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Analysis Study on the Implementation of Vision 2020 Umurenge Program in Rwanda

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Abstract: The study assessed the implementation of Vision 2020 Umurenge program in Rwanda. The study was empirical in nature, where by the researcher developed a questionnaire and an interview guide used to gather data. The study used employed a descriptive and a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from a sample of 384 respondents using cluster and systematic random sampling techniques. Analysis was done using frequency counts and percentage distributions, means and standard deviations. The findings revealed that VUP has been generally well implemented for all the three components. Majority of the beneficiaries have ever accessed public works services, including paid employment with 81.7%, direct support services in form of direct cash transfers, with 73% accessed and majority indicate that there is fairness in distribution of VUP funds, indicating that the direct cash support goes to the most deserving people. More than 90% of beneficiaries have accessed VUP loans and more than 95% have opened up savings accounts and are currently active.

Keywords: VUP; Umurenge; Public works; Financial Services; Direct support.

1. Introduction

Vision 2020 Umurenge is a new initiative by the Government of Rwanda (GoR) in collaboration with development partners and NGOs. It is led by the Ministry of Local Government, Good Governance, Community Development and Social Affairs (MINALOC) and supported by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. The VUP is organized around three components. The first component revives public works but planned using community based participatory approaches (e.g. Ubudehe) to build community assets and create off-farm employment infrastructure. The second component innovates with credit packages to tackle extreme poverty as well as to foster entrepreneurship and off farm employment opportunities; these packages are designed to make the best possible use of scarce public resources, involve the private financial sector and provide people with incentives to improve their own productive capacities. The third component includes direct supports to improve access to social services or to provide for landless households with no members qualifying for public works or credit packages; such unconditional support seeks to expand health and education coverage as well as to encourage the development of “appropriate” skills, handicraft, or social service activities (MINALOC and NISR, 2008).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Implementation of Vision 2020 Umurenge Program

Vision 2020 Umurenge program (VUP) is a social protection program aimed at accelerating the speed of poverty reduction in Rwanda (Louis- Marie, 2010). It is an initiative by the Government of Rwanda in collaboration with development partners and NGOs, aimed at eradicating extreme poverty by 2020, through three components, which include Public Works (PWs), Direct Support (DS) and Financial Services (FS) (Berglund, 2012). It is led by the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) and is supported by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN) in collaboration with development partners. This program aims at promoting local economic development, by creating off-farm employment opportunities and accelerating the process of monetization and formalization of the economy (Abigail, 2011; Berglund, 2012). The VUP is one of three flagship programmes of the National Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) aimed at alleviating poverty and promoting local economic development (Abigail, 2011). It is designed to accelerate the rate of poverty reduction in targeted sectors in Rwanda (Louis- Marie, 2010).

The VUP was launched in 2008 after realization that since 2006, over 56% of Rwandese lived below the national poverty line (Louis- Marie, 2010). While the VUP is intended to be a nationwide programme, it is rolled out in phases. In 2008 the programme was implemented in 30 pilot sectors and it is expanded by 30 sectors each year (MINALOC and NISR, 2008). Sectors were selected based on infrastructure and food security characteristics. In its first phase, the VUP support program was implemented in the poorest administrative sector of each district. Within every district, sectors were subjectively ranked according to the poverty level and the poorest one was selected for

the social protection program. Noteworthy is that, the ranking process of sectors with regard to poverty level has been made according to the perceptions and judgments of community members based on the principle of wealth ranking or *Ubudehe* (MINALOC and NISR, 2008).

