



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

SHIFTING THE CABINET INTO HIGH GEAR: AGILE POLICYMAKING IN RWANDA, 2008 – 2012

SYNOPSIS

In 2008, the challenges of managing a growing economy and translating gains into higher standards of living put many issues on the agenda of Rwanda's cabinet. The top-level policymaking process had to keep pace. Weekly meetings of Cabinet ministers were loosely organized that too often wasted the valuable time of the government's top decision makers. Aware of the need to streamline operations at the center of government, President Paul Kagame created a Ministry in Charge of Cabinet Affairs, led by Charles Murigande, his longtime foreign affairs minister. Murigande quickly concluded that Cabinet-level confusion arose largely from a lack of clear guidelines for ministers on how to manage policy formulation and develop clear and complete policy proposals colleagues could understand easily and act upon quickly. He also suspected that not all the items on the agenda really required the attention of the whole cabinet. Murigande and his successor, former Minister of Local Government Protais Musoni, crafted a policy development manual for ministries, developed ways to resolve policy differences without involving the entire Cabinet, and introduced other changes that made Cabinet sessions shorter and more efficient. Although weaknesses remained in 2012, new Cabinet procedures improved the quality of policy proposals, promoted fast and responsible decision making, and gave Rwanda's top government officials more time to deal with the country's pressing problems.

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INTRODUCTION

Rwanda's economy grew rapidly during the first decade of the 21st century. The country had started to recover from the devastating genocide of 1994. By 2007, years of capable financial stewardship and a voracious appetite for reform had combined to place the country on solid

economic footing. The government had outlined policy goals in its long-term strategy, Vision 2020. It introduced wide-ranging public management reforms to enhance effectiveness. International companies such as coffee chain Starbucks and warehouse retailer Costco sought deeper ties,

attracted by the government's efforts to cut red tape. The economy had grown by more than 7% in many of the years since 2000, according to World Bank data, and in 2007 the World Bank proclaimed Rwanda a leading global reformer.¹ Progress was swift and palpable.

But much more was needed to achieve the goals of Vision 2020. Despite growth, average incomes remained low and the poverty rate was stubbornly high, particularly in rural areas. The strategy document called for the creation of a "knowledge economy" that prized growth in information and communication technology, but less than 1% of Rwandans had access to the Internet.² Another important problem was a lack of sustainable sources of energy to support growth in mining and manufacturing. Following energy supply disruptions between 2003 and 2005, the government relied heavily on rented generators to provide electricity.

The accelerating pace of change in Rwanda contrasted with the slow pace of top-level decision-making. Cabinet meetings, which sometimes took place twice a week, often dragged on for as long as 12 hours, while ministers tried to make sense of long policy papers. It was difficult to reach priorities, because policy papers gave little guidance about which details were really important and which were not. President Paul Kagame sometimes walked out to attend to other important business.

To foster economic development, the government had to be creative and responsive. Efficient and well-informed decision making by the Cabinet was especially important because the Rwandan constitution gave the Cabinet broad authority to set policies. But cumbersome, opaque and time-consuming decision-making procedures threatened to slow progress toward Vision 2020 goals. Success required improving the speed and quality of the Cabinet's performance.

THE CHALLENGE

The Rwandan constitution established the Cabinet as the country's highest decision-making body, although it did not specify how often the Cabinet should meet or the procedures it should follow. The prime minister convened Cabinet sessions when he thought it was appropriate to do so, in consultation with the president. The president or prime minister (in the absence of the president) chaired the meetings. All line ministers and ministers of state were required to attend.

As of mid-2008, there were 22 line ministers and six ministers of state, though the number fluctuated as the president created and eliminated portfolios. In Rwanda's semi-presidential system, the president appointed the prime minister, who in turn nominated members of the Cabinet for the president's approval.

The Cabinet was administered by a secretary-general and five supporting staff housed in the prime minister's office. This team managed policy development, but with a limited mandate. It collected policy documents, proposed an agenda for Cabinet meetings for the prime minister's approval, and disseminated meeting minutes. It also oversaw regular inter-ministerial coordination committee meetings designed to resolve differences and harmonize positions.

