

Kigali shines as an example of a harmonious city

Background

Situated in the centre of Rwanda, Kigali has been the centre of economic, political cultural and transport hub of the country since independence in 1962. Because of this, the city has continued to attract many from the rural areas who chase their dreams of prosperity in Kigali.

This has led to severe stretching of the available facilities and the city authorities have been forced to look for ways of alleviating the inevitable shortages.

Beginning on [April 6, 1994](#), Kigali was the scene of the [Rwandan Genocide](#) — the slaughter of approximately one [million Tutsi](#) and moderate [Hutu](#) by [Hutu militias](#) known as [interahamwe](#), and some members of the Rwandan army — and of fierce fighting between the army and the then rebels, Rwanda Patriotic Front.

With a new government in place, Kigali faced the problem of reconstruction while at the same time striving to provide services to its citizens. Initially, the top priority of the new government was to secure the city and resettle those who were uprooted during the genocide while settling disputes arising from illegal occupation of uses and land.

Because of that focus most of the services offered by the city were neglected giving rise to rising mounds of garbage, stretched water and sanitation facilities as well as dilapidated road network and a destroyed urban transport system.

As a country coming out of a war situation, there was the issue of many widows as well as a huge number of demobilized former soldiers. Measures had to be taken to ensure that such people were incorporated into the society and not be left to a life of destitution

Description of the initiative

Because of this problem, the city authorities with the support of the national government embarked from 1998 on a process of restoring the city's lost glory.

The areas targeted for improvement included:

- **Garbage collection**

To deal with the runaway garbage problem, the city council decided to form associations whose members were tasked with the responsibility of collecting and looking for environmentally sound ways of disposing of the same. Groups of widows came in handy in this project. This was later expanded to include vulnerable women especially those living with HIV/Aids.

The women swept the streets, collected the garbage which was taken to a central place. This was sorted out and the biodegradable ones are used to make cooking bricks. The rest is taken to a garbage dump on the outskirts of the city.

- **Ban on plastics**

Probably the greatest move by the city of Kigali was to ban the use of plastic bags. This reduced by a great percentage the total amount of garbage and helped to improve the general cleanliness of the city. Whereas a few years back the city was choking under the weight of discarded plastic, this is no longer the case and a drive around the city of Kigali shows that the nuisance has been greatly reduced.

- **Beautification of streets and pavements**

One area that won the enthusiastic support of the local population was the decision to have residents planting trees outside both residential and commercial plots. It is common practice in Kigali to find a well cared for tree outside buildings. In tandem with this was the decision to have building owners building pavements between the building and the main road. Those not keen on the pavements are given the option of planting trees and having a mini garden next to their houses.

- **Public transport**

Like most of the cities in the developing worlds, Kigali was faced with the problem of public transport. The rickety taxis operating there contravened all known safety requirements thus leading to accidents which caused injuries and in some cases even death. The idea was to streamline the operations of these public transport vehicles so that commuters would not only reach their destinations safely, but also taking into consideration the interests of other road users. Towards this end, cooperative societies were formed to be in charge of public transport. Every small section and zone formed their own association which took charge of the public transport while the motor cycle taxi operators (known locally as motos) were also organized into groups and zoned for easier operation. It is here that a lot of demobilized soldiers were absorbed.

- **Sewage system**

This has always been the biggest headache for the city fathers as they look for ways of effective and environmentally friendly ways of disposing of human waste. Traditionally, Kigali has relied

on septic tanks which then empty the discharge into a central place. However, under the new changes initiated, there is an active encouragement of building owners to treat their sewage waste while the city's new Master Plan envisions the building of a treatment plant, possibly by the end of the year.

- **Slums improvement**

The long term objective of the city council is to reduce by a great margin the existence of slums within its boundaries. This is being done in a two fold manner- building improved houses for the slum dwellers or improving the living conditions of those whose slums are not removed.

The city authorities, believing in eviction with a human face, have successfully built the Batsinda site where residents of the former Kiyovu slums are being settled. The new houses are two bed roomed and have electricity, ICT centres as well as rain water harvesting tanks' Meanwhile in the other slums like Nyamirambo, public works are underway to improve road network and garbage collection initiatives.

- **Ban on smoking in public places**

Although in a small measure, the ban on smoking in public smoking has contributed to the general cleanliness of the city. Most buildings and even bars and restaurants display prominent signs warning against engaging in the practice.

- **Ban on fuel guzzlers by government official**

Also making a small contribution to the city's environment was the decision by the Central Government to discourage the use of fuel guzzling vehicles by ministers and other government officials. Seen as a first in Africa, this order transferred vehicle ownership from the government to the individual ministers. Under this, the ministers get a uniform fuel allowance for their personal vehicles which they use for official duties. For out of town duties, the ministers have the choice of getting and signing for a vehicle from a common pool.

Main Partners

The World Bank

The World Bank has been a major supporter of the initiatives to improve the general condition of Kigali city. The Bank has been actively involved in road construction, building of schools, transport termini for public buses, building offices for district and sectors. The Bank is also supporting the Master Plan for sewage systems which the city council is currently developing

The African Development Bank

AfDB has also been involved in the development of the sewage system as well as some aspects of the Master Plan.

