

# Issue BRIEF

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) sponsored the Rwanda Threshold Program to help the Government of Rwanda improve its performance on the MCC Political Rights, Civil Liberties, and Voice and Accountability eligibility indicators. Mathematica Policy Research evaluated the effectiveness of four major components of this program using an integrated, multiyear data collection effort. Overall, there were a mixed set of results across the program components that provide important insights that can help inform the design of governance initiatives in other contexts.

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## Lessons on Improving Governance in a Complex Policy Environment in Rwanda

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) was established in 2004 by the U.S. Congress to be an independent foreign aid agency that funds initiatives that promote economic growth and poverty reduction around the world. To qualify for the MCC's large-scale development programs, countries must meet eligibility criteria that address good governance, economic freedom, and investments in their citizens. MCC Threshold Programs help countries that come close to meeting the requirements make necessary improvements. Rwanda received funding from the MCC in 2009 for a Threshold Program to help strengthen citizens' political rights, liberties, and participation in the country's governance.

Rwanda has experienced unprecedented economic growth and stability after the devastation of a civil war and the following genocide that took place in 1994. In 2009, although the country was performing well on many MCC eligibility

criteria, it struggled in several areas related to governance, making it ineligible for a large-scale grant (Table 1). According to the independent organizations whose ratings MCC uses to assess governance, Rwanda faces constraints on the ability



Rwandan countryside.

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**Rwanda MCC Eligibility Scores Prior to Threshold Program Start (2009)**

Ruling Justly Indicator	Rwanda's Percentile
Political rights	26%
Civil liberties	32%
Control of corruption	97%
Government effectiveness	88%
Rule of law	63%
Voice and accountability	24%

Note: MCC calculated each of these indicator scores using a set of formulas weighting data from various sources, including the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, Freedom House, and the World Health Organization.

**Table 1**



An RNP box for collecting citizen feedback, Kigali, Rwanda.

of citizens and civil society groups to participate in politics and policymaking, the objectivity and professionalism of the media, and the capacity of the police and judiciary. In response, the Threshold Program focused on helping the Government of Rwanda improve its performance on the MCC's indicators for political rights, civil liberties, and voice and accountability.

Mathematica Policy Research evaluated the impacts of the Rwanda Threshold Program to help determine which types of governance interventions can succeed in a challenging policy context. Through an integrated, large-scale, mixed-method, and multiyear data collection effort, Mathematica found a mixed set of results about the effectiveness of the Threshold Program.

**OVERVIEW OF THE RWANDA THRESHOLD PROGRAM**

The Rwanda Threshold Program included four components designed to help the country become eligible for a large-scale MCC compact: (1) strengthening the accountability of the Rwandan National Police (RNP), (2) strengthening the rule of law for policy reform, (3) strengthening the media, and (4) strengthening civic participation. Implementation took place over approximately two years, from 2009 to 2011.

The evaluation was designed to study the impact of selected activities in each component. For example, in the component targeted toward strengthening the RNP, the evaluation studied an activity that involved setting up a submission box system to collect citizen feedback. Other activities (such as training police inspectors) also took place as part of this component, but were not included in the evaluation.

**STRENGTHENING RWANDAN NATIONAL POLICE (RNP) ACCOUNTABILITY**

Prior to this initiative, the RNP did not have readily accessible, anonymous incident reporting procedures for citizens wishing to communicate with the police. In response, the Threshold Program implemented the Every Voice Counts campaign, which installed about 250 submission boxes throughout the country that allowed citizens to offer anonymous feedback about police conduct.

Mathematica conducted two national surveys to determine citizen awareness of the campaign, use of the boxes, and perceptions of the RNP. The study compared people in sectors that contained submission boxes to those in sectors without submission boxes and controlled for differences between the groups.

Those living in sectors that had an RNP submission box were more likely to know about the campaign and more likely to indicate the submission boxes would be their preferred method of communicating with the police.

After the training of judges was completed, quality scores of written judicial decisions remained high, but there appeared to be no additional improvement associated with the training program.

The new radio stations appear to have improved citizens' satisfaction with radio news broadcasts and increased their familiarity with local government officials.

Nationwide, 20 percent of the survey respondents were aware of the submission box initiative, and those living in sectors that had a submission box were more likely to know about the campaign and more likely to indicate the submission boxes would be their preferred method of communicating with the police. Among those who knew about the submission boxes, there was a substantial increase from 2011 to 2012 in the percentage of respondents who believed the RNP reads the Every Voice Counts submissions. However, living near a submission box did not appear to affect people's perceptions of the RNP's trustworthiness or effectiveness.

In addition, the study's qualitative interviews with RNP officers also suggest that there are important barriers to maintaining the citizen feedback system that may limit its sustainability. Officials indicated that collecting and centrally processing the claims was expensive and questioned whether the effort will be funded in the future in the absence of outside support.