However, the standards and procedures for placing an issue on the Cabinet agenda were unclear. Consequently, the Cabinet office often passed along policy proposals that omitted important information such as costs and impacts. The team members lacked the authority to ensure that proposals and reviews contained the appropriate information or analysis, were clearly worded and understandable, and followed the format the office prescribed.

Lawrence Manzi, an adviser in the Ministry of Local Government in 2008, said, "From the perspective of working in a line ministry,

requirements were there but no one was making sure we did them. Sometimes you missed a section and no one checked to see.”

Jean D’Amour Gatera, a legal and governance policy analyst, explained, “Papers came in and went to Cabinet without analysis, without a quality check.”

The Cabinet team convened interministerial coordination committee meetings, but the meetings were not effective in resolving policy disagreements. Meetings needed an “enforcer,” a unit responsible to affirm that all interested parties were consulted, technical disagreements were indeed resolved, and proposals were ready for Cabinet discussion. However, the Cabinet team’s mandate did not empower it to play the role.

“Because there was little consultation of stakeholders during policy formulation, there were lengthy debates and disagreements in the Cabinet meetings and many policy papers were not adopted at their first presentation to the Cabinet,” said Charles Murigande, who played a key role in revitalizing the Cabinet. “This constituted a waste of precious Cabinet time.”

Lack of consensus carried negative implications for government effectiveness as well. “This resulted in Cabinet adopting policies that were not bought into by stakeholders. That increased the likelihood of implementation failure or the need to spend a lot of time to explain the policy so as to achieve buy-in from stakeholders,” Murigande said.

Communication before and after Cabinet sessions was another weakness. Policy documents were long and technical, with no summaries, and ministers received them without enough time to master their contents. Ministers or their aides regularly lugged hundreds of pages of reports with them to Cabinet meetings.

Finally, there was no effective system for communicating decisions to the media or providing meeting minutes to ministers in a timely fashion.

The shortcomings took a toll on cabinet performance. Cabinet often convened twice a week, and meetings often continued well into the night. Valens Uwineza, a policy researcher in the presidency, said, “Ministers were always busy preparing for Cabinet and did not have the time to go to the field or to work on other affairs properly.”

FRAMING A RESPONSE

In January 2008, Kagame issued a presidential order creating the Ministry in Charge of Cabinet Affairs—better known as the Cabinet Secretariat. Its mandate was to streamline procedures for policy formulation and improve the efficiency and quality of Cabinet decision making. Kagame placed the secretariat in the prime minister’s office, which was in charge of managing Cabinet meetings and overseeing Cabinet ministers. Two months later, Kagame appointed Murigande as the secretariat’s first minister.

A mathematician by training, Murigande had strong experience in government and politics. He had headed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation since 2002. Before that, he had been secretary-general of the Rwanda Patriotic Front political party for four years, and he had served as minister of Transport and Communications from 1995 to 1997. Born in Rwanda, he grew up in Burundi but returned to his native country in 1994 after the genocide.

Kagame decided to create the Cabinet Secretariat following discussions in 2007 with the Presidential Advisory Council, a group of Rwandan and international experts who provided strategic guidance to the president on domestic issues and promoted Rwanda’s image abroad. At the time, members of Kagame’s council included Tony Blair, former prime minister of the United Kingdom; Michael Porter, a professor at Harvard Business School; Rick Warren, an American evangelical pastor; Joe Ritchie, a prominent American businessman; Michael Fairbanks, a

management consultant; and key Cabinet members, including Murigande.

The secretariat was one component of a larger reform to bolster strategic capacity and efficiency at the center of government—the presidency and prime minister’s office. Kagame also established a Strategy and Policy Unit in the presidency in charge of policy initiation and design, and a Coordination Unit in the prime minister’s office in charge of monitoring implementation of the Cabinet’s list of goals for its term.

Kagame’s strategy drew inspiration from Tony Blair’s creation of two organizations, called the Strategy and Delivery units, to improve the British government’s policy planning and implementation. In addition to offering advice, Blair provided 10 experienced staff members to train Rwandan officials, including two assigned to the Cabinet Secretariat. Blair’s partnership with Rwanda was the first for his nonprofit organization, the Africa Governance Initiative (AGI), founded in 2008 to support reformers on the African continent.

