

Outcome Document of the Second Media Engagement and Training

Rwanda, March 06 – 08, 2019

Following on from the Johannesburg Media Engagement and Training held in March 2018, the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF) organised the second annual event that brought together over 70 media and communication representatives from 22 countries who met in Rwanda to discuss progress made since the first meeting. This year's event, "Journeying with ATAF on the Next 10 Years: The Journey Towards Increased Domestic Resource Revolution in Africa", was designed to review lessons learnt and identify opportunities for growth as ATAF prepares to celebrate its 10th anniversary in November 2019.

In taking stock of the progress made since the first media engagement, participants highlighted the disparities and challenges in reporting on tax matters. Drawing from their respective experiences, they also pointed out areas for continued focus including solidifying collaboration amongst media and communications experts. Participants agreed that while there had been advances, particularly from the point of people-centred approaches to story-telling, there were still far-reaching challenges affecting citizens.

Participants noted issues such as the right to information by the media and public as a critical impediment to reporting on Domestic Resource Mobilisation (DRM). Participants also agreed that public participation in the tax conversation remains limited. Specifically, they noted that citizens are left out of the process in terms of determining tax-thresholds and thus have no influence on government tax expenditure holding government to account. Moreover, participants discussed that these perceptions and sentiments become impediments to DRM, which results in a multitude of challenges.

Concerns were also raised around the impact of emerging tax issues on Africa, namely illicit financial flows, tax incentives, standard setting, continental free trade, new technology and policy coherence. Participants also discussed the impact of contractual agreements between states and entities (focusing on the extractive industry).

In terms of emerging trends, participants believe that digitisation is a reality that Africa can no longer afford to ignore. Specifically, participants noted that a lot of revenue is being lost through virtual operations and transactions that are being made remotely – thus eroding our much-needed domestic revenue. Participants emphasised the need to ramp up media's capacity to report on the digital economy and its tax implications.

Furthermore, participants emphasised that Africa could not afford to be left behind in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Participants underscored the urgency to build the rights skills and structures for the continent to take lead in a fast-paced world.

More importantly, participants felt that both the media and the tax administrations still needed to prioritise the needs and expectations of citizens above everything else. As media, participants acknowledged that they still need to do more in terms of communicating service delivery, holding governments to account and reporting on the impact of tax on development. Participants agreed that more indepth analysis and research was needed to ensure that the media is reporting succinctly and objectively.

Participants recognised the strides taken by ATAF to bridge the gap between participants and the media and the tax authorities. Participants applauded ATAF's efforts and are encouraged by their commitment to foster a cross-sectoral dialogue with the executive arm of governments and parliamentarians across the continent to ensure more cohesiveness from an accountability perspective.

Building on from that, participants committed to a comprehensive and collaborative approach by forming a transformative network with two dimensions – communications and connections – that would form the backbone of the story of domestic resource mobilization.

Participants reaffirmed their common goal to champion the Africa tax conversation through the formation of the Africa Tax Media Network (ATMN) that brings together over 150 participants from the first and second media engagement and training sessions. Through this network, participants committed to sharing experiences, developing story ideas, promoting access to information at multiple levels and identifying opportunities for capacity development.

In setting up this network, participants reiterated the importance of the network, because it would help them contextualize the story of tax by providing concrete policies, communicating service delivery and highlighting actions. More importantly, they noted that it would go beyond reporting scandals by highlighting solutions and best practices. According to them, this would be the right platform for media to create, access, curate and share knowledge that, subsequently, enables citizens to understand the impact of their taxes on their development.

Participants appreciated the strong commitment by all stakeholders to creating an enabling and inclusive environment in the spirit of Africa's development ambitions. Participants stated that this network - underpinned by the support of the tax administrations and the media -will create opportunities for innovation and contribute to a robust conversation around domestic revenue mobilisation for the benefit of Africa.

In closing, through telling the tax story from the African perspective, participants reaffirmed their commitment and contribution to shaping and setting the Africa tax agenda at national, regional and global level, for the benefit of the continent and its people.