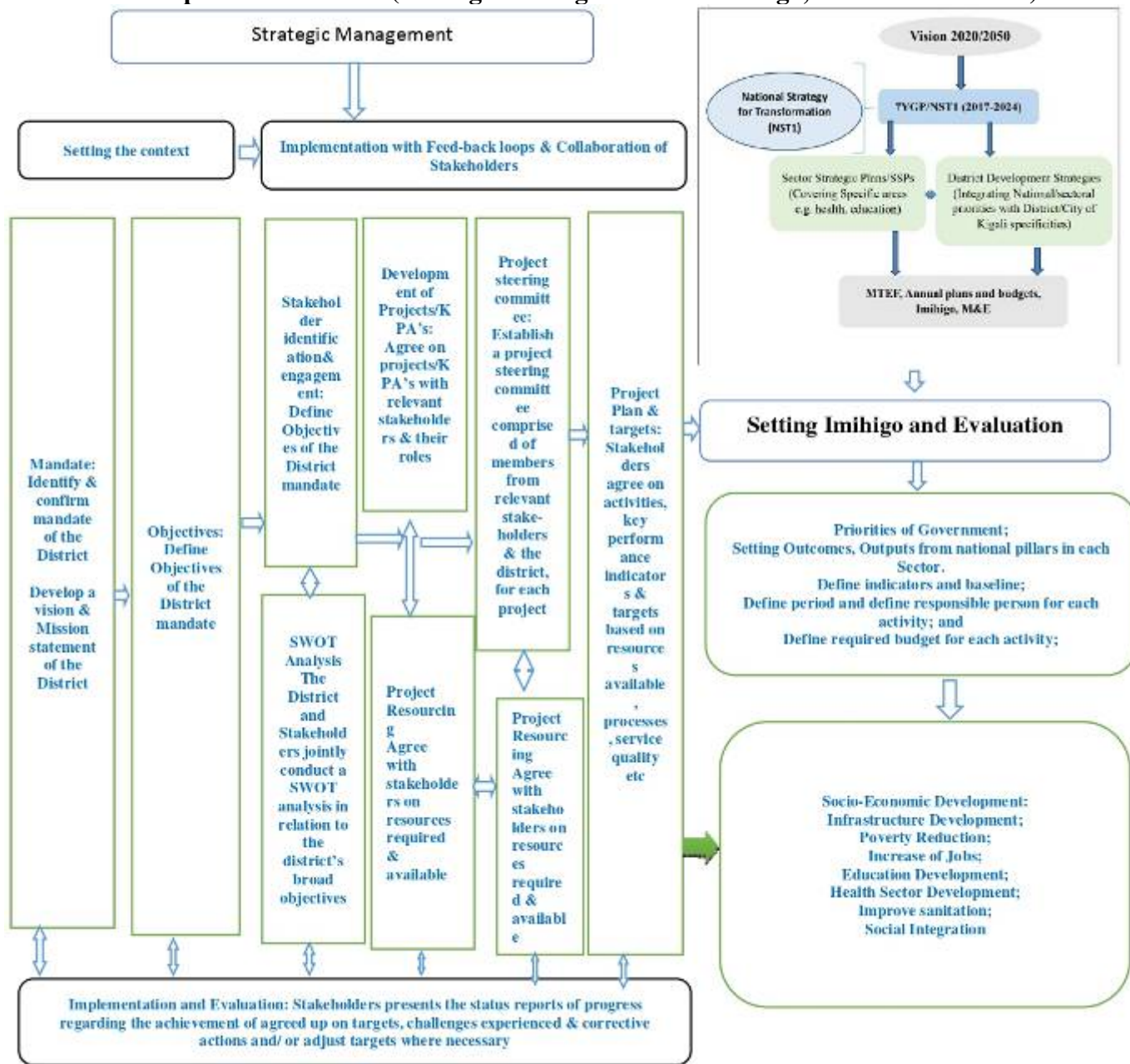
Source: Sunday & Idodo (2016).