### STRENGTHENING THE RULE OF LAW FOR POLICY REFORM

In the aftermath of the civil war, Rwanda had no formal justice system: rebuilding these institutions presented an enormous challenge. As part of the Threshold Program, MCC sought to provide training and professional support to Rwanda's judicial personnel and to improve transparency in judicial processes and rulings. As one part of this

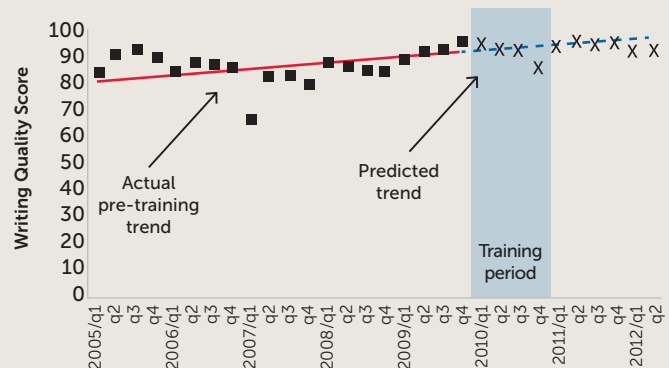
effort, the program delivered training to judges focused on improving judicial professionalism by ensuring decisions were written in a manner that met international standards of clarity and transparency. The Threshold Program used a train-the-trainers approach to provide instruction on improving the quality of the written judicial decisions to all of Rwanda's approximately 250 Supreme Court and High Court judges.

Mathematica completed a descriptive study that used a panel of reviewers to score the quality of a set of judicial decisions written before and after the trainings took place. Based on these reviews, the researchers found that the quality of judicial written decisions was very high before the training program began. After the training was completed, quality scores remained high but there appeared to be no additional improvement associated with the training program (Figure 1).

### MEDIA STRENGTHENING

When the Threshold Program began in 2009, there were a variety of limitations on the independence of private media outlets in Rwanda; at that time, the country ranked 157th out of 175 countries in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. In response, the Threshold Program aimed to improve journalistic objectivity and support the development of additional independent media providers. This included creating two new community radio stations to support the

### Judicial Writing Scores Remain High; Trainings Yield No Additional Improvement (2005–2012)



Note: The squares in the figure represent the average percentage scores of decisions in each quarter before the training period, and the crosses represent the average percentage scores in each quarter during the training year (2010) and the subsequent post-program period (first quarter of 2011 to the end of the second quarter of 2012).

Figure 1

dissemination of reliable, objective local news from nongovernmental sources.

Mathematica conducted surveys at two points—before the stations began broadcasting and eight months after programming began—to examine patterns of listenership and impacts on citizens’ satisfaction with radio news outlets and familiarity with local government affairs. The evaluation compared audiences with strong broadcast signals and those with weak broadcast signals (Figure 2).

Nationwide, nearly a quarter of radio users listen to a Rwanda Threshold Program-supported radio station on a weekly basis, and more than three-quarters of regular listeners use the stations for local news. Comparing citizens receiving strong signals from the stations to those with weaker signals, the new radio stations appear to have improved citizens’ satisfaction

with radio news broadcasts and increased their familiarity with local government officials.

## STRENGTHENING CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Many civil society organizations (CSOs) are active in Rwanda, but there are lingering public questions about the capacity of civil society to operate without government influence and organize effective forms of policy advocacy. The Threshold Program tried to address these problems by enhancing the involvement of local and national CSOs in government policymaking, supporting new efforts by government leaders to invite more active civic participation, and promoting well-informed citizen participation in public affairs. This involved training local government officials to increase their responsiveness to citizens and supporting CSOs’ efforts to advocate for local issues.



Broadcast tower for one of the program’s community radio stations.

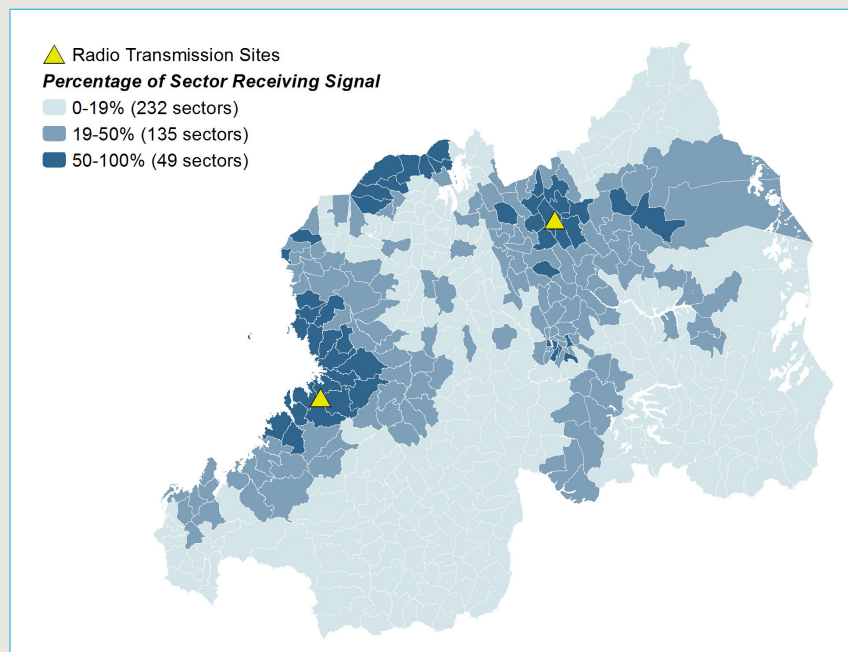


Headquarters of the *Ishingiro* radio station.



