

## **CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE LAUNCH OF AN ACCESS TO INFORMATION WEBSITE (SOBANUKIRWA)** **11<sup>TH</sup> OF FEBRUARY 2015/ UMUBANO HOTEL -KIGALI**

The importance of the right of access to information in any society cannot be over-emphasized and is underpinned by the fact that it is a 'cross-cutting right', in that it is interconnected with all other human rights, whether civil, political or socio-economic. This interconnectedness of access to information with other human rights contributes to its utility as a leverage right- one which can be used for the realisation of all other human rights.

Article 33 of the Rwandan constitution guarantees the fundamental right to free speech. The prerequisite for enjoying this right is knowledge and information. Access to information is a touchstone for all other freedoms enshrined in the Rwandan constitution and international conventions ratified by the Rwandan government. It is critical for Rwandan citizens to be kept informed about current affairs and broad issues so that they can participate in governance and hold their leaders accountable.

The 2013 Rwandan access to information law and accompanying ministerial orders comprehensively offer the right to access to information. Despite the existence of these legal provisions there is still limited utilisation of these laws by the public. The major challenge on the side of the public in making information requests is the lack of a simplified system that can help citizens to request information across all sectors without making trips to each individual institution.

It's against this background that ODESUDI has worked with Tumenye, a Kigali-based civic technology organisation, to create a central system to help the Rwanda public to access information by making information requests through one website.

### **What is Sobanukirwa?**

Sobanukirwa is a website to help people make access to information requests in Rwanda. You can visit it at <https://sobanukirwa.rw/>

Sobanukirwa makes it easy to submit information requests by creating pages for authorities in Rwanda where people can send requests straight to information officers via the internet.

The website also makes all information requests and replies from information officers public on the internet so that it is easy for anyone to search for public information which has been requested and released.

Sobanukirwa is translated into English, French and Kinyarwanda so that the website is useful to everyone in Rwanda, no matter which national language they speak.

### **How does it work?**

Sobanukirwa has been co-created by two Kigali-based organisations Open Democracy & Sustainable Development Initiative (ODESUDI), and Tumenye - to help anyone who wants to use Rwanda's access to information law to request information.

Our team has created a database of all the information officers in Rwanda and used this to create Sobanukirwa. When someone submits an information request on Sobanukirwa, an email is automatically sent from the website to the right information officer as well as an email being sent to the requester and the request being published for anyone to see on the website. People using the website will also get email notifications whenever anything happens with their request.

### **What does the access to information law for Rwanda say?**

Rwanda's 2013 access to information law (official gazette no 10 of 11 March 2013) states that "every person has the right of access to information in possession of a public organ and some private bodies" (article 3).

The law goes on to state that public organs or private bodies "shall disclose information where the public interest in disclosure outweighs the interest of not disclosing such information".

The main purposes of disclosure are defined in the following way:

- [To inform] the public about their activities;
- To ensure that the expenditure of public funds is subject to effective management and oversight;
- To promote founded public debate;
- To keep the public regularly and adequately informed about the existence of any danger to public health or safety or to the environment;
- To ensure that any public authority with regulatory mission properly discharges its functions

### **How can I find out more about Sobanukirwa?**

On the website, there is a help section with comprehensive notes which seek to answer any questions you might have. These notes are available in English, French and Kinyarwanda.

**Date and venue of the launch:** 11th of February 2015 at Hotel Umubano- Kigali starting from 10am

If you have questions you can contact the team behind Sobanukirwa by emailing [team@sobanukirwa.rw](mailto:team@sobanukirwa.rw), [opendemocracy1@gmail.com](mailto:opendemocracy1@gmail.com) calling on +250788819647 or sending a question on Twitter or Facebook.



# Open Democracy & Sustainable Development Initiative

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