



ATIPON

ATI & Policy Network

ACCESS TO INFORMATION & POLICY NETWORK

(ATIPON) CONCEPT NOTE



Rwandan Access to Information & Policy Network



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1. Context

Rwanda has registered impressive achievements against its ambitions laid out in the Vision 2020. Rwanda is now a regional model, in doing business. For instance the 2015 index of economic freedom has ranked Rwanda forth among Sub-Saharan Countries in doing business and currently poverty has reduced to 39.1% as of 2013/14 from 44.9% as was reported in 2010/11 and extreme poverty has dropped from 24.1% to 16.3%.¹ Infant mortality rate has reduced from 48.6/1000 in 2012 to 32/1000 in 2014-2015 and under 5 Mortality from 72.3/1000 in 2012 to 50/1000 in 2014-2015, whereas Maternal mortality dropped from 476/ 100,000 in 2010 to 210/100,000 in the year 2014-2015, Assisted deliveries has moved from 90% 2013 to 91% in 2014-2015².

These achievements are a very good indication that Rwanda is on a good truck in becoming a middle income economy. In this journey the GoR is also strongly committed to accountable governance as demonstrated by the first pillar of its Vision 2020 as well as in the EDPRS 2 Accountable Governance thematic area aimed at strengthening public accountability, transparency and efficiency in deploying resources and delivering services. Accountable governance is still central to Rwanda's development strategies because of its ability to facilitate citizens' participation in decisions making process and hence, helping in ensuring that development is sustained and poverty is reduced³.

To this effect the government has made efforts in availing various spaces to facilitate citizens' participation and these include:

¹ Household Living condition Survey 2014/2015

² Demographic Health Survey 2015

³ EDPRS 2



1. Development Partners Coordination Group meetings and Development Partners meetings and retreats.
2. Consultation activities launched by government, such as the consultation of individual NGOs on law/policy formulation; sector working groups held at sector level, or in the framework of the JADF at local level; informal consultation.
3. The decentralization processes, planning process including JADF, District and Sector Development Plan, and the participation in Budget setting and their monitoring and evaluation.
4. Projects and programmes aimed at disseminating information and at awareness raising on rights and public policies through community works held monthly.
5. Initiatives for “channeling the voice of citizens to the government” through imihigo.
6. Initiatives for improving the functioning of service delivery and policy implementation, particularly at local level (including evaluation and monitoring activities through open day, direct engagement in service management, etc.).
7. Thematic fora, media dialogue, gender cluster, conferences, etc.;
8. Other spaces also exist, such as - at grassroots level - the management of local resources and the conciliation of locally emerging conflicts⁴.

In order to effectively achieve sustainable development in general and more specifically Accountable Governance Objective for EDPRS 2 *“Enhance accountable governance by promoting citizen participation and mobilization for delivery of development, strengthening public accountability and improving service delivery”*. Mainstreaming access to information in all government programs and plans is imperative, mainly because Access to information (ATI) is critical to spur economic growth and development especially in the fields of social-economic development and human rights. The theory behind this is that more and better information and communication furthers the development of a society. Access to information helps in stimulating understanding of communities on how they can better engage and contribute to the national

⁴ European Union Mapping of the Civil Society and project identification of a support program to the Civil Society in Rwanda report, December 2013.



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development agenda, participating in government programs aimed at reducing poverty, enhancing agricultural productivity, healthcare, and basic education. There is also a great correlation between access to information as a stimulant of demand and supply of goods and services contributing to manufacturers and company development. Therefore access to information is also imperative for sustainable private sector growth and development. However access to information is still a challenge due to limited demand an unresponsive information officers as indicated by the article published by the New Times Editorial⁵

A multistakeholder approach to this end is critical and this requires State and None State actor's intervention (Government, CSOs, Media and private sector). There is still need to raise awareness of public institutions to understand their roles and responsibilities in promoting access to information especially by responding to information requesters. On the other hand, Rwandan Civil Society engagement in promoting access to information and in influencing policies is still limited mainly because of limited appreciation or understanding of the value access to information can add in delivering their mandate.

There is limited engagement of CSOs in influencing policies in Rwanda and they are often reactive as opposed to proactive engagement, assuming the role of implementing agents or that of service delivery bodies. According to the 2013 European Union Mapping of the Civil Society and project identification of a support program to the Civil Society in Rwanda: CSOs are still lagging behind in their contribution to government policies despite the existence of political will to increase citizens' participation to policy making, coherently with the 2003 Rwanda Constitution and the "Vision 2020". Other CSOs assume the role of "critical witnesses", without engaging or influencing public policies and their implementation⁶.

This limited engagement in influencing government policies is caused by lack of information that consequently cripples their capacity and self esteem in contributing effectively to government policies and programs through existing fora.

Despite these weakness and challenges, CSOs can still assume a more effective role in participating to Rwanda's development dynamics, both at local and national level especially those dynamics related to decentralization, social cohesion, building trust and bridging the gap

⁵ <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/article/2015-10-13/193431/>

⁶ European Union Mapping of the Civil Society and project identification of a support program to the Civil Society in Rwanda report, December 2013.



