

From participation to progress: a scalable model for inclusive development in Rwanda

ADVANCING CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN RWANDA

2021-2024 | US\$2.73 million grant

Rwanda has made remarkable progress in governance and economic development, underpinned by a strong commitment to decentralisation. To build on these gains, there is growing emphasis on deepening citizen engagement and ensuring rural communities are more directly involved in shaping their development priorities. Strengthening participatory planning and inclusive decision making presents an opportunity to enhance service delivery and reduce poverty in underserved areas.

In response, the Government launched the [Advancing Citizen Engagement](#) (ACE) project to strengthen community participation, enhance rural livelihoods, and support more inclusive governance.

Implemented by Spark Microgrants and financed by the [Japan Social Development Fund](#) (JSDF) through the World Bank, with additional contributions from Charity Projects, the ACE project benefitted approximately 135,778 people across 249 villages in four districts. It focused on building the capacity of both community members and local government officials to facilitate participatory planning and improved access to livelihood opportunities.

The project was designed to support Rwanda's ongoing efforts to strengthen citizen participation as outlined in national frameworks the National Strategy for Transformation (NST I and II), Vision 2050 and the National Strategy for Sustainable Graduation.

ACE also supported the World Bank-financed *Socio-economic Inclusion of Refugees and Host Communities Project (Jya Mbere)* by fostering cross learning opportunities for refugees and host communities. The *Jya Mbere* project also incorporated lessons for participatory planning and livelihood from the JSDF supported grant.

ACE achieved significant results both in community empowerment and improving livelihoods. On the economic front, household savings increased from RWF 2,000 to RWF 15,000 at project closure. Supported households also owned more high value assets by endline (score of 0.3) compared to baseline (-0.3) with notable improvements amongst poorer households.

It terms of governance outcomes, the project significantly improved citizen participation and local government responsiveness. The proportion of beneficiaries who felt their participation influenced community decision rose from 61% to 91%. Similarly, the share of local government officials engaging citizens in inclusive and participatory ways increased from 30% to 80%. By the end of the project, 135,778 people were represented in village meetings, including 78% from poor and marginalized groups, ensuring that local priorities were better reflected in decision-making. This collaboration between communities and government, contributed to improved service delivery and more effective development planning at the local level.

An additional achievement of ACE was the development of the National Framework for Participatory Village Planning (NFPVP), which captures lessons from village and district levels to inform national discussions on effective citizen engagement. Adopted by the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) in June 2025, the framework is now being rolled out to guide districts in improving the quality of citizen engagement. It provides tools and guidelines to enhance transparency participatory decision making at the local level.

The ACE project has successfully demonstrated a proof of concept that strengthening citizen participation not only improves the relationship between communities and local governments but also enhances livelihoods among rural poor. This model offers a scalable approach for promoting inclusive development across Rwanda.