According to Abigail (2011), VUP activities are managed and implemented by a range of actors; the Ministry of Local Government, Good Governance, Community Development and Social Affairs (MINALOC) coordinates the VUP and is guided by an inter-ministerial steering committee comprising the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN), Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI), the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Investment Promotion, Tourism and Cooperatives (MINICOM), the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy (MININFRA) and the Ministry of Land, Environment, Forestry, Water and Mines (MININTERE). Districts play an important oversight and supervisory role, supporting budget and expenditure management of VUP funds channeled through the Common Development Fund (CDF) and providing technical support as required by the sectors to effectively define and implement their specific VUP plans. Districts are also responsible for financial management functions, including procurement and management of payments within the programme (Abigail, 2011). The sectors in which the VUP operates are responsible for identifying priority projects (for public works) and for overseeing the identification of beneficiaries for all the three components, using the *Ubudehe* process.

2.1.1. Public Works (paid activities)

Berglund (2012) conceptualizes PW as the first component, which aims at creating off-farm employment infrastructure, through paid activities such as terracing, water harvesting, irrigation, roads construction, building of classrooms, health facilities, village settlements and so on. Louis- Marie (2010) indicates that Public Works provide employment for extremely poor households on community infrastructure projects. Whereas most public works programs in most countries are on community based participatory approaches (e.g. *Ubudehe*) and intend to build productive community assets (Rwanda Local Development Support Fund, 2011), in many other places the activities are carried out on public land mainly. In Rwanda, the situation is slightly different and it is of a mixed up nature. Since private land ownership is widespread in Rwanda, public works take place on either public or private land (e.g. terracing). However, the case must be made that the assets benefit the community at large. Indeed, when such benefits are clear, the community will have the incentive, or a vested interest, to conduct the maintenance of these community assets, thereby ensuring sustainability (Renate, 2013). The EDPRS (2008) described public works as a component which provides paid employment on community asset building projects to extremely poor households who have at least one adult able to work.

One typical Public Works activity provided at the village level is radical terrace making, which in most cases require a lot of strength, making the PWs best suited for strong and young people (Berglund, 2012). Supervisors of terrace making prefer to supervise a team of strong workers, as they have a budget to keep and many hectares of terrace to complete (Berglund, 2012). Each participant in the PWs has to open up an account at the sector's Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO), for a fee of Rwf 8000. The fee has a deterrent effect on people who consider participating as they feel that their wage disappears to account related costs instead of improving their lives. Berglund (2012) showed that every year, each *Umudugudu* (village) goes through a process of collectively defining which *Ubudehe* poverty category people in their community belong to. The restrictions are that the creation of household assets is not the direct objective of the public works projects and households cannot be paid individually to work on their land. However, keeping in mind the holistic approach to community development, work on household land can be undertaken if it will benefit the community at large. Furthermore, public works can be conducted on household land belonging to female-headed households with no labor in order to enhance their productivity directly. In all cases, public works projects that take place on household land are permitted if endorsed through the participatory community planning process and by the land owner (EDPRS, 2011).

Possible PWs projects are in the fields of environment/agriculture, transport, water, education, health, market infrastructure and so on (VUP, 2011). Projects are selected from existing Sector Development Plans (SDP) and informed by budget available and labour-intensiveness of the projects. The SDPs are developed every five years using a participatory process, starting with community-level meetings, in which projects are identified and prioritized (VUP, 2011).

2.1.2. Direct Support (Unconditional cash transfers)

Berglund (2012) and the VUP (2011) conceptualize Direct Support (DS) as an unconditional cash transfer to some poor members of the community to improve their access to social services or to provide for landless households with no members qualifying for public works or credit packages. According to the VUP (2009), the DS is intended to expand health and education coverage as well as to encourage the development of appropriate skills, handicraft or social service activities. This component also includes social assistance for extremely vulnerable people. Direct support activities are designed to provide grants to the neediest members and most vulnerable of the community. Such support is unconditional but beneficiaries are expected to engage in appropriate skill acquisition activities, handicraft and social service activities. Accordingly, training, guidance and access to credit form part of the package for those households who could benefit from them and who could graduate from the program. People in this category represent the most vulnerable in society. While some people in this group are expected to be graduated any time, some households within the group may never be able to graduate and so longer term support is given.

