



Electoral Volunteerism

A Case Study of Rwanda



February 2014

Volunteering is an expression of the individual's involvement in their community. Participation, trust, solidarity and reciprocity, grounded in a shared understanding and a sense of common obligations, are mutually reinforcing values at the heart of governance and good citizenship.

(UNV, November 2000)

Cover page photo: NEC volunteers swearing an oath on election-day.

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Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organization
EDPRS	Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy
EMB	Electoral Management Body
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GNU	Government of National Unity
GOR	Government of Rwanda
LDC	Least Developed Country
MINALOG	Ministry of Local Government
MINIJUST	Ministry of Justice
MINISANTE	Ministry of Health
NEC	National Electoral Commission (Rwanda)
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NURC	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission
RGB	Rwanda Governance Board
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNV	United Nations Volunteer Programme
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

1.0 Executive Summary

As the cost of elections escalates worldwide, electoral management bodies (EMBs) continue to seek innovative ways to reduce expenditure, while endeavouring to maintain the integrity of the electoral process. Within the last decade the global economic downturn has had an impact on government spending and donor support, directly affecting the mandate of EMBs, especially in emerging democracies. EMBs therefore continue to strive for effective cost-saving measures to reign-in spending.

Rwanda has a rich history of volunteerism that traverses many national development initiatives and activities. Unpaid community service is a common feature of Rwandan society and has positively impacted on health care services, agricultural production, shelter provision, infrastructure upgrading, environmental management and democratic governance.

This case study will explore and document one unique feature of community service in Rwanda – electoral volunteerism. The study will investigate and assess how election volunteerism works, the historical background, and the framework established by the National Electoral Commission of Rwanda (NEC) to enable volunteerism. The scope of the study is intentionally broad in order to capture as many aspects of electoral volunteerism as possible, and therefore provide a useful and relevant example for EMBs, election practitioners and other stakeholders wishing to explore the organizational and economic benefits of volunteerism. The case study will therefore examine the extent that electoral volunteerism has improved, enhanced and benefited election management in Rwanda.

The social and economic benefits of volunteerism has undoubtedly supported Rwanda's development strategy and contributed to enhanced service delivery and budgetary savings. The primary findings of the case study support the premise that volunteerism promotes citizen participation in the democratic process and impacts positively on election management in Rwanda. Over the last decade NEC has cultivated an ethos of national pride and patriotism and galvanized this spirit into a dedicated workforce of almost 75,000 electoral volunteers. As the cost of running Rwanda's Legislative Elections in 2013 decreased from previous years, the study determined that volunteerism directly contributed to national development by decreasing the financial burden on the state treasury. While the potential for sustainability rests on the good-will of the Rwandese people to continue volunteering, the study revealed a dedication and enthusiasm among citizens that augurs well for future electoral cycles.

The case study similarly revealed that a healthy *esprit de corps* and continued faith in NEC is conducive for ensuring the highest levels of professionalism and dedication among volunteers while performing their duties as election officials. A strategy of continuous training, mentoring, skills development, and innovative, cost-effective capacity building interventions, such as e-based learning and knowledge sharing, is therefore desirable for the well-being of the NEC voluntary workforce; such measures could positively impact on the quality and integrity of the electoral process in Rwanda.

There is no single global model of best practice - what works well in one country may not be suitable in another. This study is therefore not intended as a blue-print for EMBs to replicate, but rather presents an example of what works in Rwanda. Election practitioners faced with the prospect of ever-increasing costs may recognize certain aspects of the Rwandan model in their own countries and adapt or tailor existing volunteerism mechanisms in an effort to decrease election spending. A particular measure to reduce electoral spending in one country may, however, not be appropriate or desirable in another. Countries that have a history and culture of community service and volunteerism may therefore be in a position to harness existing traditional values of patriotism, social responsibility and civic duty and galvanize these beliefs into a dynamic and committed movement of election volunteerism.

In partnership with the National Electoral Commission of Rwanda, this case study has been undertaken within the context of One UN's "Deepening Democracy through Strengthening Citizen Participation and Accountability in Governance Programme", managed by UNDP.



2.0 Country Profile

Rwanda is a landlocked, mountainous country located in the Great Lakes region of Africa. With a predominantly rural population engaged in subsistence agriculture, Rwanda is considered a Least Developed Country (LDC) by the United Nations.¹ “The Land of a Thousand Hills” is bordered by Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and Uganda. With a youthful population, an approximate birthrate of 4.5% and a total land area of 26,338 sq. km, Rwanda is one of sub-Saharan Africa’s most densely inhabited countries.² The population of Rwanda is estimated at approximately 11.6 million and its people share a common culture and language, *Kinyarwanda*.³



In the wake of the European “scramble for Africa”, the Kingdom of Rwanda was colonized by Germany in 1899; following World War I Rwanda became a Belgium League of Nations Mandate in 1916. During the decades of colonial administration the social relationships and power dynamics between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi were gradually influenced and exploited by their foreign rulers (Meredith, 2005; Snyder 2000). A divisive style of administration, combined with emerging ethnic tensions, led to a polarization of clans and periodical outbreaks of conflict, resulting in large numbers of mainly Tutsi refugees crossing into neighbouring countries. In July 1962 Rwanda gained independence from Belgium and remained under Hutu civilian and military rule for the next three decades.

In 1990, forces of the Tutsi-supported Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) entered Rwanda from Uganda, resulting in fresh hostilities breaking out. While a power-sharing agreement was signed in 1993 to end the conflict, an airplane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down in April 1994. This act is believed to have signalled the beginning of a wave of ethnic violence (Shawcross, 2000) that resulted in more than a million people, mainly Tutsis and opposition Hutus, losing their lives in the Rwandan Genocide.⁴

¹ UN-OHRLLS 2013.

² Rwanda Ministry of Health 2013.

³ Economist Intelligence Unit- Country Report Rwanda 2013.

⁴ Government of Rwanda website: “genocide62”.

A government of national unity (GNU) began the challenging task of rebuilding Rwanda following the genocide. The civil service was weak, infrastructure and buildings had been damaged or destroyed, and the government treasury was depleted. During the next decade Rwanda experienced a period of gradual national reconstruction, unification and reconciliation, accompanied by political, social and economic transition, constitutional reform, multi-level elections and steadily increasing human development indicators.