To get the secretariat up and running, Murigande had to build a team of policy analysts, train the staff, and clarify the secretariat’s mandate.

Recruiting a team

Following his appointment in March 2008, Murigande set out to recruit two staffers for each of three departments that Kagame’s presidential order set up within the new secretariat: law and governance, economy, and social policy. “I wanted, where possible, people who had experience in policy formulation, analysis, monitoring and evaluation; people who had analytical thinking skills, good oral and written communication skills, and teamwork and networking skills,” he said.

For each department he recruited a junior researcher and a senior analyst. Researchers were

in charge of reviewing policy proposals to ensure they contained the proper information, reflected consultation with relevant stakeholders, and were broadly feasible (through a cursory analysis of similar policies in other countries). Analysts were heads of departments who supervised researchers and were ultimately responsible for the accuracy of their analyses. In practice, little separated their day-to-day functions. In hiring analysts, Murigande sought applicants with master’s degrees and at least five years’ work experience that included supervising or coaching. For researchers, he looked for three years’ experience and bachelor’s degrees.

Recruitment followed standard government procedures, with announcements via radio and newspaper, a written exam for all applicants, and interviews for those who made the cut. Officials from the Strategy and Policy Unit in the presidency, the Public Service Commission, the finance ministry and the Kigali Institute of Management reviewed applications along with Murigande.

Murigande said he was satisfied with the quality of applicants for the researcher posts, but did not find many applicants that met the qualifications for the analyst positions because of a dearth of candidates who held master’s degrees. For analysts, “We settled with who we were able to attract not because they were necessarily responding to our desires, but we thought that, with the help of Tony Blair’s team, we could train and coach them and grow them into the kind of analysts we wanted,” he said. “For the post of researcher, we got a high number of good applicants and we ended up selecting extremely brilliant young people with little experience in policy formulation, analysis, monitoring or evaluation, but we were convinced from the very beginning that they would become very good staff.”

The staffers were young, all between the ages of 24 and 32, and came from a variety of

backgrounds including the Rwanda Revenue Authority, the Rwanda Development Board—an interagency investment-promotion group led initially by Ritchie, the American businessman—and the private sector. They received civil service salaries, near the top of the pay scale. By September, all six positions were filled.

Learning their roles

Because the analysts and researchers had little experience in policy analysis and research overall, Murigande focused the first several months on capacity building. The staff read policy documents and studied the policymaking system. John Kalisa, the economic policy analyst, recalled, “[We were] constantly discussing and studying prior documents, becoming familiar with Rwandan government strategy papers, studying the prime minister’s role. We were reading and understanding, Googling, going to ministries to learn how government works.”

The analysts looked to other countries as models. Although the U.K. system featured prominently in their thinking, they were interested in learning from their continental peers as well, including Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa and Mauritius. Murigande visited Australia to study its Cabinet system, while Gatera, the legal and governance analyst, visited the U.K. and Ireland. The team looked to New Zealand, Singapore and the Netherlands as well.

“We realized that we needed other experiences, not only the U.K. experience, but experience from other Cabinet offices,” Gatera said. “We said we have to visit those offices to find out how they’re working and what we can learn from other parts of the world to supplement the experience we’re getting from the U.K. We were learning, and we were checking other sources for information.”

The two AGI advisers supported the analysts during this research phase in a variety of ways. In

addition to reviewing policy documents with the staff, the advisers created training workshops tailored to staff needs in order to build capacity at the secretariat. Training focused on time management, organizing team work, analytical skills, and preparing clear, concise communiqués.

Putting it in writing

Murigande decided early on that the secretariat team’s first big task would be to write a Cabinet manual for line ministries that detailed the roles and responsibilities of ministers and their staffs in policy formulation and Cabinet decision making. “I had made it my first objective when I was appointed to that position, because I had an opportunity to see how new ministers were at a loss as to how to conduct their business,” he said. “I saw the need to give them a reference manual that could help them understand their roles as ministers and quickly learn how to conduct their business.”

The manual would include guidelines that stipulated content requirements for policy papers; how and when to submit papers; and procedures for consulting with interested parties. By enforcing the guidelines, the secretariat would ensure that the Cabinet received only papers that contained sufficient analysis to permit informed decision making and reflected the outcome of conversations with all relevant ministries and stakeholders. In turn, this step would help reduce the number of times a document and decision came before the cabinet and limit the duration of Cabinet discussions, freeing ministers to use their time for other purposes.