According to [Renate \(2013\)](#) direct support is awarded for a period of 12 months. Re-targeting is done every year, just before the start of the new operational year, to select the beneficiaries. At that time, DS households either remain on the DS list for the next year if they still meet the eligibility criteria, and may remain on the list in future (if they require long term assistance). The assistance is given to the households, at the beginning of every month and it is paid direct into beneficiary bank, savings and credit cooperative (SACCO) or microfinance institution (MFI) accounts (no cash payments). The other services in this form of assistance include training and sensitization on financial management and productive use of transfers, savings and credit, community messages on health, education and cross cutting issues such as gender equity (See Appendix IV). To select beneficiaries, the *Umudugudu* Committee makes recommendations on the provision of direct support to individual households. These recommendations are reviewed by the *Umudugudu* Council. Eventual approval in-kind transfers or cash transfers are made by the *Umurenge* Council and notified to the District Council. This final decision made by the VUP Management Team in consideration of the pool of in-kind resources and funds available ([VUP, 2011](#)).

It is important to note that getting the DS eligibility criteria correct and administered uniformly across Ubudehe committees is critical to (a) reduce errors of inclusion and exclusion, (b) provide the right interventions for the right household and maximize the opportunities to graduate and (c) keep within any budget constraints ([Government of Rwanda, 2007](#)). In this line of eligibility, extremely poor households, in operational areas, who have no land (less than 0.25 hectares) and no adults able to do manual work are the principle targets. Eligibility to this support has several restrictions as highlighted in the above eligibility criteria, but in addition, individuals who qualified for DS but consistently failed to engage in appropriate skill acquisition activities, handicraft, or social service activities may also be restricted from further selection ([VUP, 2011](#)).

2.1.3. Financial Services (loans)

According to [Renate \(2013\)](#) the financial services component, the Ubudehe Credit Scheme, was launched in selected communities in February 2010. It complements the public works and the direct support components by offering credit to the poor and aims to further spur productive investment, entrepreneurship and off-farm employment. In principle all households in the community, irrespective of their VUP programme status, can apply for credit under the Ubudehe Credit Scheme. Applicants submit a proposal for a portable income generating activity to the community leadership committee for approval ([Renate, 2013](#)). Households have to demonstrate the ability to manage the loan and the income generating activity; they have to have a bank account and upon acceptance have to sign a performance contract with the community. The interest rate on the loan is 2% p.a. The repayment schedule can be chosen by the applicant but the maximum repayment period for the loan does not exceed 12 months.

According to the [VUP \(2011\)](#), credit packages were built on similar experience in Ethiopia. Whereas their experience has prevalent focus on agriculture and livestock, the innovation with credit packages in Rwanda is to go beyond natural resources to cover human resources (i.e. skills), entrepreneurship and off-farm employment. Increasing access of poor households access to financial services cuts across all VUP components, since direct support and public works payments are made through the banking system. The need for bank/savings and credit cooperative/microfinance institution access in VUP sectors has accelerated the establishment and strengthening of financial institutions in them [VUP \(2011\)](#). All VUP beneficiary households have accounts and beneficiary testimonies indicate that many are choosing to save in them. Individual loans were the most common (69%) followed by group (30%) and then cooperative loans (1%). The average loan amount per beneficiary was RwF77,480. The most common types of income generating projects financed to date are farming, livestock and agricultural wholesale/trade. Other types of projects include non-agricultural trade, handicraft, tailoring and petty trade ([VUP, 2011](#)).

According to [Abigail \(2011\)](#), the Financial Services Component in effect carries the goal of enabling very poor households to become better integrated in the market. It has three sub-components, namely: VUP beneficiary training: aimed at providing basic financial education and basic business development services training to VUP beneficiaries; A VUP Microcredit Fund: aimed at providing incentives (i) for financial institutions to cater to the financing needs of poor households that are currently outside the reach of financial services, and (ii) for poor households who are able to start or grow small income-generating activities; and A VUP Challenge Fund: aimed at encouraging or supporting communities or groups of beneficiaries to undertake relatively larger fixed asset purchases via a matched-savings or grant facility ([Abigail, 2011](#)).