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among citizens and public institutions, promoting Citizens access to information and accountable governance as well as promoting social inclusion and innovation. In all cases, public action needs to be accompanied and supported by CSOs in order to be effective in addressing Citizens' needs and concerns.⁷

2. Objectives for ATIPON

It is in this regards that Rwandan CSOs under the auspice of ODESUDI have decided to co-create ATIPON which is a Rwandan Access to Information and Policy Network with the following objectives:

- a) Promote access to information for the Citizenry and engage in policy analysis and dialogue using access to information as leverage;
- b) Engage in access to information advocacy and dialogue;
- c) Members of ATIPON engage with grass roots and in community sensitization on access to information, and mainstream ATI within their programs and plans;
- d) Redefine civil society role and position in a changing environment where they are continuously criticized and challenged for their omission and ineffectiveness in representing their constituencies;
- e) Devise mechanisms to engage with the government and development partners whilst maintaining their independence;
- f) To continuously review capacity gaps and find solutions within themselves in order to fill these gaps;
- g) Knowledge sharing and mutual support among CSOs;
- h) To build the capacity of members to interact with government and local authorities in governance processes and development partners;
- i) Engage in innovate approaches to CSO fundraising like philanthropy in order to establish sustainable funding pools;

⁷ Ibid



- j) Build the trust and enhance the collaboration of CSOs, Media, Private Sector and public institutions in promoting social values and citizens' interests.
- k) Effectively engage with the government and development partners in the establishment different development indicators and evaluation of their achievements to ensure that all stakeholders have same understanding and are in agreement with the outcomes.

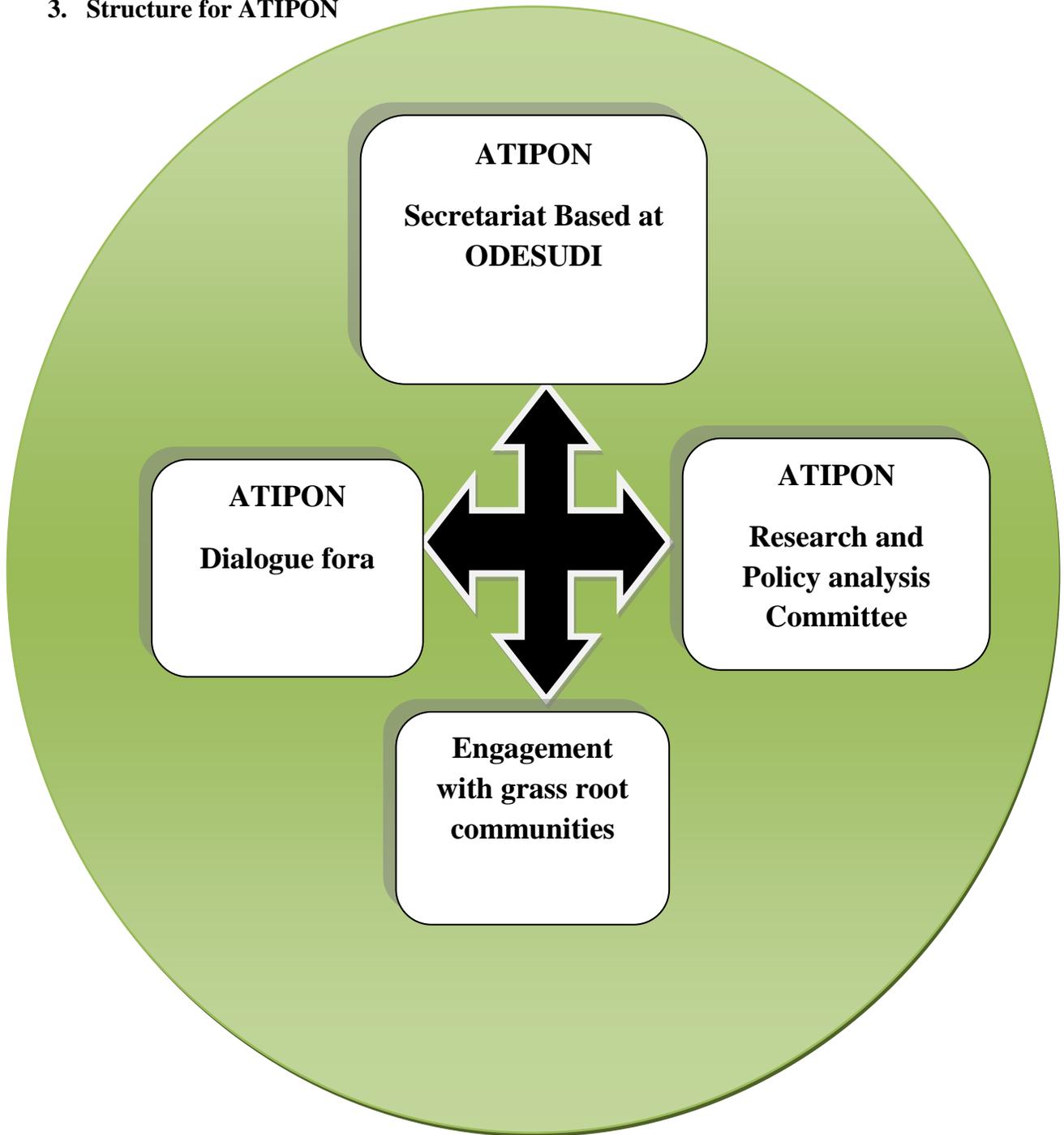
The common Vision for ATIPON is to strengthen a vibrant, pluralistic, independent and autonomous rights-based Rwandan civil society that takes citizens access to information and influencing government policy as its primary focus through redefining its roles, working methods, and means of cooperation. The strategy is to establish a conducive environment for CSOs dialogue to self-critic, and identifies their own weakness as well as challenges that affect engagement and adopt appropriate solutions.