“The idea was it’s not a function of the number of items on the agenda, but have the items been discussed previously and have people had the opportunity to argue about problems before?” said Manzi. “If we follow those procedures, then Cabinet [meetings] shouldn’t take very long.”

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

The cabinet manual would be one in a series of steps to create a more efficient policymaking system. It would map new procedures Murigande and his team decided to introduce to try to improve the quality of policy documents, expand stakeholder consultation, and reduce the length of cabinet meetings.

A roadmap for the Cabinet

At a two-day workshop in September 2008, the six analysts and two AGI advisers met with Murigande to discuss the goal and structure of a manual. “The idea was it would be the template for government to understand how the Cabinet would work, what their responsibilities were, what they could expect from the secretariat, but most importantly what a policy paper should look like and should include,” said Kate Hipwell, an AGI staffer who worked previously in the Cabinet Secretariat for the U.K.’s Home Affairs Committee.

The six analysts agreed on the overall structure and content of the manual based on their reviews of manuals from other countries—particularly the United Kingdom and Australia—and divided the tasks of writing among themselves. They submitted several drafts to Murigande and the AGI staffers, who in turn provided feedback.

The manual consisted of seven chapters that covered the Rwandan constitution and separation of powers; the role of the Cabinet and ministers; the mandate of the Cabinet Secretariat; the stages of policy development leading to Cabinet discussion, including a decision tree to help ministries determine what documents had to be included with policy proposals; guidelines for compiling different types of policy papers, including requirements to consult with interested parties; formats and content requirements; and implementation procedures, including monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

The initial version of the manual received an enthusiastic reception from line ministries in December. “Ministries were excited about the idea of having formal and clear guidelines regarding policy formulation,” said Nelly Mukazayire, an economic policy researcher. Ministries asked the secretariat to be more specific in the manual in describing the functions and procedures of the Cabinet, the roles and responsibilities of ministers and permanent secretaries and how to request travel clearances. The secretariat made the adjustments, and in March the Cabinet approved the final manual.

Although the manual’s guidelines took effect immediately, the secretariat did not begin to enforce them until ministries had time to become accustomed to the new procedures. During a six-month grace period, the secretariat trained ministers, permanent secretaries, and ministerial directors of planning. “Trainings took long—two days initially—but we later shortened it to one day,” said Gatera. “They were impressed. They wanted training to be longer, to be a week, so that they could discuss more details, especially relating to policy development.”

Mukazayire said the exchange with ministries during the editing process facilitated training later on. “The manual was not new to them at this point,” she said. “It was more to present the final product that they took part in developing.”

This was the first time such rules and procedures were written down, the first time ministries could be certain of what was required of them. “[We] needed it because in Rwanda things keep changing,” said Gatera. “...So with the manual, even if you’re a new member [of the Cabinet], you can know exactly what is required.”

Additionally, the secretariat held monthly policy forums with permanent secretaries and ministerial planning heads to continue the discussion about policy development, Cabinet procedures, and the implementation of adopted Cabinet decisions. When there was a change in

personnel atop a ministry, the secretariat organized training sessions to bring that individual up to speed.

Concrete policy formats

The new Cabinet manual specified formats for policy documents to help ministries achieve a consistent level of quality that would improve Cabinet discussions and speed decision-making. The Secretariat laid out a two-step process. First, a ministry would submit a so-called “green paper,” or consultation document, that contained multiple policy options and was intended to solicit feedback from various individuals and organizations that had an interest in the matter.

After discussion, the ministry would submit a “white paper,” which contained a specific policy proposal, for the designated Secretariat researcher to review. After the senior analyst and Murigande signed off, the document went to the Cabinet. This process helped ensure that the Cabinet received well-researched papers that reflected the views of those whose cooperation was essential for implementation.

In green papers, ministries had to articulate the problem they sought to address in the new policy, demonstrate that they conducted substantial research into the issues, and present multiple policy options, each with a financial and legal impact assessment. They then had to engage with interested parties inside and outside government through formal meetings, circulating proposals for comments, or other means.