In recent years Rwanda has witnessed relative political stability, sustained economic development and an estimated growth rate of 8% in 2012.⁵ Following a decentralization policy adopted in 2000, the government has simultaneously initiated a strategy to promote citizen empowerment, widen participation in decision-making and create a new political status-quo. Through the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), and under the concurrent banner of “*Itorero*” (the custodian of Rwandan values and norms), the government is reviving traditional grass-roots and community based mutual support, community service, volunteerism and national service.⁶

Rwanda simultaneously continues to pursue a series of ambitious economic reforms, outlined in “Vision 2020” and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS 2) 2013-2018.⁷ Its official entry into the East African Community in July 2007 and The Commonwealth in 2009 were both seen as important developments for Rwanda and the Great Lakes region.

With a multi-party system, the constitutionally enshrined form of governance in Rwanda is built on two principles – power sharing and consensus, characterized by the country’s response to the genocide, which aims to avoid all forms of divisions within the population. Constitutionally, no party obtaining a majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies shall have a majority representation in the Cabinet.

Rwanda is a Presidential Republic, with legislative power vested in both the government and the two chambers of parliament, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. The Constitution of Rwanda is particularly robust in protecting the democratic rights of vulnerable and minority groups, including women, youth and persons with disabilities. The Chamber of Deputies has 80 members, 53 being

⁵ World Bank; Rwanda Economic Update, May 2013, edition 4.

⁶ Volunteerism Policy Paper, National Itorero Commission, Government of Rwanda, July 2012.

⁷ Vision 2020, the government’s overarching national development strategy was elaborated during the transition period. Its aim is to turn Rwanda into a middle-income country by 2020.

elected for a 5 year term by proportional representation. For the remaining seats the Constitution provides a quota for women (24 seats) elected by provincial councils; youth (2 seats) elected by the Rwanda National Youth Council; and persons with disabilities (1 seat) elected by Federation of the Associations of the Disabled. All political parties are compelled by law to submit lists that comply with certain principles of national unity and gender. Rwanda holds the global distinction of having the highest number of female members of any legislature, currently with 64%.

3.0 Electoral Background

In the wake of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda faced a multitude of unprecedented economic, social and political challenges in the path towards economic recovery, social reconciliation and democratic governance. As part of a transitional agenda established by the Arusha Accord in 1993, the Rwandan GNU pledged to hold parliamentary and presidential elections in 2003.

The government, therefore, embarked on an electoral process which began in March 1999 with the first election of cell and sector leaders, followed by the election of district, municipal and city council leaders in March 2001. Further elections for cell and sector leaders were conducted in March 2002. A constitutional referendum was also scheduled for May 2003, and presidential and parliamentary elections were planned within six months of the referendum. This process marked the end of the transitional arrangements governing the mandate of the GNU.

Since 2003, elections in Rwanda have been held on numerous occasions, including local, legislative and presidential. The 2008 Legislative Elections (Chamber of Deputies) occurred in an atmosphere of continuing national unity and reconciliation. These elections were seen as an important step in the ongoing process to further institutionalise inclusive parliamentary democracy in Rwanda. According to the Commonwealth Observer Group, the subsequent presidential elections in 2010 were well administered by NEC, and voters turned out in very large numbers across the country; the report furthermore stated:

“We understand the legacy of the past and the consequent caution as the country moves forward. However, we are also cognisant as to what is required for Rwanda to forge ahead as a pluralistic democracy, enjoying the associated freedoms and rights.”⁸

The most recent legislative elections were held on 16-18 September 2013 for Rwanda’s Lower House, the Chamber of Deputies. A total of 5,953,531 eligible voters were registered for the polls, an increase of approximately 24% from legislative elections in 2008 and 15% from presidential elections in 2010. Of the voters registered for the 2013 polls, 54% were women, 46% men and 62% were youth. NEC reported a voter turnout of approximately 98%.



2013 Legislative Elections

The September 2013 elections were Rwanda’s third legislative elections since the 2003 Constitution was adopted. According to national and international observer reports, the elections were conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner with key benchmarks of democratic elections being provided for, including freedom of association and expression, and universal suffrage. Various logistical and administrative shortcomings were, however, noted during the polling, counting and results tabulation processes.⁹

Following the establishment of NEC in 2000, Rwanda faced numerous challenges – the country was emerging from social and economic crisis, the government had limited resources to spare for elections and NEC lacked sufficient staff. In 2003 NEC conducted a constitutional referendum and two national elections (legislative and presidential) with support provided by the government of Rwanda, donors and the UN. Donor countries and the UNDP (which managed a basket fund) contributed approximately 43% of the total budget.¹⁰ Subsequent elections in 2008, 2010 and 2011 witnessed a steady reduction in donor support, including the 2013 elections, for which donors contributed approximately 4.6% of the total budget.

⁸ Commonwealth Observer Group; Rwanda Presidential Elections 2010, Interim Statement, August 10, 2010.

⁹ Civil Society Election Observation Mission - Final Report on the 2013 Legislative Elections; Commonwealth Expert Team Report: Rwanda Legislative Election, September 2013; Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Election Observer Mission; Preliminary Report on the September 2013 Legislative Elections.

¹⁰ UNDP Project Document: Technical Assistance Programme for the 2003 General Elections in Rwanda.

4.0 Volunteerism Context

Volunteerism has deep historical roots in Rwandan society that date back many centuries. The spirit of volunteerism emanates from the tradition of “*Itorero*”, the custodian of Rwandan values and norms.¹¹ In contemporary Rwanda various forms of volunteerism exist that have positively impacted on many sectors including agriculture, health care, shelter, infrastructure, the environment, conflict management, community reconciliation and democratic governance. The social and economic benefits of volunteerism have undoubtedly enhanced Rwanda’s national development strategy and contributed to improved service delivery and budgetary savings. In 2011 it was estimated that volunteerism accounted for 30% of GDP. According to the government, the main motivation behind volunteerism is to “alleviate socio-economic constraints experienced by individuals or their communities and to improve their quality of life”.¹² Volunteerism is widely practised in Rwanda and is common within civil society, faith-based and non-governmental organizations, international institutions and companies.

4.1 “*Itorero*”

Itorero refers to a historical institution that provided Rwandans with training and education in military skills, athletics, language, social relations, dance, music and poetry (Iliffe 2005). Over the generations, *Itorero* has developed into a cultural norm that embodies values of community, mutual self-help and national development. Through *Itorero* a culture of volunteerism has been preserved in the every-day life of Rwandans.