- **Environmental evaluation:** environmental Evaluation deal with assessment of both internal and external environment of an organization that influences its performance either positively or negatively. Environmental evaluation requires collecting relevant data and providing information for strategic direction.
- **Strategic action plan:** Strategic action plan focus on the sequence of deciding the best pathway of action for achieving institutional/organizational aims and objectives. This second step enable leaders/manager, formulate strategic business unit, functional and corporate level strategy. **Strategy appraisal:** Strategy appraisal examine internal and external factors that influence strategic action plan, measuring level of performance and taken appropriate steps to correct deviation to make sure that the organizational strategy meets the stated objectives. **Analysis of available fund:** Analysis of available fund present holistic view and assessment of the available fund required for integrating the above steps in other to achieve effective implementation in the final stage.
- **Strategy implementation:** This is the final stage of strategic Management process that imply making the strategic action work as intended by designing necessary organization structure, managing human and material resources based on the available resources. These process is an ongoing process that required each component to interact together constantly for effective implementation of strategy.

Looking different imihigo evaluations of fiscal years poses some challenges of which the researcher thing it can be addressed by combining both strategic Management steps and process with that of local government's

Imihigo elaboration process so as to come up with tangible results intended by citizens. It with this background that stimulated the researcher to embark on research to see how strategic management is adopted in local government's imihigo process.

### Conceptual Framework (Strategic Management and Imihigo, Local Government)



There is a small but growing research field (Linda & Fredrik, 2015); Joyce, 2004; Lane, 2008, Lane & Wallis, 2009; Walker et al. 2010; Poister, 2009; Boyne & Walker, 2010; Andrews & Van de Walle, 2012; Hansen & Ferlie, 2014; Ferlie&Ongaro, 2015) that has for the past decade highlighted the importance to study strategy and strategic thinking in public organizations. Several of these studies investigate the application of strategic management (SM) (Linda & Fredrik, 2015). Koteen 1997; Joyce, 2000; Johnson & Scholes 2001; Ferlie, 2003; Bryson, 2004; Drumaux& Goethals, 2007; Hansen Rosenberg, 2011), but few investigate how Strategic Management (SM) actually is adapted in local government performance contract (imihigo) process, especially in Rwanda.

According to Stephan et al., 2016 conducted a study entitled “Public Sector Performance and Development Cooperation in Rwanda”, The study revealed that Imihigo has been designed to play a central role and contribute to the achievement of Rwanda’s development goals. However, due to several challenges, using Imihigo as an entry point for development cooperation in the form of RBA or RBF (Results Based Finance) might be challenging. Nevertheless, the country system could be used and further strengthened through a conceptual engagement by development partners.

According to RGB in 2014 & Turatsinze in 2015, the word Imihigo is the plural Kinyarwanda word for Umuhigo, which means to deliver. Imihigo

also includes the concept of *Guhiganwa*, which means to compete among one another. *Imihigo* describes the pre-colonial cultural practice in Rwanda where an individual sets targets or goals to be achieved within a specific period of time. The set targets are accomplished by following some guiding principles and with determination to overcome any challenges that may arise. In 2000, a shift in the responsibilities of all levels of government as a result of decentralization programme required a new approach to monitoring and evaluation. Local levels of government were now responsible for implementing development programmes which meant that the central government and people of Rwanda needed a way to ensure accountability. In 2006, *Imihigo* (known also as performance contracts) was introduced to address this need. Since its introduction, *Imihigo* has been credited with improving accountability and quickening the pace of citizen-centered development activities and programmes. The practice of *Imihigo* has now been extended to Ministries, embassies and public service staff.

*Imihigo* also included an element of evaluation: a public ceremony was usually organized to facilitate the dissemination of outcomes of an agreed upon undertaking to the community. People's courage, bravery and hard work set examples which others were usually encouraged to emulate. The spirit of *imihigo* in the Rwandan cultural context therefore embodies the principles of setting ambitious goals that require commitment to action and personal responsibility, reciprocity of obligations and mutual respect between high (BAD,2012). Performance measurements are used to evaluate, control and improve operations process in order to ensure that the organization achieves its goals and objectives and that an organization avails resources necessary for implementation of strategy and that Management practices fair evaluation of Performance outcomes (Elizabeth et al.,2012).

Two major challenges, highlighted by Srinivasa in 2016, in his study entitled "challenges to strategic management in public and private sector organizations" *with the aim to analyze various aspects of application of strategic management practices in public and private sector organizations*, those challenges are: First, the long-term policy consistency required to accommodate the planning and implementation of the organizational changes often triggered by the introduction of new management techniques is hard to obtain. Second, the relatively simple accountability model found in modern private sector organizations, wherein Executive Directors are responsible to the board for

both strategy formation (including setting strategic goals and priorities for the organization) and the management of the execution of this strategy (i.e. to achieve those goals). As it is documented by Srinivasa in 2016, the literature review suggests that the biggest difference between strategic management in the public versus the private sector would appear to be content rather than form. Both sectors are forced to operate in dynamic environments with a high degree of uncertainty and the need to avoid that "the corporate plan, once complete, is a tablet of stone, given an honored place in annual reports, but otherwise forgotten" (Stewart, 1996). Both sectors comprise organizations that are often managed from a short-term budgetary perspective focused on financial rather than strategic control. Public sector managers therefore need to adopt an approach to strategic management that helps them clarify the expectations of their authorizing environment, communicate a more consistent strategic direction internally, while at the same time demonstrate externally their organizations' ability to interpret and respond to frequently changing political signals and priorities.

