



RWANDA

**EU COUNTRY ROADMAP FOR
ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY**

2016 – 2020

SUMMARY and SETTING

The EU, with its Member States, is the leading supporter of civil society in Rwanda, working for the promotion and protection of human rights and the creation of a vibrant and independent civil society. The EU recognises the key challenges facing civil society organisations (CSOs) in Rwanda and is committed to help address them. The aim of the Civil Society Roadmap is to identify long term objectives for support to civil society; including both operational support and dialogue.

Background

The Civil Society Roadmap in Rwanda is part of the objective of the European Union and that of its Member States to improve the impact, predictability and visibility of its support to civil society. The roadmap was developed with the Member States in consultation with local civil society and development partners.

State of Civil Society

Civil society in Rwanda is rapidly growing in terms of the number of civil society organisations (CSOs). There are numerous challenges to be overcome for a strong and vibrant civil society to develop in Rwanda. The regulatory framework must facilitate civil society to work effectively. The current registration and administration requirements for CSOs are excessively burdensome. Civil society must be able to operate within a suitably expanded political space. CSOs that choose to focus on policy advocacy, policy oversight or advancement of political rights are less established in Rwanda and can find their work difficult. Most national CSOs provide services to the local community, but only very few are engaged in advocacy and few are able to influence government decision-making processes at local and national level. Although evidence-based advocacy is crucial for engaging meaningfully with government and others, the capacity of Rwandan CSOs to carry out research and policy engagement is low in general. CSO capacity must be enhanced so that they can conduct

research, consult and represent the views of citizens, and carry out evidence-based advocacy. Rwanda has demonstrated progress in areas such as economic growth, child mortality and gender rights. A demonstration of the same commitment to a pluralistic, open and vibrant civil sphere would reap great benefits for the country.

Setting

Rwanda has ratified all core UN human rights conventions and most optional protocols (except for the ICC Rome Statute), but actual implementation on the ground has yet to match commitment. Rwanda's human rights record has many achievements, such as in the area of women's rights, LGBTI, anti-corruption, religious freedom, and to some extent socio-economic rights. It is in the security and political domain that the record is less positive, with accusations of torture and disappearances well documented, and limits to freedom of assembly and association noted, for example, in the remarks made by UN special rapporteur Maina Kiai following his visit to Rwanda in 2014. The EU seeks to encourage improvement of human rights in the area of political freedoms, as in all domains, and to encourage the elimination of security-based violations. The EU has supported Rwanda's engagement in the UN Universal Periodic Review mechanism, and encourages full implementation of its agreed commitments. Rwanda's seat in the UN Human Rights Council for 2017-18 brings international responsibilities, for which Rwanda has a laudable record, and domestic responsibilities in advancing human rights internally. The EU will continue to work with civil society and government in this broad area, and in the context of this civil society Roadmap, to pay particular attention to progress in an enabling institutional and legal environment for civil society to operate.

Current EU Engagement

The EU, with its Member States, is the principal supporter of civil society in Rwanda working in areas related to governance, protection of human rights and monitoring the justice sector. The EU Delegation and Member States regularly meet with Rwanda civil society and have close contacts with a number of CSOs, including through Sector Working Groups. Thematic events are regularly held by the EU Delegation to promote dialogue amongst stakeholders on specific issues (such as media, agriculture, and access to justice).

The EU Delegation to Rwanda currently supports civil society through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the Civil Society and Local Authorities (CSO-LA) programme. The EU Delegation supports 'accountable governance', both democratic and economic, as a focal sector in line with the government's development strategy, EDPRS II. The EU Delegation with its Member States engage in political dialogue with the Government of Rwanda on a number of issues, including freedom of association; registration for CSOs; participation of CSOs in decision-making and accountability processes.

Priorities and Actions

The EU with its Member States will focus on three priorities in its engagement with civil society organisations in Rwanda.

Priority 1

Environment: Promote a conducive legal and institutional environment for CSOs in Rwanda

Priority 2

Participation: Promote the meaningful, structured and sustained participation of CSOs in domestic policies and EU and Member States programming cycle.

Priority 3

Capacity: Increase local CSOs' capacity to perform their roles as independent development actors more effectively.