During the colonial era *Itorero* entered a dormant period in Rwanda, yet never entirely fell out of practice. In recent years *Itorero* has made a comeback and its spirit has been rekindled by the government through extolling its virtues to inspire positive values among society and to strengthen volunteerism efforts throughout the country. Through *Itorero* the government is re-introducing a culture of serving one’s country to encourage “patriotism, positive values, responsibility and selfless service”.¹³ The National *Itorero* Commission, a body officially established in June 2013 to develop a national volunteerism strategy and framework, has articulated the following:

¹¹ Volunteerism Policy Paper, National Itorero Commission, Government of Rwanda, July 2012.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Itorero for the Country: Policies for the Republic of Rwanda*; Ministry of Local Government, November 2011.

“The spirit of volunteerism transcended the Rwandan social structure and was relied upon by the national leadership institutions operating under the king as an effective tool of mobilizing people for national and community service activities including: security, disaster relief and other social economic community services. The volunteerism spirit was used at all levels among Rwandans to address issues confronting society at various levels”.¹⁴

The National *Itorero* Commission’s policy furthermore iterates that “the definition of volunteerism is strongly influenced by the history, politics, religion and culture of a community. What might be seen as volunteering in one country might be dismissed as low paid or labor intensive in another. What is important is to ensure that all elements that qualify a certain activity to be voluntary are present”.

There are various forms, types and concepts of volunteerism in Rwanda that have contributed to the social and economic advancement of its people. Communal work (*Ubudehe*), community service (*Umuganda*), and communal services (*Umusanzu*) are all forms of mutual help that benefit Rwandan families, communities and the wider society. Local government councils (*Njyanama*), traditional conflict resolution, mediation and reconciliation mechanisms (*Abunzi*) and *Gacaca* Courts are additional examples of important civic duty volunteerism, the latter playing a crucial role in rebuilding Rwandan society following the 1994 genocide. The spirit of volunteerism even extends to providing traditional ambulance services (*Ingobyi*) for members of the community.

Umuganda

The last Saturday of each month in Rwanda is reserved for *Umuganda*, a form of national service which mobilizes all walks of Rwandan society. This mandatory activity has its origins day. *Umuganda* occurs in the morning between the ages of 18 and 65 from street cleaning to repairing encourage community involvement of different social and economic *Umuganda*, community members gather to discuss issues of public interest and exchange views, thus providing a platform for community members to interact with leaders and authorities.¹⁵



for various community and civic duties. in the colonial period and continues to this hours and sees all healthy Rwandans involved in community service ranging public buildings. *Umuganda* is intended to and strengthen cohesion between citizens backgrounds. Following the completion of

¹⁴ Volunteerism Policy Paper, National Itorero Commission, Government of Rwanda, July 2012.

¹⁵ Website of the Rwanda Governance Board: <http://www.rgb.rw/main-enu/innovation/umuganda.html>

4.2 National Service

The practice of national service, while not a new concept in Rwanda, is experiencing a recent resurgence. During the pre-colonial period Rwanda relied on national service (*Ubwitange*), a variation of unpaid labour, to develop and build the state. This concept was not widely practiced during Rwanda's recent turbulent history and is only now being revived. The government is gradually rolling out a new national service programme, which envisages a "blended model" of voluntary and compulsory service. Known as *Urugerero*, this programme is initially focusing on students and youth (18-35). Other demographic groups of society will be encouraged to participate on a voluntary basis depending on their availability, profession and age.

4.3 Government Institutions

Volunteerism is a crosscutting feature and activity of many government ministries and institutions. The main function of the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) is to "promote the well-being of the population by good governance, community development and social affairs". Among its objectives, the ministry is tasked with instilling democratic, decentralized administrative structures, which are able to mobilize the population in order to implement government programmes and resolve problems.¹⁶ Throughout the country thousands of volunteers serve on district councils (*Inama Njyanama*), which are tasked with the day-to-day affairs of local government, and village assemblies (*Umudugudu*). The Ministry of Health similarly supports the activities of 45,000 volunteer community health workers (*Abajyanama b'ubuzima*) throughout the country, while the Ministry of Education relies extensively on volunteers to build schools.

Perhaps the most well-known example of grass-roots volunteerism in Rwanda is the *Gacaca* Courts. This system was intended to be an expeditious means of clearing a back-log of 1994 *génocidaire* cases.¹⁷ Evolving from a traditional form of dispute resolution, *Gacaca* Courts became an integral part of a national programme of reconciliatory justice. Over 12,000



¹⁶ MINALOC website: <http://www.minaloc.gov.rw>

¹⁷ A term generally referring to perpetrators of Rwanda's genocide.

courts were established at village level to relieve the burden on the higher courts. Elected by their peers, “people of integrity” served as volunteer judges and presided over cases brought before them. Established in 2001, *Gacaca* Courts operated for over a decade.

5.0 National Electoral Commission of Rwanda

The origins of NEC can be traced back to the Arusha Peace Accords, signed in 1993 by the Rwandan government at the time and the Rwandan Patriot Front (RPF). Article 24c of the power sharing agreement contained provisions regarding the peoples’ right to freely elect their leaders.

In November 2000 NEC was formally promulgated by Law No. 39/2000 which outlined its organizational structures, functions and duties for conducting elections. In 2003 a referendum was conducted that adopted a new constitution, which included Article 180 confirming the legal status of NEC. The stated mission of NEC is to conduct free, fair and transparent elections to promote democracy and good governance in Rwanda.

Prior to 2010 there were two principal electoral laws in Rwanda, the Organic Law (No. 17/2003) governing presidential and legislative elections, and Law No. 02/2006 pertaining to the conduct of local council elections (Kigali City, district, sector, cell, village). These laws were consolidated in 2010 to create the current legal framework governing elections in Rwanda (Law No. 27/2010). The law has been amended and complemented twice since 2010. A harmonized document reflecting the current legal framework for conducting elections was published by NEC in August 2013.

Under Article 180 of the 2003 Constitution, NEC is endorsed as an independent body in charge of the preparation and conduct of elections of local leaders, members of parliament, presidential elections, referenda and other elections as determined by law. Its mandate includes ensuring that election processes are conducted in a free, fair and transparent manner, and extends to developing and implementing a voter and civic education programme. NEC is legally empowered to develop and issue periodical instructions, guidelines and codes of conduct governing elections.