According to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR ,2018), *imihigo* is one of the homegrown solutions embarked on by the government of Rwanda to solve some of the pressing challenges that the country faces by creating for Rwandans to take part of their own development and aspirations (INGABIRE & RUVUNA,2020).

In his study Habamenshi et al, (2019) on the contribution of *Imihigo* on the socioeconomic development in Rwanda (2013-2018) a case study of Gakenke District, by using a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches whereby primary data were collected using questionnaire, interview, focus group discussions, personnel observations and telephone calls; and secondary data were collected using archival review. The findings explain that signing *Imihigo* for district authorities has improved agricultural techniques that increased the production which in turn improved the lives of the citizens and reduced hunger (affirmed by 100% of respondents); New forest and trees planted and soil protection against erosion and increased agricultural productivity (affirmed at 100%). Signing *Imihigo* contributed to the improvement of new roads and the creation of new roads (affirmed at 97%); signing *Imihigo* contributed to the increase of access to electricity (70%). Signing *Imihigo* system resulted in the creation of new jobs (72%) (Habamenshi et al, 2019); Cooperatives were improved (affirmed at 69%); *Imihigo* improved the lives of poorest households through social protection programs

namely VUP and Girinka (affirmed at 100%); education sector was improved by new classrooms constructed (affirmed at 100%); Signing Imihigo implemented mechanisms reducing dropouts together with school feeding (affirmed at 86%); Imihigo system improved health care services at 90% (Habamenshi et al, 2019).

According to the National Institute of Statistics (NISR, 2018), imihigo is one of the homegrown solutions embarked on by the Government of Rwanda to solve some of the most pressing challenges that the country faces. It creates the ability to Rwandans to take part in their own development and aspirations.

Rwandans access their own problems and take initiatives for solving them without thinking of external support. This is the logic and spirit that has been driving Imihigo Performance Contracts since 2006 (NISR, 2018). These contracts, signed between ministers, district mayors, senior executives of selected Boards (parastatals) with the Head of State, aim at improving Rwandans living conditions. Consequently, Imihigo is a tool for accelerating the ambitions that have been set by the leadership of the country that are geared towards meeting the expectations that the people of Rwanda have for their leaders enshrined in national strategic plans (NISR, 2018). Learning from EICV5 (NISR, 2018) poverty rate in some districts, most notably Kicukiro, Nyarugenge, and Gasabo, is relatively low (below 15%), while in some it is very high, reaching close to 70% in Nyamasheke.

According to IPAR, (2015), in order to sustain the positive changes resulting from Imihigo a number of considerations are needed. Apart from linking Imihigo and the national development priorities as embedded in Vision 2020, 7YGP and EDPRS2 during the preparation phase, a thorough prediction of possible spillover effects is needed to ensure that they are taken into account in a next generation of midterm or long term District Development Plans. Another determinant factor of sustainability of Imihigo already achieved is the level of involvement and participation of citizens who are the beneficiaries of all the projects during the period of planning and implementation of Imihigo. This helps to capitalize on their needs and hence their willingness to contribute to their own development. Moreover, technical expertise that is available needs to be optimized especially for Imihigo projects in the infrastructure and agriculture sectors for quality assurance to avoid costly rehabilitations before the expected span of life for some investments made (IPAR,2015).