Maximum loan amounts vary among the following; RwF60,000 for an individual person; RwF70,000 per person for a group of 2 – 5 persons; RwF80,000 per person for a group of 6 – 10 persons; and RwF100,000 per person for a group of 11 persons and above. In all cases the amount can be adjusted downwards depending on project feasibility and liquidity of the Ubudehe Credit Fund versus number of applicants ([VUP, 2011](#)). Repayment schedule and period of the loan is established. Borrowers can select to either repay monthly, quarterly, six-monthly or annually. The repayment period should not exceed 12 months from the date the loan is transferred to the borrower's bank account. Interest rate 2% per annum. The interest amount is calculated by applying the nominal rate to the total amount borrowed. The Guarantee: None, in line with the pro-poor focus of VUP which recognizes poor households have few assets to provide as collateral. Mutual trust and socio-cultural dynamics are crucial for the effective functioning of UCS. At the discretion of the loan committee simple guarantees may be offered in cases where it is affordable.

According to [Abigail \(2011\)](#), the main objectives of the FS support is to provide support to poor households able to start or grow small income-generating activities by providing them access to loans. The financial services

component has three sub-components: Microcredit, Challenge Fund (matching grants for purchase and/or construction of assets requiring relatively large capital inputs) and Financial Literacy Training. Only the microcredit sub-component (the Ubudehe Credit Scheme) was fully operational during the time of this report 2011.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The study used a descriptive survey and cross-sectional design. The descriptive survey design was used to collect data from a large sample of VUP beneficiaries and the cross-sectional survey design was used since the interest of the researcher was to obtain all the data from all the sampled VUP beneficiaries once and at one point in time. The study followed a mixed method, where both quantitative and qualitative data was collected to describe how Vision 2020 Umurenge Program was implemented in Rwanda. Quantitative data collected from existing records and from respondents was supplemented by the qualitative views of informants about the VUP.

3.2. Target Population

The researcher targeted the VUP beneficiaries to provide data for this study. In total, the target population comprised 262,945 beneficiaries of VUP. All those were considered to have thorough knowledge about VUP.

3.3. Sample Size

The sample size for this study consisted of 384 respondents, including VUP beneficiaries. The Krejcie and Morgan table was used to determine the minimum sample size.

3.4. Research Instruments

Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through questionnaires and interviews, while secondary data was collected from the bulletins and reports of Government and Nongovernmental reports, NISR, MINALOC and MINECOFIN.

4. Findings

The findings showed that VUP has been generally well implemented according to result from its components; many people have accessed public works services, including paid employment with 81.7%, while domestic consumption support and income generating activities support took the rest; over 73% of the respondents have accessed direct support services in form of direct cash transfers from VUP, majority indicate that there is fairness in distribution of VUP funds and that this direct cash support goes to the most deserving people. Regarding financial support, the findings showed that this component of VUP has been effectively implemented and is working well with more than 90% of beneficiaries in this category, showing that they have ever accessed a VUP loan. More than 95% of the beneficiaries opened up savings accounts and are currently using them to save money.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1. Implementation of Vision 2020 Umurenge program

Vision 2020 Umurenge program with its three components including public works, direct support and financial support and how they have performed, is discussed.

5.1.1. Implementation of Public Works

The findings on the public works component revealed that public works services usually accessed include paid employment, domestic consumption support and income generating activities support. In the same line, it was revealed that the most public work service to be accessed is paid employment, meaning that many people were employed by the government to do some public works such as road construction, construction of schools, markets, bridges and so on. Through paid employment, more nationals are able to access income in a productive way. This can accelerate the speed of poverty reduction and income growth. According to [EDPRS \(2008\)](#) the main objective of the public work aspect is to provide paid employment to the poor members who would otherwise have no access to such jobs either in the market or through employing themselves since they have no access to land but they can afford to work. So the findings of this study agree with the main objective of the public works element of Vision 2020 Umurenge program.