Under the law NEC is considered an independent and autonomous body in the preparation, management, announcement and certification of election results; NEC collaborates with government

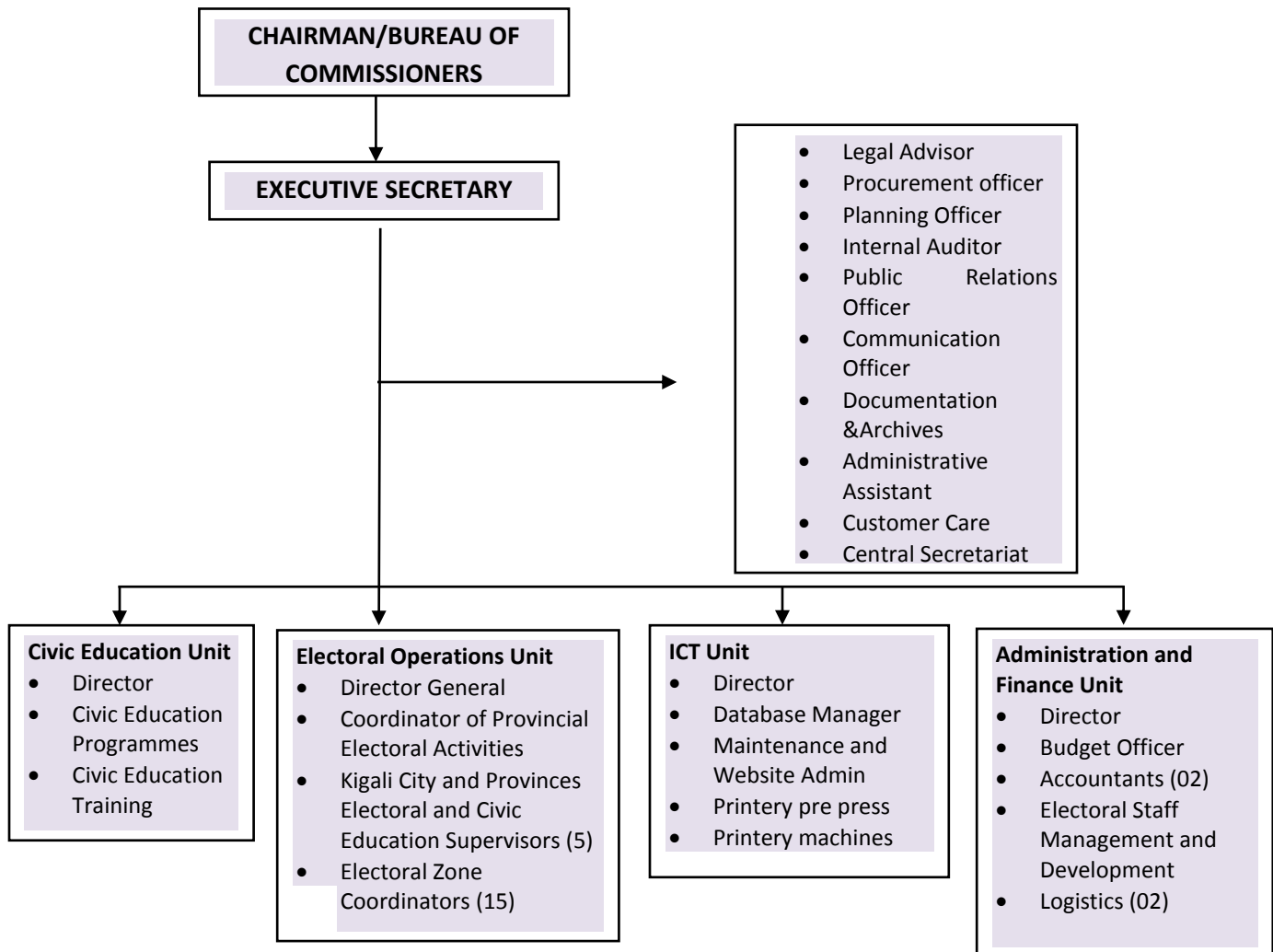
institutions such as the Presidency of the Republic, Parliament, the Supreme Court and the Ministry of Local Government, as well as national and international organizations and foreign missions in Rwanda.

As the institution mandated to prepare, conduct and supervise elections and referenda in Rwanda, NEC is responsible for establishing electoral constituencies, developing and conducting civic education programmes and tabulating, announcing and publishing election results. During the election period, NEC establishes branches at provincial, City of Kigali and district levels. NEC is also responsible for conducting elections for the National Youth Council, the National Women's Council, *Gacaca* and mediation (*Abunzi*) jurisdictions.

NEC has a tripartite structure - the Council of Commissioners, the Bureau of the Commission and the Executive Secretariat (see organogram below). The Council of Commissioners is the main decision making body. It is composed of 7 members, including a president and a vice president. Two of the commissioners are required to be lawyers. Commissioners are proposed by government and approved by the senate, and may be removed from office by presidential order. The Council of Commissioners establishes procedures for the organisation of elections, for the approval of the final voters' list, for the examination and approval of candidacies and for the proclamation of election results. The activities of NEC Commissioners become full-time two months before elections and extend until the proclamation of the final results.

A re-structuring process in 2010 established 49 state-funded, permanent staff positions at NEC. Currently there are an additional 18 short-term contractual positions across various headquarter departments. Fifteen short-term contractual staff are posted at district level. There is also reliance on donor funding for a number of positions (NEC Strategic Plan 2012-2017). Following administrative restructuring in early 2006, Rwanda was divided into 4 provinces and the City of Kigali. Below the provincial level, there are 30 districts, which are again subdivided into 416 sectors, 2,150 cells and 15,000 villages (*Umudugudu*) as the smallest unit. This structure combines appointed local officials at all levels, with directly and indirectly elected councils at district and lower levels. The main administrative units are the 30 districts, governed by mayors and vice-mayors, who are elected by the district and sector councils from among district council members.

NEC Organizational Structure



6.0 Electoral Volunteerism

Volunteerism in Rwanda is referred to as *“Ubwitange”*, which literally means a “free will action” performed out of self-motivation and passion without expecting financial reward.¹⁸ Throughout the duration of this case study the words *“patriotism”* and *“civic duty”* were often used to describe the motivation behind election volunteerism. The spirit of volunteerism in the context of elections in

¹⁸ Volunteerism Policy Paper, National Itorero Commission, Government of Rwanda, July 2012.

Rwanda is commonly perceived as performing a valuable and necessary public service, without the expectation of payment, thus contributing to good governance and credible elections.¹⁹

It is generally acknowledged in Rwanda that NEC is one of the forerunners in promoting volunteerism. This role was precipitated by a critical shortage of state funding and finite donor support for the 2003 elections. NEC was therefore compelled to identify “home-grown” cost-saving measures. By revitalizing Rwanda’s dormant culture of volunteerism²⁰, NEC conducted the 2003 elections by relying almost exclusively on volunteers (*Umukorera-bushake-w’amatora*) to deliver voter and civic education, organize logistics, manage polling stations and conduct the count. Since that time, a national network of volunteers has been on standby for all levels of elections. NEC currently maintains a data-base of approximately 75,000 volunteers, many of whom have been offering their services without any expectations of financial reward since 2003.