According to the Imihigo evaluation report of 2014/2015 by IPAR, 2015, the following were

recommendations were given if we need to get the success from Imihigo:

1. More efforts to be made in terms of consultations during the preparation of Imihigo especially at community level to ensure that Imihigo customize the needs of citizens in order to produce more and sustainable impacts.
2. Strengthen the feedback mechanisms to allow citizen learn more on Imihigo priorities therein the approved performance contracts.
3. Define clearly the roles and responsibilities of partners with respect to joint Imihigo - implemented by more than one partner or entity- to ensure proper accountability, responsibility, and attribution of the performance.
4. Focus more on Imihigo with larger spill-over effects, that are more challenging, innovative, and transformative to avoid setting soft Imihigo targets (have a clear demarcation between Umuhigo and routine activities in the Annual action plan).
5. Strengthen the planning and M&E framework for Imihigo performance contract to drive the implementation of the National development priorities as stated in the Vision 2020, 7 YGP, EDPRS2, Sector Strategic Plans, and District Development Plans.
6. Ensure strong follow up and execution of other planned activities within the annual action plan and unimplemented activities as per Imihigo performance contracts.
7. Ensure that Ministry targets are linked to targets at District level to enforce the bridge between the DDPs, Sector strategic plans and EDPRS2.
8. Ensure that Ministry targets are implemented within the timeframe set in the performance contract to avoid delays in the implementation of joint Imihigo at local government level.

The World Economic Forum (2018) recall that Government has the responsibilities of addressing the changing needs of citizens over their entire lifetimes, providing platforms to help them get the resources and make the connections they need, and seeing a whole set of public goods created by the sum of their deliberately many parts.

The Government of Rwanda is convinced that the need to accelerate socio-economic development is vital, in order to address poverty. In the aftermath of 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, the Government of Rwanda has often opted to use approaches embedded in cultural values and historical heritage of Rwanda to find solutions to current societal problem. Such

cultural values are known as Home Grown Solutions (HGSs) (Versailles, 2012).

Imihigo is one among main Rwanda's Home Grown Solutions (HGSs) adopted by the Government of Rwanda in 2006 as governance innovations that provide unconventional response to the modern development challenges, which are unlikely to be addressed through conventional means. In the aftermath of 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, the Government of Rwanda has often opted to use approaches embedded in cultural values and historical heritage of Rwanda to find solutions to current societal problems (MINALOC, 2012).

According to Versailles (2012), Imihigo program (Performance contracts) are contracts between the President of the Republic of Rwanda and government agencies detailing what the respective institution sets itself as targets on a number of governance, justice, economic and social indicators. The stated objective of Imihigo is to improve the speed and quality of execution of government programmes, thus making public agencies more effective. It is a means of planning to accelerate the progress towards economic development and poverty reduction. Imihigo has a strong focus on results which makes it an invaluable tool in the planning, accountability and monitoring and evaluation processes. Different researchers outlined the contribution of Imihigo in improving the socio economic development of the population: Bisaga (2017) analyzed the success of Imihigo in increasing access to energy in Rwanda. The research found that 93% of participants affirmed that energy imihigo were common in their villages. Together with Grimm et al., 2016, the research found that that due to imihigo, off-grid solar is increasing

By Imihigo, the population increases access to solar electricity which is cost effective and affordable for them than grid-based electrification expensive to install in rural locations. The research analyzed the energy access in general and it does not outline the situation per District Especially Districts in rural areas where infrastructure continues to be challenging. Another weakness of the research is that it considers the answers from respondents and affirms that Imihigo increase access to energy. The research does not provide evidences in terms of households with access to energy. Makuza (2012) analyzed the contribution of Imihigo in improving the social economic development in ten Districts namely Gicumbi, Musanze, Gisagara, Ruhango, Nyamasheke, Karongi, Kicukiro, Gasabo, Bugesera, Kirehe. The research found the following results in terms of percentages: improved health (mutual health insurance) 42%, improved education (9YBE) 20.5%,

eradicated grass thatched houses 11.2%, improved hygiene and sanitation 8.7%, Girinkaprogramme 6.8%, alleviated diseases 5.7% and job creation 1.8%, infrastructure developed as a major achievement is 24.8%, land consolidated 21.7%, Umurenge SACCO 20.3%, strengthened cooperatives 18.3% and provision of land titles 5.3%. This research outlines very low achievements and it creates needs to know the current situation of the contribution of Imihigo to socioeconomic development especially for a District like Gakenke which has shown impressive achievements in Imihigo performance ranking since 2012. The District has occupied respectively the following ranks: 30th over 30 Districts in 2012- 2013; 15th in 2013- 2014; 24th in 2014- 2015; 27th in 2015- 2016; and 4th in 2016- 2017 (GoR, 2013; IPAR- Rwanda, 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017). Such achievements of reaching the 4th rank in 2017 from 30th over 30 Districts in 2012 attracted the present research to analyze the relationship between the rank occupied and the level of improvement of socio economic development in the District.

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