Radio hosts deliver the local news.

### Broadcast Coverage of the MCC-Supported Community Radio Stations, by Sector



Note: Shading represents the combined signal coverage from both RTP stations. Lakes and rivers are not shaded, as those areas were excluded from the signal coverage calculations.

**Figure 2**

Results suggest that the Strengthening Civic Participation component did not improve citizen perceptions about civic participation outcomes in Rwanda, but it did encourage citizens to voice some concerns about government policies more openly.

The evaluation of these activities involved randomly assigning districts to either the first or second phase of the project so that similar districts could be compared to estimate the program’s impacts. This random-assignment evaluation design provides rigorous evidence about the causal relationship between the component’s activities and key civic participation outcomes. Two national surveys were conducted to measure the level of civic participation in six areas: (1) awareness of local government meetings, (2) familiarity with local officials, (3) satisfaction with government services, (4) perceived citizen influence on government affairs, (5) access to government information, and (6) knowledge about local government performance (Table 2).

Results suggest that the Strengthening Civic Participation component did not improve citizen perceptions about civic participation outcomes in Rwanda, but it did encourage citizens to voice

some concerns about government policies more openly. Interestingly, the Threshold Program increased the number of citizens voicing dissatisfaction with local services. In 2012, the percentage of citizens with above-average satisfaction levels in the control districts was almost unchanged compared to the year before (the difference was approximately -1 percentage points); however, satisfaction levels dropped by approximately 6 percentage points in the treatment districts (Figure 3). There also was a small negative impact on citizens’ self-reported influence on government and knowledge about local government affairs.

Qualitative interviews with local government officials and civic leaders suggest that these negative impacts on the study’s survey outcomes occurred because the program encouraged citizens to voice criticism about local government affairs.

### Survey Items Used to Establish Civic Participation

#### Outcome Index

#### Components

Awareness of local government meetings	Awareness of public meeting—budget Awareness of public meeting—nonbudget Awareness of non-governmental organization (NGO) activity Awareness of Joint Action Development Forum (JADF)
Familiarity with local government officials	Name the district mayor Name at least one member of district council Name at least one member of sector council Name at least one member of cell council
Knowledge about local government affairs	Ever received district budget information Have enough information to assess government performance
Access to district government information	Access to budget information Access to government salary information
Citizen influence	Respondent can influence government policy Respondent can openly disagree with a government official without negative consequences
Satisfaction with local services	Satisfied overall with drinking water services Satisfied overall with waste collection services Satisfied overall with education at local schools Satisfied overall with local health facilities

Source: Citizen survey (Mathematica 2011 and 2012).

**Table 2**

## Citizens' Satisfaction with Local Services, 2011–2012

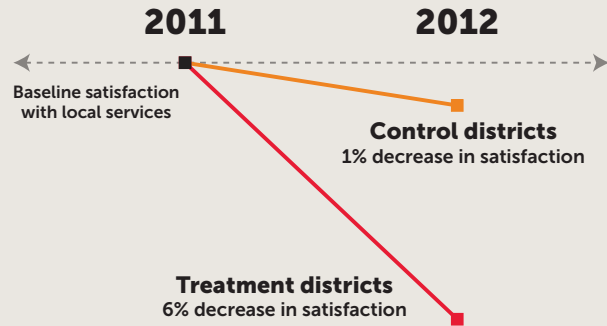


Figure 3



Interview for 2011 baseline survey.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Overall, the evaluation of the Rwanda Threshold Program identified some activities that succeeded in producing improvements in certain components, and others that did not. These results provide important insights that can help inform the design of governance initiatives in other contexts.

For example, the study's findings suggest that all governance interventions should be based on an accurate needs assessment. Information from timely and careful needs assessments should be used to ensure that the interventions target well-defined issues with clear links to desired indicators. Relatedly, local policy, political, and capacity constraints should be

considered carefully as part of the planning process. For example, in the Rwanda Threshold Program, both CSOs and the RNP had limited operational capacity that made it challenging to implement related activities within the timeframe and budget allowed.

Evaluations such as this one are particularly important in the democracy and governance sector, where rigorous studies are rare. Understanding the effects of these programs provides a stronger foundation of evidence to inform the design and implementation of governance interventions in the future.

For more information on this brief, contact Ira Nichols-Barrer at [inichols-barrer@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:inichols-barrer@mathematica-mpr.com).

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