6.1 Reducing Election Costs

The cost of elections continues to escalate worldwide, resulting in additional challenges for EMBs to reduce operational expenditure while maintaining the integrity of the electoral process. Within the last decade the global economic downturn has had an impact on government spending and donor support, directly affecting the mandate of election management bodies. EMBs continue to seek innovative and cost-saving measures to reign in election spending, including streamlining electoral management and staff, changing from base-line to zero-based budgeting, optimizing ICT systems, exchanging or borrowing election equipment from neighbouring EMBs, procuring materials locally and holding multiple levels of elections on a single day.²¹

The NEC budget for the 2013 elections was approximately RWF 4.76 billion.²² Of this total, 96% was allocated from the national budget, while the remaining 4% was raised by the NEC Printing Services and through UNDP and donor support. For the 2008 elections, total expenditure was approximately RWF 7.65 billion, of which government funded 63%. The remaining 37% was provided by development

¹⁹ Based on opinions expressed during focus group discussions with electoral volunteers.

²⁰ Many forms of traditional volunteerism were discouraged during colonial rule and gradually lost traction in Rwanda.

²¹ While it is important to address organizational inefficiency, prudence also must be exercised as cost saving measures should not undermine the basic requirements of legitimate elections. A particular measure to reduce electoral costs may work well in one country but not in another due to differing legal, political, and socio-economic circumstances.

²² Approximately \$7.14 million at current exchange rates.

partners through a “joint basket fund”, managed by NEC. For the most recent election, NEC reduced the cost per voter from approximately \$2.90 in 2008 to \$1.20 in 2013, amongst the lowest on the continent. Though the number of voters has increased by 20% from 2008 (see chart below), NEC has achieved current cost reductions by re-using equipment (ballot boxes etc.), through procuring cost-effective ICT systems and by rationalizing the stipends paid to election volunteers.

Chart 1

Year	Elections	# voters	Budget ²³				Cost per voter (US\$)*
			Total (RWF)	GoR %	Donors %	Cost per voter (RWF)	
2008	Legislative	4,769,228	7,651,889,812	62.9		1,604	2.90
			4,816,285,404		37.1		
2010	Presidential	5,178,492	8,854,203,358	58.1		1,710	2.90
			5,147,919,424		41.9		
2011	Local Govt.	5,411,740	5,578,456,686	84.2		1,031	2.20
			4,695,675,525		15.8		
2013	Legislative	5,953,531	4,763,474,230	95.4		800	1.20
			4,546,069,000		4.6		

* exchange rate fluctuates between RWF 448-667 per US\$

Source: National Electoral Commission of Rwanda

6.2 Legal Framework

While not explicitly stated in the principal electoral law, the legal foundation for election volunteerism is implied in electoral legislation and instructions issued by NEC. Article 32 of Law no. 27/2010 (19/06/2010) relating to elections. It states:

“Voting in each polling room shall be supervised by a committee of assessors. The number of its members and their attributions shall be determined by the National Electoral Commission.”

Electoral law provides NEC with the authority to issue instructions and regulations on various aspects of electoral administration and management. As specified in NEC Instructions, election volunteers are comprised of i) the chairperson of the polling station ii) the coordinator of the polling room, and iii)

²³ All figures provided by NEC.

assessors (3) and their substitutes.²⁴ A review of the Instructions indicate that the functions and duties of volunteers engaged by NEC are primarily consistent with the responsibilities of polling staff recruited in other jurisdictions with similar electoral procedures.

As stated in NEC Instructions, an election volunteer refers to “a Rwandan who gives support in the activity and preparation and conduct of Elections but without pay. However, the National Electoral Commission takes measures to facilitate them fulfilling their mission”. Conditions for volunteerism include: being a Rwandan national, be at least 18 years-old, and a person of integrity who is able to vote and who has completed at least 3 years of secondary education. The Instructions also specify who is prohibited from being a volunteer, including *inter alia*, elected government officials, local executive committee members, security personnel and leaders and employers of political parties.

The polling committee, all of whom are volunteers, is the branch of NEC comprised of the chairperson of the polling station, and the coordinators of the polling rooms. The polling committee is responsible for resolving any problems arising at the polling station and polling rooms, including security issues. Articles 15-18 of the Instructions provide a comprehensive list of duties, roles and responsibilities of the chairperson, coordinator and assessors. A code of conduct for election volunteers is imbedded in the Instructions. The guiding principles of the code include neutrality, impartially, transparency, professionalism and adherence to laws and instructions governing elections.



6.3 NEC Volunteerism Policy

“Rwanda’s strong volunteerism culture, while embedded in many sectors of society, is accompanied by few formal guidelines for national organizations”.²⁵

Since 2003 NEC has developed an informal policy of systems, structures and procedures for election volunteerism. Due to the relatively new concept of volunteerism at the time, NEC followed an iterative

²⁴ Instructions of the National Electoral Commission no. 03/2013 of 23/07/2013 Governing Legislative elections, Chamber of Deputies, September 2013.

²⁵ Paraphrased discussions with civil society organization representatives.

approach in 2003, and subsequent elections, where repetition and analysis contributed to improved and more effective volunteerism management. This method, with informal procedures governing volunteerism, may not be suitable in all countries and contexts, however, in the case of Rwanda the process has served its purpose. NEC, nonetheless, recognizes the need to review and assess the current system and is considering the introduction of an institutional policy for the benefit of volunteers, the electoral process and the organization. This may include, *inter-alia*, a formal organizational structure, volunteerism terms and conditions, deployment, legal obligations, stipend policy, training and skills development, supervision and evaluation, retention, and discipline policy (the latter is currently being developed by NEC).

The introduction of formal NEC volunteerism guidelines or policy may, however, impact on the flexible and adaptive nature of the current system. Before any fundamental changes are considered, NEC may wish to engage in a dialogue with relevant stakeholders, including MINALOC, political parties, volunteerism institutions, as well as volunteers themselves. Given the increasingly central role that the National *Itorero* Commission is playing in the formulation of a strategic plan intended to embed volunteerism in the national development process and implement a coordination framework, an exchange of views and experiences commission management would also be beneficial.

As stated by the chairman of the National *Itorero* Commission, “election volunteerism is the child of *Itorero*”. NEC’s proven track record of recruiting, training and coordinating thousands of volunteers could therefore provide valuable lessons for the National *Itorero* Commission to consider while developing appropriate institutional frameworks for effective management of volunteerism resources. The potential synchronicities between election volunteers (*Umukorera-bushake-w’amatora*) and National Service (*Ubwitange*) may also require exploration and discussion.