Concerning the different projects under public works where people get paid, it was revealed that roads construction takes a lion's share among the public works projects, where most of them are employed as casual workers. However, there are other projects where people are employed, including schools/ classrooms construction, bridges construction, construction of ditches and terraces for environmental protection purposes and so on. But it was keenly observed that almost less than 10% of the people are employed as technicians and very few are employed in other strategic positions such supervisors, project leaders, store managers and so on. The implication is that most people are employed at lower levels and so their income earned may be lower as would be the case if they could work at some higher levels.

The findings on public works also revealed that there is fairness in selecting beneficiaries since it is done openly in a transparent manner, following the set criteria. Fairness in salary payment was also reported to be timely and in line with local market wage rates. No gender inequalities were found, something which is consistent with the target set (Government of Rwanda, 2011). The fact that all beneficiaries of public works were found eligible, is also consistent and in agreement with (Renate, 2013), in which it was revealed that all the beneficiaries of public works were eligible and that the weak people who could not do heavy works are sent to the Direct Support category. From the findings of Berglund (2012) what seems to be observed as unfairness is when some people are excluded from the public works activities just because they are weak and yet the activities require some good strength. The supervisors, however, do not see this as unfairness, similar to the researcher, since it is not useful to give someone work which he or she cannot afford to do. There seems to be a relatively bigger number of people who are not satisfied with the salary payment (though still majority are satisfied). Berglund (2012) indicates that sometimes there are delayed payments which make people unsatisfied with the program. The other element mentioned is the high costs of opening up bank accounts. It is indicated that the costs of opening up bank accounts requires a person to work for a full week, which they do not want as they see it as working for free in that week. Most beneficiaries interacted with revealed fairness in selection of beneficiaries, since it is done openly in a transparent manner following already set criteria. However, there are some few people who indicated some elements of unfairness, indicating that sometimes some people selected are dropped unfairly. But it was also noted from the reports of supervisors that sometimes the number of eligible households exceeds available jobs in a sector and this leads to the removing of some people. Berglund's report (2012) also indicated that some people after being selected turndown the offer fearing that the work is too heavy, which makes the leaders recruit other people who are ready to work, to fill up the gap. It is in this gap re-filling that some people not eligible may be recruited. However, their number is usually negligible.

5.1.2. Implementation of Direct Support

As indicated in VUP (2011) the direct support aspect targets extremely poor households in Rwanda with no labour capacity and they include adults who are old, disabled, chronically sick or still in school, or have no adults at all (child-headed households). In extending direct support to the most deserving beneficiaries, various forms of assistance are given, including cash, training in soft skills and handcraft skills. The findings revealed that most respondents had accessed money transfer from Vision 2020 Umurenge Program. The majority believe that there is fairness in the distribution of funds from VUP and that this direct cash support goes to the most deserving people. The findings implied that Direct Cash dominates other direct support services, indicating that most beneficiaries in this category are given support in the form of cash deposited into their bank accounts. Other forms of direct support include livestock provision, house construction and renovation. It is true that the direct support service has helped many people to improve their lives. Various reports agree with the findings of this study. For example, Berglund (2012) interviewed one of the beneficiaries Kagoro, who indicated that he was able to get iron sheets to renovate his house. He is quoted saying, "I cannot ask for anything more, really. VUP helped me to repair my house, I have now gotten a cow and my children are in school. They have been doing a lot for me, I had nothing before". Such and many others are a clear testimony that the VUP has enhanced people's welfare.