Procedures for green papers called for ministries to consult with a core group of government agencies, including the Strategy and Policy Unit in the president’s office, the Coordination Unit and the Rwanda Economic and Social Development Council in the prime minister’s office, the Rwanda Development Board, and the ministries of finance, justice and local government. When appropriate, ministries also were to confer with other line ministries,

private sector groups, and think tanks such as the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research.

Government agencies were allowed one week to respond, and civil society and private sector groups had two weeks. If ministries substantially altered their proposals after consultations, they had to circulate revised green papers to all interested parties.

The template for white papers was equally specific. Each white paper had to be organized in 12 sections that included the background research that went into the green paper, the views of various organizations and constituencies affected by the proposal, the preferred policy option and its justification, an implementation plan, financial and legal impacts, and sources of funding. Ministries had to describe any impact the policy might have on the business environment or national unity, and prepare a communication strategy to publicize the new policy.

The secretariat head referred proposals or moved them to the Cabinet on the basis of analysts’ recommendations and his own review. The head signed off on proposals that were suitable for the Cabinet; indicated when a paper was deficient in some way and should be returned to the sponsoring ministry; or determined that a proposal had to go to one of four Inter-ministerial Coordination Committees for further review of its ramifications for other parts of the government.

“Once we started enforcing [the guidelines], we gave them three chances to get the documents right. Then, the minister would have to send the document back with a letter stated diplomatically and with a list of what to work on. We worked together,” said Kalisa. “... You have to be humble and diplomatic. The ‘sending back’ policy was not presented as a rejection but as advice to improve their papers.”

Mukazayire said analysts focused on the feasibility of implementation plans and the availability of human and financial resources to assess the practicality of proposals.

“Implementation plans and impacts of proposals were key things we looked at,” she said. “So when Cabinet makes its decision, it’s ‘Something which will be done,’ not later on we look and say ‘How can we get this done?’”

Coordination before Cabinet meetings

After analyzing white papers, the Cabinet Secretariat often referred policy proposals to meetings of the Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee (ICC). There were four ICCs—one each for economic, social, security and defense, and governance and legal affairs—established by a prime ministerial order of 2002. The committees were meant to be forums for high-level discussion of complex policy matters, excluding items that went directly to the Cabinet such as undisputed personnel appointments or the ratification of donor grants.

“These ICC meetings are the opportunity for dealing with disagreements that may have not been settled during policy consultation at the earlier formulation stage,” said Murigande. “They also allowed MINICAAF (the Ministry in Charge of Cabinet Affairs, or Cabinet Secretariat) to clearly identify disagreements that could not be ironed out at the level of ICC and required the arbitration of the Cabinet.”

The forums had four main purposes: to verify that all interested parties had been consulted, to work out remaining policy differences, to clarify outstanding issues for the Cabinet, and to present any issues raised by secretariat analysts, such as conflicts with established policies. The secretariat staff proposed an agenda for discussion and a list of attendees to the prime minister. The prime minister convened and chaired the forums, which were attended by ministers, ministers of state, and others identified by the secretariat. The meetings took place once a week, on average.

“We identify who should attend when we set the agenda,” said Manzi. “If it’s restructuring of

an entity, we look at who should come, like the supervising ministry and Ministry of Finance; the justice ministry, if it’s a legal issue. If it’s mining, you have to bring private sector people.”

Although ICCs had functioned prior to 2008, Kalisa explained that the lack of objective analysis undermined the discussions. Earlier, participants had viewed ICC meetings as a technical requirement and not as an opportunity to iron out disagreements and reach policy consensus. “[There was] no specific team to work on analysis then,” he said, “Before MINICAAF, people would bring papers just to pass the ICC because of a requirement.”

The main reform undertaken by the secretariat was to take an active role to frame ICC discussions so that the impacts and options were clear. Kalisa offered the example of a tax break, which would affect growth in a sector but would also alter revenue flows. “My job is to explain the issues and explain the options: ‘If you follow this path, we’ll hold on to revenue but not bring as much investment, or if we do this we’ll attract more investment but sacrifice revenue,’ or present a third option of lowering but not eliminating the tax. If there’s still no agreement, then you have to bring it to the political level, to Cabinet.”