6.3.1 Recruitment Process

The majority of election volunteers registered on the NEC database were recruited prior to the 2003 elections, hence many have more than a decade of experience. NEC, however, has not institutionalized a formal procedure for recruiting volunteers as various traditional channels exist for volunteers to step forward or be nominated. In the past this process has involved a pro-active initiative whereby an individual approached NEC, or a community “council of elders” suggests or nominates a suitable

candidate during public meetings. Regardless of the path taken, all volunteers are evaluated and selected through a community-based, peer-review mechanism that takes into consideration qualifications, experience, background, character and commitment to serving his or her country. Community meetings following *Umuganda* provide a platform for assessing or nominating election volunteerism candidates. One advantage to this selection process lies in the knowledge that the community has a stake in selecting E-Day officials, ideally enhancing the integrity of the electoral process. Such involvement can instill a sense of community ownership in the electoral process and may contribute to the credibility of results, while mitigating allegations that polling officials may be biased or lack neutrality.²⁶

6.4 NEC Volunteers



NEC election volunteers come from all walks of life in Rwanda and include self-employed entrepreneurs, lawyers, teachers, students, health-care workers and the unemployed. The latter category is targeted by NEC as a means of providing unemployed youth with an opportunity to acquire training and work experience. The case study revealed that this group is motivated to volunteer for election duty through a desire for personal development, including the prospect of finding paid employment or furthering their education. Due to Rwanda's admirable tenacity at striving for gender balance in public institutions, the percentage of female election volunteers currently stands at 55%. By necessity, NEC volunteers must be competent and literate, hence the majority have A-Level certificates and many have university degrees. The rate of attrition among volunteers is low and the majority are encouraged to return for future election duties. The rate of new recruitment since 2003 is approximately 22%.

²⁶ Opinions expressed during primary stakeholder interviews.

6.5 Performance Evaluation

Following each election NEC conducts a performance evaluation of volunteers. Team evaluations are conducted at various levels of the organizational structure and assessments are made of each volunteer's performance, work ethic, compliance with the code of conduct and co-operation with fellow volunteers. This is a transparent, peer-review process involving the participation of the volunteer being evaluated; if requested a rebuttal procedure is available.

6.6 Coordination and Responsibilities of Volunteers

The coordination and management of 75,000 volunteers presents NEC with a unique set of challenges, not least in the implementation of a suitable chain of command and reporting structure. This is accomplished by appointing seasoned volunteers at strategic levels of the organization who are responsible for coordinating the activities of volunteers in their particular area of responsibility. This structure reaches down to the smallest administrative divisions in the country. Starting at provincial level, NEC staff support the activities of volunteers at the district and sector levels who are responsible for training, logistics and voter education, while volunteers at the village or cell level are primarily responsible for managing polling centres and stations on E-Day.

The roles and duties of electoral volunteers in Rwanda are largely consistent with the responsibilities of electoral officials and E-Day polling staff in other countries where similar elections are conducted. The responsibilities of NEC volunteers can vary depending on their experience and the positions with which they are matched. Volunteers are assigned at provincial, district, sector and polling centre/station levels. Provincial and district level volunteers coordinate logistics and manage materials distribution, while others are involved with operational procedures and voter education.



Within polling centres (typically a school or public building), volunteers are assigned to one of three general categories: chairperson of the polling station, coordinator of a polling room, and assessors. Each

polling room has four volunteer officials, a coordinator and three assessors. The roles and responsibilities of the volunteers include coordination of electoral activities in the polling station and polling rooms, receiving and distributing materials, setting up and opening polling rooms, verifying voter eligibility, facilitating voting, liaising with election observers and party agents, counting ballots (*in situ*) and preparing and signing relevant statutory forms and documents. Additional volunteers may also be deployed to welcome and direct voters in polling stations and assist with operations and logistics. While maintaining consistency with the law, each village or cell is encouraged to be creative and develop home grown initiatives to make the voting process more efficient.

Election volunteerism in Rwanda is not limited to E-Day proceedings. Volunteers are also engaged in civic and voter education training activities throughout the country. A national cadre of volunteers deliver a range of information based on the NEC voter and civic education programme. Volunteers in this category are often teachers who donate their time on weekends, holidays and after working hours. NEC also collaborates with national institutions, including the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, CSOs and NGOs that have training and outreach capacity for delivering voter and civic education through their respective volunteerism programmes.

6.7 Volunteer Benefits and Allowances

During meetings and group discussions conducted for this case study a strong spirit of altruism amongst election volunteers was observed. Regardless of the motivation behind volunteering, the modest stipend provided by NEC was not an influential or decisive factor in the minds of the election volunteers when they were recruited. The case study revealed that it was common for volunteers to



Polling centre decorated by volunteers

subsidise various aspects of the election process, such as decorating polling stations, or paying for their own local transportation. The general consensus among the volunteers interviewed reflected a conviction that civic duty and national pride greatly outweighed financial sacrifice.

NEC's reliance on volunteers has significantly contributed to offsetting reductions in government spending and donor support for elections in Rwanda. Studies conducted by NEC reveal that substantial financial savings are being achieved during election periods as a result of volunteerism. On average, volunteers spend 15 days per election engaged in voter and civic education, E-Day duties and other support activities. If NEC were to employ 75,000 temporary staff for these positions, the cost to the country would be approximately \$11.25 million per election. While volunteers do not receive a salary, NEC endeavours to provide a token stipend to cover communication (for polling centre coordinators), transportation and food costs, amounting to approximately \$1.5 million per election. Since 2003 NEC has recruited thousands of election volunteers for 8 general elections, amounting to an estimated \$43.65 million in savings over 10 years.²⁷

As an indirect benefit, many volunteers in Rwanda have created local cooperative associations as a means of income generation and mutual support. These associations are found throughout many volunteerism sectors, including electoral and health care. Collective business activities and rotating savings and loan facilities are common features of these associations. While NEC does not directly support these associations it fosters participation and encourages its volunteers to band together for mutual self-help activities.

7.0 Integrity of the Electoral Process

EMBs worldwide have contended with the issue of maintaining integrity of the electoral process. Professionalism, credibility and accountability of staff are cross-cutting issues in election management and must be considered in all aspects of the process, from the independence of the election commission to the transparency of the count and results tabulation. Sustained



dialogue with electoral stakeholders and a sufficient number of trained political party agents and objective observers will additionally contribute to increasing the integrity the process.

