

Digital divides or dividends?

Including basic services in Rwanda's digitalisation agenda

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KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM ON INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

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This document is part of a larger research project into the digitalisation of basic services in Africa. It concerns one of five case studies that assess, on a country-level, what interventions exist, which of these are inclusive of poor and vulnerable groups, and to what extent governments are facilitating the enabling conditions for digital transformation.

Context

Rwanda has shown exemplary leadership and policy commitment by promoting digitalisation since 2001 through 5-year ICT strategic plans. It has over 100 e-government services as part of a nationwide digital platform. Mobile penetration lies at 82% in 2020 and internet penetration was measured at 31,4% in 2021. However, digital literacy is lagging at 12% (men 15%, women 10%). Challenges remain related to inequality, participation, security and protection, language and literacy barriers, information infrastructure and lack of trust in the new system.

Key findings

Rwanda's nationwide digital platform Irembo has had many positive outcomes, including increasing the ease and efficiency of government services, reducing corruption, and in some cases being more gender inclusive. But despite this progress, not all Rwandans are using the platform. Our case study found three major reasons why:



Digital transformation in Rwanda targets economic growth rather than inclusion. Maximising digitalisation for businesses has been prioritised over inclusive digital development. Local CSOs are not involved in the creation or implementation of the country's digital agenda and citizens needs are not always at the forefront of policy and program decisions

There is a stark digital divide across geographies (access to electricity and digital infrastructure), income level (low affordability), age and ability (lacking digital skills and literacy).

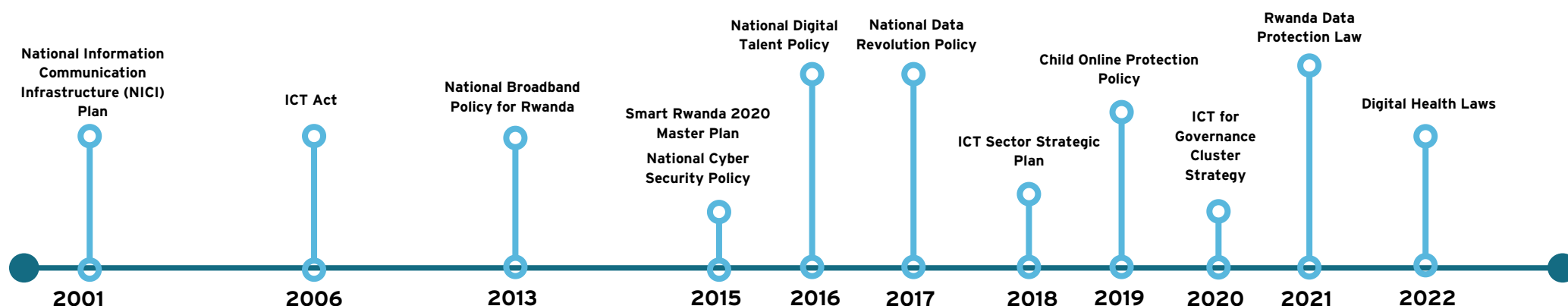


Irembo

Though the Irembo platform has made advances digitalising government services in terms of speed and integration, intermediary costs and fears of data protection, in addition to inequalities in access, have limited citizen uptake to about 1500 daily users.

Despite Rwanda's strong policy commitments and legislation around digitalisation, the government has strict control over content and can oppress critical voices through surveillance, arrest, and intimidation. Rwanda faces the important challenge of increasing trust among its citizens, as well as changing its course to genuine inclusive digital development, rather than focusing on economic growth.

Timeline



**Enock Nyorekwa Twinoburyo,
Martin Luther Munu and Zjos
Vlaminck**



Major services offered online:
InfoHighway
Irembo Digital Platform
Launched in 2014, there are 104 e-government services available. The most-used e-services include: **Driving test registration and driving licence application; Passport and national ID application; Work permits; Social security; Birth certificate; Criminal record clearance (cost ranges USD 0,49-149,00).**