

**The Rwanda Government¹ in collaboration with
The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)
and The Commonwealth Secretariat**

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
GOVERNANCE AND DEMOCRACY:
AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

Kigali, Rwanda, 1st – 3rd July 2012

*Reaching Decision Makers, Political Leaders, Practitioners and
Academics from across Africa and the World*

Concept Paper

¹ The Government of Rwanda through the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB). Other involved institutions include: the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) and the National Electoral Commission (NEC).

1. Background

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, most Sub-Saharan African countries were characterized by popular movements demanding the democratization of political systems and better governance of public affairs. Twenty years later, several countries have experienced political reforms with multiple effects. Some of them have gone through major political crises and destructive conflicts, but they began to rebuild their political and economic systems.

In general, elections have become an unavoidable issue of accession to power. They are organized in most countries even if their results are often challenged in violence because of, among others, deficiencies and irregularities which characterize the management of electoral processes. At the same time, bilateral and multilateral partners determine more and more the provision of their assistance to respect for democracy and good governance. In addition, over the past ten years, African regional organizations as well as the African Union intervene progressively in the issues of democracy and governance. The process of setting up an African architecture for governance is a relevant initiative in this area.

Despite the excitement generated by the democratization and governance, few changes are noticeable on the ground in terms of impact of development policies carried out in several countries. Furthermore, the idea that civil society could replace the state in delivering public services has shown its limits. Civil society organizations need the public authorities able to guarantee a secure environment for them to conduct their actions. Other than that, the political protest movements led to the change of regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. There is certainly a need to understand the dynamics behind these demands for greater democracy in countries considered until last year to be relatively stable.

That is why this Conference provides an ideal setting for political leaders, decision makers and other relevant stakeholders to make a retrospective analysis of the last two decades and draw the necessary lessons in order to meet future challenges. This is a good opportunity because debates on the issues of democracy and governance in Africa are often discussed outside of Africa. This is to enable African stakeholders to discuss, among themselves and with their international partners on the basis of concrete experiences, the implementation of democratization processes and policies to promote good governance.

2. Conference Objectives

The overall objective of the Conference is to provide a retrospective assessment of democratization and political governance in Africa over the last 20 years, analyzing the progress and challenges and identify strategic options able to improve policies in these areas. It will also seek to assess and inform, 50 years after independence, where Africa is in governance and democratization.

Indeed, many analysts agree on the idea that strengthening democratic governance in terms of democratic institution building and the capacity of the state to manage the political and economic processes of society for developmental purposes remains a major challenge for many African countries. They are also of the view that there is the need to revisit and interrogate the theoretical discourse on the democracy project in Africa in the interface between democracy, institution building and development.

From this perspective, five specific objectives underpin discussions of the Conference:

- To promote an exchange of experiences and open dialogue amongst African policy makers and Development Partners on progress made, and identify gaps and challenges of democratisation and public governance. Indeed, these complex policies are set up in national contexts characterized by a particular history, constraints and multiple national and international actors sometimes with converging and often conflicting interests.
- To analyse the achievements of the last 20 years of political democratization and promotion of good governance in Africa and identify strategic options for strengthening democratic institutions and improving public service delivery to the citizenry.
- To promote the analysis of and discourse on democratisation and governance in Africa by African Analysts and Researchers working on the ground. Indeed, the production of knowledge and discourse on democracy and good governance by African elites is an important and essential contribution to improving and propagating best practices in these areas. The relevance of liberal democracy applied in Africa must also be subjected to scrutiny.
- To promote multi-stakeholder dialogue between Policy Makers, Practitioners, Development Partners and Analysts on policies and practices related to democratization and promotion of good governance, including in post-conflict societies.
- To analyse and assess factors and methods of measuring democratization and good governance processes in Africa and recommend necessary improvements to the current methods and indicators used.

3. Focus Areas

The Conference Participants will discuss and analyse in each session an aspect of democracy and governance in Africa in line with the above objectives. The approach is to analyse each topic by focusing on progress made, constraints and challenges encountered and possible solutions to address them. Moreover, Rwanda as the host country provides a case study in that it crossed most situations: from the failure of democratization in the early 90s to the 1994 genocide, and from the socio-economic recovery to the current challenges of strengthening public institutions and democratization in the post-conflict environment.

The Conference issues will be based on the following thematic areas:

- 1. The State, Citizenship and State Building in Africa**
- 2. Engineering Governance for Citizen Development: Innovations from Africa**
- 3. Democratisation in the African Context**
- 4. Elections and Election Management in Africa**
- 5. Media, Governance and Democracy in Africa**
- 6. Political Contestation and Uprising in North Africa: Lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa**
- 7. Measuring Democratisation and Good Governance**
- 8. Elevating Standards of Democracy and Governance in Africa: The Delicate Equation between Power Change and the Imperatives of Political Stability**
- 9. African Renaissance: Where are we?**