²⁷ Calculations are based on a 10 year average of 70,000 volunteers receiving an average of \$22, rather than a minimum of \$100 as provided in other countries where EMBs pay temporary polling staff (all figures provided by NEC).

A transparent, competitive mechanism for selecting polling staff, clear procedures and adequate training can also contribute to an atmosphere of trust and confidence. EMBs that include political parties in the process of screening polling officials, for example, may face fewer allegations of biased or partisan behaviour on E-Day (in some contexts though this may politicize the process to an undesirable extent). Various EMBs have felt it necessary to stop the practice of relying on school teachers as polling staff due to concerns from stakeholders that state employees may favour the party in power. Regardless of the context, the most suitable person for the job is usually someone who is honest, neutral and upholds principles of professional conduct and integrity.²⁸

In Rwanda the selection of volunteer polling officials is at the centre of creating an environment conducive with credible and acceptable elections. On E-Day, NEC volunteers are requested to sign a code of conduct and swear an oath prior to the opening of polling stations²⁹. This statutory requirement is the culmination of a process that endeavours to ensure that polling officials maintain ethical standards of independence, neutrality and integrity during the electoral process. While difficult to



guarantee complete impartiality, the selection process of NEC volunteers through community participation, combined with regular evaluations of volunteers, can potentially create a solid foundation for fostering integrity and impartiality of the process. The practice of volunteers living in the communities where they preside over elections can also contribute to an atmosphere conducive with trust. While this process works well

in Rwanda and contributes to cost savings, it may not be a suitable practice in countries where less faith is placed in the integrity of locally recruited polling staff. In some jurisdictions polling staff are intentionally deployed to distant regions where there is less opportunity for collusion, biased behavior or mismanagement of the process. Rwanda is fortunate that NEC has gained the confidence and respect of its citizens during the last decade, an improvement over an environment of mistrust experienced during elections in 2003.³⁰

²⁸ ACE: The Electoral Knowledge Network.

²⁹ NEC Instructions 03/2013 of 23/07/2013; p. 22.

³⁰ HOPE Magazine, August 2013, issue 32; interview with NEC Executive Secretary, p.10.

The efforts taken by NEC to build public trust, recruit volunteers locally and encourage a community stake in the selection process augurs well for the capacity of its volunteers to sustain the integrity of the electoral process. Following best practice while counting ballots and consolidating results, for example, is essential for maintaining the integrity of the process. NEC should therefore remain vigilant for indications that the electoral process is being compromised by poorly trained or misguided volunteers who either fail to grasp the importance of following correct procedures (in the electoral law for example) or are deliberately manipulating the electoral process.

If the integrity of volunteers is in doubt, an evaluation process based on observations and trends during previous elections is recommended. This may include an examination of polling station results where anomalies occurred, such as tally sheets that may not have reconciled, or cases where complaints were lodged, or unusual voting patterns observed. An internal audit of results may also inform NEC of potential training deficiencies. A survey on public perceptions, awareness, satisfaction and confidence in the electoral process may also identify issues and areas of concern that NEC may wish to focus on.

8.0 Training of Volunteers

The importance of effective training in electoral management and processes cannot be underestimated. When polling stations open, election officials are expected to demonstrate that they have adequately understood the process for which they were trained. Insufficient training can result in incorrect procedures, voter confusion, disputes and unfavourable observer findings. The ability of EMBs to effectively train thousands of poll workers is often seen as a test of its professional capacity to develop and execute complex and multi-faceted plans.



NEC depends on its staff at headquarters, provincial and district levels to oversee and manage training for up to 75,000 electoral volunteers, putting considerable strain on its organizational capacity. To address this requirement NEC relies on a core group of volunteer “trainer of trainers” to roll out a national training programme. This core group is trained by NEC staff using a standard curriculum. A conventional “cascade” model to train volunteers has been put in place along with a basic monitoring framework which involves random, ad-hoc evaluations by commissions, headquarters and field staff.

volunteers that NEC is committed to their advancement and well-being. A “quick win” practical solution to supplementary training for NEC volunteers exists through a variety of free, e-based electoral resources (Box 2) available to anyone with access to a computer and internet connectivity.³¹

The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network³² is an online platform offering professional electoral management guidance that emphasizes sustainability and best practice. ACE offers a wide range of services related to electoral knowledge, assistance and capacity development. Electoral professionals are able to improve their knowledge by studying a wide range of on-line modules on every aspect of election management, including logistics, operational planning and voter education. The network is comprised of a global, thematic component, the ACE Practitioners' Network, and a regional component, the ACE Regional Electoral Resource Centres.

On-line Learning Courses: The UNDP, EC and International IDEA³³ have developed an E-learning resource targeting EMBs and electoral practitioners. The objective of the “E-learning Course on Effective Electoral Assistance” is to provide EMBs and electoral practitioners with effective assistance in line with international best practice and common principles, and to develop capacities of electoral management. The free on-line course offers a wide range of training modules and provides registered users with an E-learning certificate upon completion of the course.

Box 2

10.0 Sustainability and Replication

While the potential for sustainability rests on the good-will of the Rwandese people to continue the tradition of volunteering, the study revealed a dedication and enthusiasm amongst citizens that augurs well for future electoral cycles. In addition, NEC’s endeavours to reduce the cost of elections and reign-in spending have resulted in significant degrees of sustainability through its practice of recruiting unpaid volunteers.

The institutional memory embedded within the ranks of 75,000 volunteer workers also bodes well for collective retention of electoral practices and procedures. Both factors are essential elements of NEC’s

³¹ To facilitate complimentary internet access NEC may, for example, consider developing strategic partnerships with the Rwanda Development Board (RDB), which has established Business Development Services Centres around the country.

³² www.aceproject.org

³³ The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization.

overall objective to achieve greater effectiveness and sustainability. Continuous skills transfer and capacity building for the organization's most important asset, its volunteers, is therefore desirable in order to maintain a high standard of professionalism and integrity.

To demonstrate a commitment to its volunteer workforce, NEC is encouraged to identify motivational, cost-effective incentives to building volunteerism capacity, such as inviting volunteers for BRIDGE training and video-taping these sessions for on-line viewing; including volunteers on regional observation missions and exchanges trips; participating in "national volunteerism day", creating a portal on the NEC website for volunteer activity and developing a Facebook page, as well as producing "A Guide to Electoral Volunteerism" for the next generation of aspiring young volunteers. Such quick-win, realistic measures can potentially produce a beneficial return for NEC and incentivise its volunteer workforce.