DED (German Development Service)

DED has been actively involved by providing technical assistance. Every year, the agency sends staffs to Kigali who are involved in capacity building for their local counterparts.

Central Government

The Central Government offers assistance to the Kigali City by giving fund for public and traffic lights through two funds, the Common development Fund and the Road Maintenance Fund.

At the Kiyovu slum upgrading project mentioned earlier, the government owned national Social Security Fund provided the money which was used to build the new houses at Batsinda. The NSSF heavily subsidized the houses so that they could be affordable to the poor of Kiyovu who were the intended beneficiaries.

UN Agencies

Some of the agencies the city council is engaging include:

UNIDO and UNDP in the area of the environment while UN-HABITAT in conjunction with the Rwanda Environmental Management Authority (REMA) have just concluded a study on the intended relocation of the residents of Chahafu slum area.

European Union

The European Union is supporting the improvement of a drainage project as well as the construction of bitumen roads in some of the slum areas of Kigali.

CTB (Belgian Development Agency)

Private sector: mainly the ones that execute most of the projects being undertaken by the city authorities.

NGOs: World Vision has been the most active

IMPACT

The biggest impact of the initiative has been that the city of Kigali has achieved a measure of cleanliness that is rare in the region. From the streets to the residential areas, one cannot fail to notice the continuous efforts by those in charge to ensure that the city is kept at certain standards of cleanliness.

The formation of associations of women to clean the city has also impacted on their general wellbeing. A group that would have otherwise been destitute or forced to illegal ways of livelihood are now proud members of the society and every morning one finds them sweeping the streets and getting rid of garbage.

As said earlier, some of this garbage is used to make cooking bricks while still some of it is used in making compost manure. The cooking bricks ensure that trees are not cut with reckless abandon as people look for sources of fuel for cooking. But this is still not enough and the city officials are optimistic that when a new electricity project from Lake Kivu will be fully operational, the increase in Megawatts in the national grid will help them offer more power to the city residents. On the other hand the manufacture of compost manure reduces the dependence on fertilizers which in most cases is imported and thus being out of reach of the small scale farmers.

The zero tolerance attitude towards plastics has reduced litter in the streets and residential areas. The spin off is that cottage industries have sprung up where people make shopping bags of biodegradable materials thus creating employment. However, a total eradication of plastics has not been achieved yet as there are mineral water bottles and packaging of goods from abroad that still come in plastic containers. But the city authorities are in talks with a private investor in

partnership with REMA to build a plastic recycling plant which will then make good use of the little plastic still found in Kigali and other parts of the country.

Since the members of the association are paid by the citizens, this has reduced the city authority's wage bill considerably. According to the city officials the money saved from the wage bill is then channeled to other areas.

In the transport sector individual transporters have been empowered to take charge of their businesses. They are the ones who assign vehicles the positions of picking and dropping passengers. They also have a hotline printed on all public transport vehicles through which those with complaints can channel their grievances. Those breaking the rules are penalized while the existence of an internal security organ has reduced substantially the work of traffic police in enforcing the law against those flouting traffic rules.

This area has absorbed a big number of demobilized soldiers which has the benefit of keeping them occupied. Otherwise they can be tempted to engage in criminal activity owing to their background in the military.

Sustainability

Because of the active participation of the citizens, the initiatives to improve the city of Kigali has received overwhelming support. Quoting HE President Paul Kagame, the residents proudly say "Poverty is no excuse to live in a dirty environment." Because of this, the residents usually come out in large numbers to clean their city especially on the designated national cleaning days.

The message of keeping a clean environment is also taught in schools so that the younger generation grows up with this instilled in their minds. There has also been an aggressive

campaign to have the private sector involved in this initiative so as to give it a measure of sustainability. The ban on public smoking has also been embraced by many businesses premises and considering the period that it has covered, it is safe to say that the initiative has been sustainable.

Transferability and upscaling

This initiative has been successfully transferred to all the major urban centres of Rwanda. Although Kigali was the pioneer, the other towns also readily adopted the measures and the entire country seems to have fallen in step of having a clean environment.

There have also been delegations from other regional countries who are keen to transfer the initiative to their own towns and cities. Some of these include Bujumbura in Burundi, Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Thika and Nairobi in Kenya as well as others from Uganda and DR Congo.

The city of Kigali has an estimated population of one million so I think we are safe to say the whole population benefited. Most of these initiatives were replicated countrywide and in some cases right up to the rural areas.

However, for our purposes I think it would be okay to mention the major towns in Rwanda which are Butare, Byumba, Cyangugu, Gisenyi, Gitarama, Kibeho, Kibungo, Kibuye, Nyanza, Ruhengeri and Rwamagana.

Innovation

Innovation: the city of Kigali pioneered in Rwanda the concept of making the city cleaner and the same, as noted above, has been successfully replicated in other towns.

Recognition

Although there has not been official recognition other organization, the city authorities cite the numerous visits they have received from outside the country as recognition enough. Towards getting the recognition it rightfully deserves, the city officials now want to embark on an aggressive promotion of their city so as to get recognized.