Following debates, the ICCs could send papers along to the Cabinet, ask the sponsoring ministry to make minor corrections before submitting it to the Cabinet, or ask the sponsoring ministry to make major revisions and send it back to the ICC at a later date. The secretariat staff took notes at ICC forums and prepared reports to the prime minister, who in turn issued reports to the president.

Efficient Cabinet meetings

Strict policy guidelines, standardized policy formats and improved communication among ministries helped to ensure that proposals received by the Cabinet required less discussion, reduced

the duration of meetings, and freed ministers and other top officials to work on other pressing matters.

However, Murigande saw other administrative weaknesses that prolonged Cabinet meetings. Together with the secretariat's two note-takers, he aimed to improve the preparation and follow-up for Cabinet meetings and provide more support for ministers to participate in Cabinet discussions.

Previously preparations for Cabinet meetings were meager. Ministers sent hard copies of policy papers to the prime minister's office. The forerunner to the Cabinet Secretariat sent invitations to ministers three days ahead of the meeting with an agenda and copies of all proposals to be discussed. The agenda included the approval of the previous Cabinet meeting's notes, discussion of all proposals submitted by ministries, appointments of senior public servants, and a catch-all called "any other business."

The new Cabinet Secretariat made several improvements. First, ministries could send policy papers to the secretariat via email, eliminating the need to deliver paper copies. This made the proposals easier to share among secretariat staff and government agencies and easier to present at Cabinet meetings. The note takers deliberated with the policy analysts regarding whether documents were ready for discussion, based on their analyses and the conclusions of ICC discussions. The note takers then submitted a proposed agenda to the Cabinet affairs minister who in turn sent it to the prime minister for final approval.

"We do this as early as possible," said Alice Karake, a note taker. "The constitution says three days, but we usually complete this a week before Cabinet." Ministers received the agendas with more advance notice and for the first time received agendas and policy papers via email. "We must be sure of every item we put on the agenda,"

said Alphonsine Mirembe, the permanent secretary for the secretariat.

Murigande distributed annotated agendas to help ministers decipher policy documents and anticipate discussions at the Cabinet meeting. Annotated agendas were one- or two-page documents that elucidated policy proposals, including the context, the option selected, and what action the sponsoring ministry was asking the Cabinet to take.

"I introduced an annotated agenda for the Cabinet meetings that summarized each Cabinet agenda's aim, the consultations made, the recommendations of the Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee meetings and states clearly what is expected from the Cabinet meeting," said Murigande. "This has rendered Cabinet decision making very easy."

The annotated agendas were one of the most popular reforms among ministers who didn't have time to read the 10 or so lengthy policy documents that were on the agenda for each Cabinet meeting. "Ministers don't even need to go into the papers anymore at Cabinet meetings. They know the purpose and the relevance of the paper and what they are requested to do with that paper," said Gatera. "They rely on that document... Ministers now pine for the annotated agenda!"

The secretariat took steps to ease the burden on ministers during the meetings. Previously, ministers lugged documents in hard copy. "Before, ministers would come with a briefcase of documents, 20 kilograms of documents," said Gatera. Following a research trip to Ireland and discussions with Cabinet officials there, the secretariat implemented an electronic Cabinet documentation system. Gatera set up desktop computers for each minister in the meeting room with the annotated agenda on the homepage and hyperlinks to relevant documents. Karake, who later took responsibility for the system, said,

“Now, they have a homepage and click on items to get the content of the documents. We’ve received very positive feedback on this.”

The secretariat made significant changes to accelerate the dissemination of important information after Cabinet sessions. Cabinet note takers began to release summaries of decisions taken by the Cabinet to national radio and television stations the same day meetings took place. The note takers organized a press conference a day or two later with the ministers that featured prominently in the communiqué. Note takers also drew up detailed records that were circulated within days of Cabinet sessions and approved at the start of the following meeting of the Cabinet. Previously, ministers did not see the previous session’s minutes until they arrived at the next meeting, and it could take a considerable amount of time to peruse them.

Protais Musoni, Murigande’s successor, added an additional measure to make it easier for the secretariat to monitor the implementation of Cabinet decisions. Cabinet note takers compiled a list of action items for Musoni to circulate to Cabinet members for their approval. “We wrote the action, day taken, miles,” said Karake. “If you build a house, you must say by when, name the department responsible, and give indicators to tell us the action is done.”