11.0 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

NEC's volunteer workforce plays a central role in ensuring sound and credible elections in Rwanda. The well-being, capacity development and professional conduct of this valuable social capital is therefore paramount for democratic elections to flourish. Regular review and assessment of the system of electoral volunteerism in Rwanda is therefore important in order to identify systemic challenges and develop appropriate responses. While a paradigm shift is not required, a strategic, tailored approach to enhancing and optimizing the existing model will lend itself to a more efficient and professional electoral workforce.

Prior to any fundamental changes being made to the current framework, NEC may consider organizing a dialogue with the relevant stakeholders, including RGB, MINALOC, political parties, volunteerism institutions, development partners, and volunteers themselves to elicit their views.

Given the increasingly central role that the National *Itorero* Commission is playing in the formulation of a strategic plan to embed volunteerism in the national development process and implement a coordination framework, an exchange of views and experiences is also suggested.

Once this process has been completed, NEC may consider introducing institutional guidelines for election volunteerism. This may include, *inter-alia*, a formal organizational structure, volunteerism terms and conditions, legal obligations, M and E framework, stipend policy, training and skills development, supervision and evaluation, retention, promotion and discipline (currently being developed by NEC).

A robust monitoring mechanism is recommended to ensure that training gaps can be identified and addressed. NEC may consider developing a formal mechanism that involves a network of monitors to evaluate training sessions. NEC is encouraged to explore the feasibility of a suitable mechanism to provide regular and reliable feedback on training quality and efficacy before deficiencies are manifested on E-Day. Under the auspices of NEC, this function could be outsourced to a voluntary institution with a mandate to recruit national workers such as VSO, SNV, or UNV.

A training needs assessment of volunteers is furthermore recommended; this would assist in identifying critical capacity gaps and skills development requirements, and would convey a message to volunteers that NEC is committed to their professional advancement and well-being. A survey on public perceptions, awareness, satisfaction and confidence in the electoral process may also identify specific issues and areas of concern that NEC may wish to focus on.

12.0 Conclusions

The historical tradition of *Itorero*, combined with customary practices of community service, has provided NEC with the cornerstone that underpins election volunteerism in Rwanda. A strong sense of patriotism, social responsibility and national pride complements the ethos of Rwandan volunteerism and has enabled NEC to recruit a pool of willing and dedicated citizens.

National volunteerism has undoubtedly had a positive impact on reducing the cost of elections in Rwanda. Since 2003 approximately \$43.65 million has been saved by relying on an experienced and dedicated corps of some 75,000 unpaid citizens. By easing the burden on the country's national treasury, these budgetary savings have directly contributed to Rwanda's economic and social development.

NEC has successfully fostered a traditional spirit of community service in Rwanda through encouraging its population to volunteer for electoral duties. By relying on volunteers to work as logistics assistants, voter education facilitators and Election Day polling officials, NEC has managed to reduce election expenditure in Rwanda to amongst the lowest on the continent.

As with other EMBs, NEC faces ongoing challenges of recruiting and training suitable electoral officials, while simultaneously ensuring the highest standards of competence and integrity of the process. Due to the nature of volunteerism, NEC faces the additional responsibility of managing and coordinating a workforce that has no formal or contractual obligation to fulfill their duties in a professional manner. In recognizing this vulnerability NEC is considering introducing a set of guidelines intended to formalise certain procedural aspects for volunteer recruitment, training, promotion, retention, evaluation and disciplinary proceedings. Such measures could ideally benefit the volunteer, NEC, and the electoral process.

NEC's most valuable asset are its volunteers, hence ensuring their well-being is of paramount importance. To maintain a high degree of morale, dedication and professionalism among this workforce, NEC has recognized the importance of investing in capacity building and personal development. While these measures may have certain financial implications, a creative approach utilizing cost-effective measures and establishing strategic partnerships with national institutions will potentially contribute to the overall well-being of NEC's 75,000 electoral volunteers.

Electoral volunteerism succeeds in Rwanda due to various historical, cultural and economic imperatives that have merged into a spirit of civic duty and community service. In adeptly harnessing this national ethos, the National Electoral Commission has facilitated an important and cost-effective service that can benefit democratic governance and future electoral processes in Rwanda for years to come.



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Annex 1

Interviews and Meetings

National Electoral Commission

NEC Chairman	Professor Kalisa Mbanda
NEC Commissioner	Esperance Mukamana
NEC Executive Secretary	Charles Munyaneza
Coordinator of Electoral Activities	Liberatha Irambona
Director of Civic Education	Olive Kansanga
Planning Officer	Jean-Baptiste Kwitonda
Legal Advisor	Theoneste Gisagara
Zone Coordinator: Gasabo	Julius Nkusi
Coordinator: Southern Province	Nduwimana Pacific
Supervisor: Eastern Province	Kayiranga R. Frank

Electoral Volunteers (Focus Group Discussions)

Huye District	11 Volunteers
Kigali City	10 Volunteers
Gwagamama	10 Volunteers

Civil Society

Rwandan Civil Society Platform	Thaddee Karekezi: Executive Secretary
Civil Society Election Observation Mission	Eugene Rwibasira: Chief Observer

Government of Rwanda

Ministry of Local Government	Vincent Munyeshyaka: Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Health	Uzziel Ndagijimna: Permanent Secretary
Rwanda Governance Board	Felicien Usengumukiza: Deputy CEO

Institutions

National Council of Persons with Disabilities	Oswald Tuyizere: Director of Economic and Social Empowerment Unit
National Youth Council	Alphonse Nkuranga: Executive Secretary
Gender Monitoring Office	Rose Rwabuhiri: Chief Gender Monitor
	Aquiline Niwemfura: Executive Secretary
Media High Council	Erik Bazirema: Media Research
National Itorero Commission	Boniface Rucagu: Chairman
National Consultative Forum of Political Organizations	Zephyrin Jijuka: Programme Coordinator
National Unity and Reconciliation Commission	Jean Baptiste Habyalimana: Executive Secretary
Red Cross	Apollinaire Karamaga: Secretary General

United Nations and Development Partners

UNDP: Country Director	Auke Lootsma
UNDP: Head of Governance Unit and Programme Specialist	Nadine U. R. Sibomana
UNDP: IPG Programme Specialist	Judy Wakahiu
UNV: Programme Officer	Ivan Dielens
British High Commission	Marcus Grazette: Political Officer
Delegation of the European Union	Kaisa Kruise: Attache, Political Section
Embassy of Sweden	Malin Eriksson: Second Secretary Clement Kirenga: Programme Officer Democratic Governance
Embassy of the United States of America USAID	Jonathan Howard: Political Officer Emily Kronic: Democracy and Governance Office Director

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