As evidence of progress and a confirmation, by 2010, an average per household of over RWF165, 671 had been transferred to the household and many people had benefited from it and more than 9600 households had benefited from the VUP direct support (VUP, 2011). From the findings of this study and many other reports on VUP, there is enough evidence that the support reaches the people. There is only a need for education on how to use the funds and other forms of support in a more productive way. Though the majority use it for domestic consumption, the government target was mainly to promote people's capacity so that they can produce for themselves and reduce dependency on government. Many people have increased their capacity to produce. There are many testimonies on this. For example, Abigail, a direct support beneficiary reports that from the money received via direct support, she was able to buy food at home and now they can eat every day and she bought shoes and clothes for herself and children; the children are attending school; bought health insurance; bought iron sheets to replace the roof of her house and purchased a hoe to cultivate her vegetable garden and got a goat; she also has some savings in the bank (VUP, 2011).

On the other hand very few people had ever participated in skills acquisition projects, social activities and handcraft making projects organized by VUP. According to MINALOC (2009) the first step in implementing the Direct support aspect of Vision 2020 was to sensitize clients and educate them on the goals of VUP. The training was intended to educate the recipients on the available options and to create awareness about their own potential and to enhance their ability in enhancing initiatives and build in them self-confidence. As indicated in the findings of this study, few people have attended such skills training sessions, something that may hinder achievement of the overall target of the program. However, according to the findings from Berglund (2012) VUP leaders usually advise people they give direct support cash to always use their money wisely. Though this is done in an informal or less organized way, it has helped some beneficiaries to use their money productively. One beneficiary interviewed by Berglund (2012) called Biago, indicated that from the money he gets from VUP, he was able to buy some iron sheets to renovate his house, buy a goat and a hoe, all of which are helping him in increasing household productivity. But the need to increase formal training sessions is still high, as indicated in the report of the same man who indicated that the goat bought from VUP money died, a sign of lack of skills on how to look after livestock.

5.1.3. Implementation of Financial Services Support

The financial support services mainly include loans advanced to individuals who can do some profitable businesses, training on how to save and conduct businesses (Abigail, 2011). The findings of this study revealed that more than 90% of beneficiaries in this category have ever accessed a loan through Vision 2020 Umurenge program credit scheme. It was further revealed that more than 95% of the beneficiaries opened up savings accounts and are currently using them to save money. The response rate with regard to financial services support of VUP is amazingly high, almost on all the targets. So the financial support element of VUP has been effectively implemented and is working well far above the other two aspects. It is an indication that the dependence on government through the other two components is progressively reducing as people's capacity to develop themselves increases. As more people access loans and learn how to save, they are able to raise capital and through entrepreneurship trainings, they get oriented in market oriented production. As indicated in Renate (2013) and Abigail (2011) the financial support component takes training of credit beneficiaries, a very vital activity, not only to teach them how to do business, but also on how to save and manage repayment. Most of the loans given are short term, covering periods of one year, six months and one month. The findings through interactions with the beneficiaries indicated that most of them are managing their loans well and most of them indicated that they had already paid back and got other loans. This implied that there is a very important capacity that has started to develop and that is management of capital, savings or business funds, which is highly needed if the community is to break the problem of extreme poverty (Abigail, 2011). It was found out that some beneficiaries were even able to repay their loans before the end of one year, the maximum period they are required to reimburse the loans.

Considering the amount of loan usually offered to beneficiaries, it was revealed that different individuals are given different amounts of money according to their financial capacity to handle such monies and/or depending on the type of project or business being run. As indicated in the findings, more than 70% usually take loans between 80,000 and 100,000frw.

6. Conclusions

All the three components of Vision 2020 Umurenge program are implemented relatively well and there is a steady progress in poverty reduction among the beneficiaries in particular and in Rwanda in general.

Recommendation

The researcher wish to make the following recommendations;

- More and focused training and sensitizations for beneficiaries on Vision 2020 Umurenge Program support utilization are needed. The local government leaders and the management of the program should explore the training possibilities.
- The sector and district staff should ensure adequate monitoring and evaluation of the program activities to facilitate corrective actions and improvement.
- Officers on sector level should sensitize the beneficiaries more about the program and how to take care of all support from the program like the cows and to tell them that those cows are for their own benefit, not for the government.

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