Karake managed an online “dashboard” that contained information regarding all action items. Analysts were responsible for monitoring the implementation of action items by ministries in their sectors and updating the database. Karake said the prime minister relied on the dashboard to stay current on the latest developments. “The first thing the prime minister does every morning is check the dashboard,” she said. Mirembe, the permanent secretary for the secretariat, wrote monthly implementation reports for Musoni and quarterly progress reports for the prime minister and president.

The day after Cabinet meetings, Musoni, Mirembe and the two note takers briefed the analysts on decisions that were made, with particular attention to the preparedness of proposals for adoption. “If a policy goes to Cabinet and we had not considered all the data and the president is asking questions and nobody had thought of that angle, it can be sent back,” said Manzi. “It’s our failure that we didn’t iron out the issues, not the fault of the ministries. That’s how we view it ourselves.”

Karake stressed that Musoni was always pushing analysts to think creatively. “The president is always challenging his ministers, so Musoni always challenges analysts the same way,” she said. “He tells them to think outside the box, because our president always does.”

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Having young analysts critique the work of senior government officials raised hurdles for the new system. One was their general inexperience. “A major challenge was the necessity to have analysts with broad and deep experience in government,” said Musoni, Murigande’s successor. “The staff was young and inexperienced, and sometimes the work didn’t go to the desired level, but we had internal trainings to fill the gap and several templates were developed to streamline and standardize briefs and reports.” Additionally, at first, the Cabinet Secretariat’s staff members were hesitant to criticize—and, possibly, to return—proposals submitted by officials in line ministries.

Several measures boosted their confidence. Mukazayire said the Cabinet manual provided some cover for analysts, because their recommendations and critiques often involved ministries’ failure to follow written requirements.

In addition, Murigande stressed to analysts that they were reporting for his purposes, and that the analysts’ would not be exposed to disputes

with those whose work they reviewed. Murigande said he personally signed all letters that returned proposals for errors or additional information, and he would address ministries directly when necessary. The knowledge that AGI advisers reviewed their analyses during the initial months also assuaged analysts' fears of making significant errors.

At the same time, several factors helped to boost the analysts' credibility in the eyes of more experienced officials in line ministries. Visits from Tony Blair helped raise the analysts' profile and cultivate respect for their role. "Tony Blair used to visit us, discuss with us the process, and ministers were invited to attend," Gatera said. "...The ministers knew that there is a team in the office of president and prime minister who are young, energetic, inexperienced but smart." The prime minister often invoked their analyses at ICC meetings, and he sometimes invited analysts to present their findings in person. "The prime minister would invite us to ICC meetings to give our point of view and analysis to ministers," Gatera said. "So when you see them shaking their heads in approval, you know you've done your job."

A tactful and conciliatory approach was important. Analysts were careful to frame their critiques to avoid offending the officials who drafted proposals and to build relationships that would serve everyone involved. Manzi said confidence-building measures, such as "using the power of the center" to encourage interested parties to collaborate, was one productive tactic. "The issue is to make the other person find you helpful," he said.

Mukazayire said analysts' tone mattered as well. "We made it clear we were not questioning their expertise but assisting them in ensuring that their papers provide all the information necessary for the Cabinet to take a sound decision in an efficient and effective manner," she said.

Several analysts reported that they built a rapport rather early on with permanent secretaries and planning directors in line ministries, and that they communicated with them with ease. Planning directors would consult them about content issues even before submitting proposals. "They'd talk to us ahead of time and ask us to review their papers and advise them before officially submitting them to the Cabinet," said Mukazayire. "The relationship was smooth."

ASSESSING RESULTS

"By the second Cabinet meeting, ministers began to see the changes," said Gatera, legal and governance analyst with the Cabinet Secretariat. "Even the way papers were presented, they realized that there were changes being made."

The changes that went into effect in 2009 standardized and simplified policymaking, though weaknesses remained. Policy proposals contained more of the information and analysis that ministers needed to make informed decisions quickly. The secretariat ensured that sponsoring ministries consulted with interested parties, within and outside government, and resolved technical disputes before placing proposals on the Cabinet agenda. The secretariat improved its preparation for Cabinet sessions and post-Cabinet dissemination of information. Most importantly, perhaps, discussion of policy issues at Cabinet meetings took a total of only two hours on average, freeing ministers to focus more time on their many other responsibilities.

