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RWANDA'S EXPERIENCE IN IMPROVING THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT: LESSONS FOR UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This paper examines the administrative, legal, and infrastructural reforms undertaken to improve Rwanda's business environment and considers their correspondence with changes in the country's Doing Business indicators. Rwanda's 76-place improvement between the Doing Business 2009 and 2010 assessments is examined alongside the substantial reduction in the number of procedures and the time required to start a business. Drawing on Rwanda's experience, the paper develops practical implications for Uzbekistan, including stronger coordination among public services, lower mandatory time and financial costs for businesses, greater clarity of property rights, and more effective enforcement of contractual obligations. It is proposed that the effectiveness of business-environment reforms should be assessed in terms of entrepreneurs' time and costs, ease of access to public services, and the degree of effective legal protection.

Keywords: Business environment, Rwanda, Doing Business, institutional reforms, public services, property rights, Uzbekistan.

The quality of the business environment is reflected in the conditions under which firms are registered, begin operations, organize production, and engage in contractual relations. Evaluating reform outcomes should therefore go beyond



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assessing individual administrative simplifications. It should also consider coordination among public services, the time and financial costs borne by entrepreneurs, and the extent to which property and contractual rights are effectively protected. Rwanda provides a useful case for examining how the coordination of administrative procedures and supporting institutions can generate tangible changes in business conditions within a relatively short period. The study applies a comparative analysis to Rwanda's administrative, legal, and infrastructural reforms. Rankings and indicators related to starting a business were cross-checked against the relevant World Bank Doing Business reports. Because the number of economies covered and aspects of the methodology differed across editions, movements in the rankings are interpreted as historical outcomes rather than strictly comparable measures over time. The recommendations for Uzbekistan are therefore not intended to replicate Rwanda's reforms directly, but to identify elements that may be adapted to Uzbekistan's institutional context.

Rwanda was recognized in Doing Business 2010 as the world's leading reforming economy. During the corresponding reporting period, the country moved from 143rd to 67th place. This 76-place improvement coincided with reforms in several areas, including starting a business, property registration, access to credit, and investor protection. Reforms were recorded in seven of the ten areas assessed at the time. The practical significance of these changes for entrepreneurs was particularly visible in the reduction in the number of procedures and the time required to establish a business.



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Table 1. Changes in Rwanda's Doing Business ranking and starting-a-business indicators

Indicator and period	Initial and final value	Change
Overall DB ranking, 2009–2010	143/183 → 67/183	Improvement of 76 places
Procedures to start a business, 2009–2010	8 → 2	Reduction by 6 procedures
Time required to start a business, 2009–2010	14 days → 3 days	Reduction by 11 days
Overall DB ranking, 2010–2019	67/183 → 29/190	Improvement of 38 places
Overall DB ranking, 2019–2020	29/190 → 38/190	Decline of 9 places

Source. Compiled by the author based on the World Bank's Doing Business 2010, Doing Business 2019, and Doing Business 2020 reports and Rwanda economy profiles.

The key finding from the table is that Rwanda's initial sharp improvement in the rankings coincided with concrete administrative simplifications. Reducing the number of procedures required to start a business from eight to two and shortening the required time from fourteen days to three represented directly observable improvements from the entrepreneur's perspective. These two indicators alone, however, cannot explain the entire 76-place rise in the overall ranking. The Doing Business ranking also captured changes in property registration, access to credit, investor protection, and other regulatory areas. Rwanda's decline to 38th place in the Doing Business 2020 edition further demonstrates that its experience should not be presented as a continuous and uninterrupted improvement in ranking positions.

Important elements of Rwanda's reform agenda included the development of one-stop-shop services, formalization of property rights, simplification of tax administration, and improvements in infrastructure-related services. Subsequent reforms included replacing dedicated devices for VAT invoicing with free



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software solutions, monitoring electricity outages, and requiring service providers to supply materials needed for electricity connections. Customs reforms expanded the use of risk-based inspections and electronic documentation, while judicial reforms sought to reduce unjustified procedural delays. These measures addressed not only barriers to starting a business but also administrative and infrastructural constraints affecting firms during their ongoing operations.

The economic importance of formalizing property rights is also supported by Ali et al. (2014). Their analysis of a pilot land tenure regularization program in Rwanda identified positive changes associated with the registration of land rights and investment in land. This finding highlights the importance of legal certainty for long-term investment decisions. At the same time, formal property registration does not automatically lead to increased access to credit. Lending decisions depend not only on the legal status of collateral but also on the borrower's financial position and repayment capacity.

Drawing on Rwanda's experience, reforms in Uzbekistan should increasingly focus on coordination among public services and on outcomes experienced directly by entrepreneurs. Since firm development depends partly on the clarity of property relations, existing electronic information exchange between notarial services, the cadastral system, and the collateral registry should be further strengthened. Particular attention should be paid to timely updating of registry information, rapid correction of inconsistencies, and reducing the need for entrepreneurs to submit repeated applications to different public agencies for the same transaction.

In production and trade, the performance of electronic services for electricity connections and the customs Single Window should be assessed not merely by their availability but by their practical outcomes for businesses. Relevant indicators could include the total time required to obtain an electricity connection,



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the duration of power outages, and the time cargo spends waiting at the border. Delays identified across regions or stages of service provision should be used as a basis for improving the operating procedures of the responsible institutions. These measures should also be integrated with stronger enforcement of contractual obligations and more effective protection of entrepreneurs' rights. Given the availability of electronic court filing and remote participation in hearings, priority should be placed on reducing the total time from the initiation of a dispute to the effective enforcement of the final judgment. Business-environment reforms should therefore be evaluated not by the number of newly introduced digital services or reform measures, but by reductions in entrepreneurs' time and financial costs, lower uncertainty in accessing public services, and more effective protection of property and contractual rights.

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