3.1 Themes and underlying Issues

| | Theme | Issues |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | The State, Citizenship and Nation Building in Africa | What distinguishes the modern African state from the colonial one? Democratization and post-conflict state building in Africa: what are the lessons learned and challenges posed? |
| 2. | Engineering Governance for Citizen Development: Innovations from Africa | How can political consensus and inclusiveness be built around policy and constitutional reform? What can Africa show that it has done better in governance for the betterment of the Citizens? |
| 3. | Democratisation in the African Context | What is the nature of the democratic reforms that have taken place in Africa over the last twenty years? New constitutions, multiparty elections, rule of law reforms, media liberalisation, and what else? To what extent have the reforms worked or succeeded? How does gender equity/equality contribute to the consolidation of the democracy? Policies and practices of donors in supporting democratization and governance in Africa – in whose interest are they acting? To what extent does decentralization contribute to the promotion and/or strengthening of democracy? |
| 4. | Elections and Election Management in Africa | To what extent does the holding of elections symbolise democracy? How are elections managed in Africa? What is the capacity of the Electoral Management Body (EMBs) in Africa to manage the whole electoral cycle? |
| 5. | Media, Governance and Democracy in Africa | Who do the Media speak for in Africa? What is the role of the Media in the democratisation process in Africa? To what extent can the Media catalyse political change in Africa? |
| 6. | Political Contestation and Uprising in North Africa: Lessons for Sub-Saharan Africa | What are the dynamics behind the changes that have been taking place in North Africa? Why has the World been caught unawares by the Arab Spring? Is the Arab Spring a warning signal to Sub-Saharan Africa? |
| 7. | Measuring Democratisation and Good Governance | Institutions measuring democracy and governance are mostly based outside the Continent, and Africa seems to be the most affected by the results posted by these institutions in terms of impact. How is democracy and governance currently measured in Africa, and what are the methodologies, evidence and assumptions behind governance and democracy indices? Do Africans understand governance and its dynamics in the same way as other International Actors? What are the current Regional and pan African Instruments for promoting democracy and governance: how relevant are they? |
| 8. | The Delicate Equation between Power Change and the Imperatives for Political Stability | What is the relationship between Democracy - Governance – Stability and Development? What is the connection between elections, ethnicism and citizenship in Africa? |
| 9 | African Renaissance | From anti-colonialism to national liberations and fight against poverty for Africans and Africa's dignity: 50 years after Independence, where is Africa today? |

4. Expected Results

- Participants more so those in authority are expected to agree upon shared principles such as acknowledgement of, growth and development of democratic practices to serve as basis for governance in Africa.
- Demonstration of the relevance of developing an African perspective in analysing complex processes of democratization and public governance.
- Achieve a common consensus on a model joint assessment of good governance that can be adopted by African countries.
- Highlight key lessons learned from the experiences of Rwanda and other post-conflict countries to better understand the governance practices that lead to stable democracies and institutions.
- Adoption of a Joint declaration to be approved by the Conference, which aims at defining guidelines for the enhancement of democratic governance in Africa.
- Adoption of an Action Plan based on strategic options identified in the Conference in order to support local, national and regional stakeholders as well as donors in strengthening democratization and good governance in Africa. Proposals for supporting the African Governance Architecture will be highlighted.
- Publication of a synthesis report of the Conference with recommendations and strategic options.

5. Follow-Up

The Conference is not intended as an end in itself but rather as an important occasion for defining fundamental principles that are necessary for constructing effective democracies in Africa. The Joint Declaration and the related Action Plan shall thus be considered as the operational measures defining the direction of future undertakings towards the improvement of democratization and governance in Africa.

6. Dates and Venue

The Conference will take place in **1st-3rd July 2012 in Kigali, Rwanda,**

7. Conference Methodology

The Conference will take place for a period of three to four days. The Conference sessions shall include Keynote speeches, panel discussions and presentations. Presenters and Speakers will be drawn from the Organizers, Global leaders, the Ministers of participating countries, the representatives of the Donor organisations, and Distinguished Scholars specialised in different aspects of democratization, governance and African affairs. There will parallel sessions to allow for maximum presenters and sufficient discussion on issues. Distinguished Eminent Guests and Global Leaders will speak to the Conference in Plenary Sessions.

8. Participants and Observers

Participants at the Conference will include the following:

- Heads of States and Governments;
- Members of Governments from the Great Lakes Region and across Africa;

- Global Leaders in different domains;
- Heads of Regional Economic Communities (RECs);
- Senior representatives of Donor Agencies and Multilateral Organisations, including the UN;
- Eminent Scholars and Practitioners from the Region, Africa and Overseas;
- Selected Media Specialists and practitioners;
- Different categories of people with their respective expertise from different disciplines in Civil Society, Academia and Non-Governmental Organisations.

9. Conference Organizers

The Conference is jointly organized by the Government of Rwanda through the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) through its Lusaka Regional Centre for Democracy and Good Governance and the Commonwealth Secretariat in London.

10. International Scientific Committee

To ensure high quality of selected papers, scientific credibility and all Africa ownership, an international Scientific Committee is put in place. It comprises prominent academicians and/ practitioners from across Africa and beyond and is chaired by Professor Shyaka A., the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for Rwanda Governance Board (RGB).