The secretariat did face several shortcomings, however. One was the rate of turnover among secretariat staff. Several were promoted, and left to pursue further academic studies. As of June 2012, only one of the original six analysts remained.

Mirembe, permanent secretary under Musoni, said the uneven capacity levels in line ministries at times undermined the work of

secretariat analysts. “Capacity issues were reflected in other ministries,” she said. “You can train your team, but maybe capacity in line ministries is lacking.”

Additionally, turnover among policymakers in line ministries posed a challenge to consistently producing quality policy documents. “You could train the ministers, their advisers, directors of planning, and permanent secretaries, but the people change,” said Kalisa, economic policy analyst. The many changes in personnel atop line ministries caused something of a setback for the secretariat. “In 2010 and 2011, the quality dropped when ministers turned over with the election, and permanent secretaries and directors moved,” Kalisa said. “This could really affect the quality of the policies.”

The secretariat also struggled to monitor the implementation of Cabinet decisions, a result of its limited resources. “At Cabinet Secretariat, we didn’t get the time to monitor implementation of government decisions because we were always analyzing documents,” Gatera said. “There were always a lot of papers coming in. We didn’t have time to follow up the actual implementation of decisions.”

To address this shortcoming, the prime minister’s office merged the Cabinet Secretariat and Coordination Unit in mid-2012. Mirembe explained that there was overlap between the groups in that the secretariat, which monitored Cabinet decisions, and the Coordination Unit, which monitored implementation of the government program, tracked many of the same activities. At the time of writing, it was too early to discern the effects of the merger.

REFLECTIONS

Several factors contributed to the development of the Cabinet Secretariat. One was the collegial nature of Rwanda’s Cabinet. Cabinet offices in other countries that critiqued and

questioned proposals submitted by line ministries sometimes became the subject of criticism from sponsoring ministries. The risk was most apparent in situations where Cabinets consisted of a tenuous coalition between rival political parties where infighting over policy proposals might engulf an objective Cabinet office. In Rwanda, such infighting was rare, and secretariat staffers were not accused of partisanship.

For many of those who joined the Cabinet Secretariat in 2008, the crucial step was crafting the Cabinet manual. With the advent of the manual and access to secretariat staff, ministries knew exactly what they had to do to produce quality policy proposals for the Cabinet. “The manual really improved policy development across government,” said economic policy researcher Nelly Mukazayire. “It was clear and understandable to people. They could meet the requirements because they knew them.”

Charles Murigande, head of the Cabinet Secretariat from March 2008 to July 2009, said the compilation of the Cabinet manual was the crowning achievement of his tenure. “I had said to myself that even if I were to leave the ministry after having only produced the Cabinet manual, I would leave a satisfied man,” he said.

Analysts credited Murigande and others for diligently laying the groundwork for the secretariat. The strong foundation allowed analysts to get off to a quick start. “We had clear terms of reference; there was no confusion,” said Mukazayire. “You could see that the establishment of the Cabinet Secretariat was thought through.”

John Kalisa, the economic policy analyst, concurred. The mandate analysts received early on from Murigande helped them understand their roles. “You can see some ministers are not economists, so you need to come up with an approach to help them understand economic policies, use everyday language, and help them

make high quality decisions,” he said. “Minister Murigande told us, ‘Your job is to make life easier for ministers.’”

Mukazayire said the team’s enthusiasm about its mission from the outset helped catalyze reform.

“[The] feeling was the same: passionate about what we’re doing. We’re all new, even those who had worked for government before, because the unit was entirely new. [We were] excited and passionate,” she said.

Endnotes

¹ “Doing Business: Rwanda in top 20 Reformers Globally.” *World Bank*. September 2008. <http://go.worldbank.org/HWDL25RGD0> Accessed 07/10/2012.

² “Rwanda Country Profile 2007.” *Economist Intelligence Unit*. April 2007. http://www.eiu.com/report_dl.asp?issue_id=1882162373&mode=pdf Accessed 07/10/2012.

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