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3. Structure for ATIPON



4. Methodology

The network will mainstream ATI within programs of its members and will carry out sensitization of the public through workshops and meetings carried out by the members. It will also engage in research and policy analysis to ensure that access to information regime is not affected by other upcoming Laws and policies. The research will be the basis for policy engagement and advocacy through different fora and CSO established dialogue platforms. The members will engage in existing space, but will also establish their own fora to engage with the GoR and Development partners. This will give them an opportunity to inform GoR and Development partners their views on all that is said about them in different reports and what they would need from GoR and Development partners to be effective in their engagement.

The network will also work on establishing of an online platform for knowledge sharing between members on access to information and policy advocacy. This network will help in boosting knowledge, skills and self esteem among members as it will offer the opportunity for critical engagement. There will be a SWOT analysis of members in order to identify strength and capacity gaps for the network to know how best it can support its members.

The network will also be an opportunity for fundraising for ATI and policy engagement work. This will be done through joint fundraising proposals. The policy will also help in coming up with modern fundraising mechanisms like the business modal and establishment of online fundraising platforms.

ATIPON will evolve as the challenges and opportunities facing civil society in Rwanda will evolve. It aims to strengthen civil society today and in future, as well. Issues of capacity, limited funding and engagement of CSOs, the need for innovation, and the drive for effectiveness will be different, but the value of a vibrant, pluralistic, and rights based civil society in Rwanda will continue. The only truly appropriate method of developing, managing and programming of this Network is through participatory inclusion. The ethos of co-creation, co-design



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5. Potential Services for ATIPON

Roles	Examples of Potential Services
<p>Facilitator & convener to encourage knowledge exchange and collaboration</p>	<p>Conferences, workshops, Platform of practice, physical and virtual knowledge exchange platforms serving to respond to emergent policy issues or new challenges affecting ATI.</p> <p>Forums with GoR, Development Partners, Private sector, and others</p>
<p>Matchmaker and Fundraiser</p>	<p>Connecting various other actors such as GoR, Donors, private sector and academia with CSOs for collaboration and financial or material support.</p> <p>Conducting philanthropic fundraising events and advocacy on philanthropy policy.</p>
<p>Innovator & creator catalyze new tools and approaches</p>	<p>Crowd sourcing platform to help national/local CSOs to be more innovative using digital technology in delivering of services.</p> <p>Prizes to most efficient information officers</p> <p>Virtual Platform</p> <p>Open Data and open source technology to enhance service delivery.</p>
<p>Dialogue platform</p>	<p>Platform for dialogue of members on how they can improve their work</p> <p>Sourcing capacity builders for members from other institutions.</p>



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Operational arrangement of ATIPON

- ✦ ATIPON will always meet 1st Monday of the month to develop a monthly action plan and on the last Thursday of the month to review its reports.
- ✦ Produce policy briefs on the analysed policies;
- ✦ The Secretariat will develop an annual action plan it will share with members;
- ✦ Develop an advocacy, communication and engagement strategy;
- ✦ Identify capacity gaps that members need sport;
- ✦ Identify capacity pulls within the region CSOs can tap in;
- ✦ Organize regional information and knowledge sharing conferences with other CSOs Media and partners in the region;
- ✦ Join other networks and CSO hubs and hub lets to enhance regional engagements.

6. Membership and Membership contribution:

Membership will be voluntary. However to ensure sustainability and ownership of the network by members, members will pay an annual contribution and admission fees for those who will join later. The proposed amount for the co-creators is 15000 per months totalling to 180000RWF which can be paid annually or in instalments twice a year or three times a year.

The legitimacy of ATIPON will have its roots within its membership and members deserve a right to change its leadership and express dissatisfaction on the functioning of its secretariat. The Secretariat will operate to serve the interests of ATIPON members and will always be accountable to them at any cost.

7. The size and composition of ATIPON:

The size of the network is not limited and ATIPON Board and Secretariat will encourage as many members of the Civil Society, Media, Academia and Private institutions to join.



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8. Meeting venue and rules of attendance:

The meetings of ATIPON shall be held at ODESUDI or at any other agreed upon venue; the member who will not attended for three consecutive meetings will be charged a fine 50,000RWF.



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