



# APESA PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Alliances and Partnerships for Evidence-led Environmental and Social Safeguarding  
Accountability (APESA) Project – Ijwi ryanjye mu Iterambere Rirambye (INTERA)



APESA LAUNCH GROUP PHOTO

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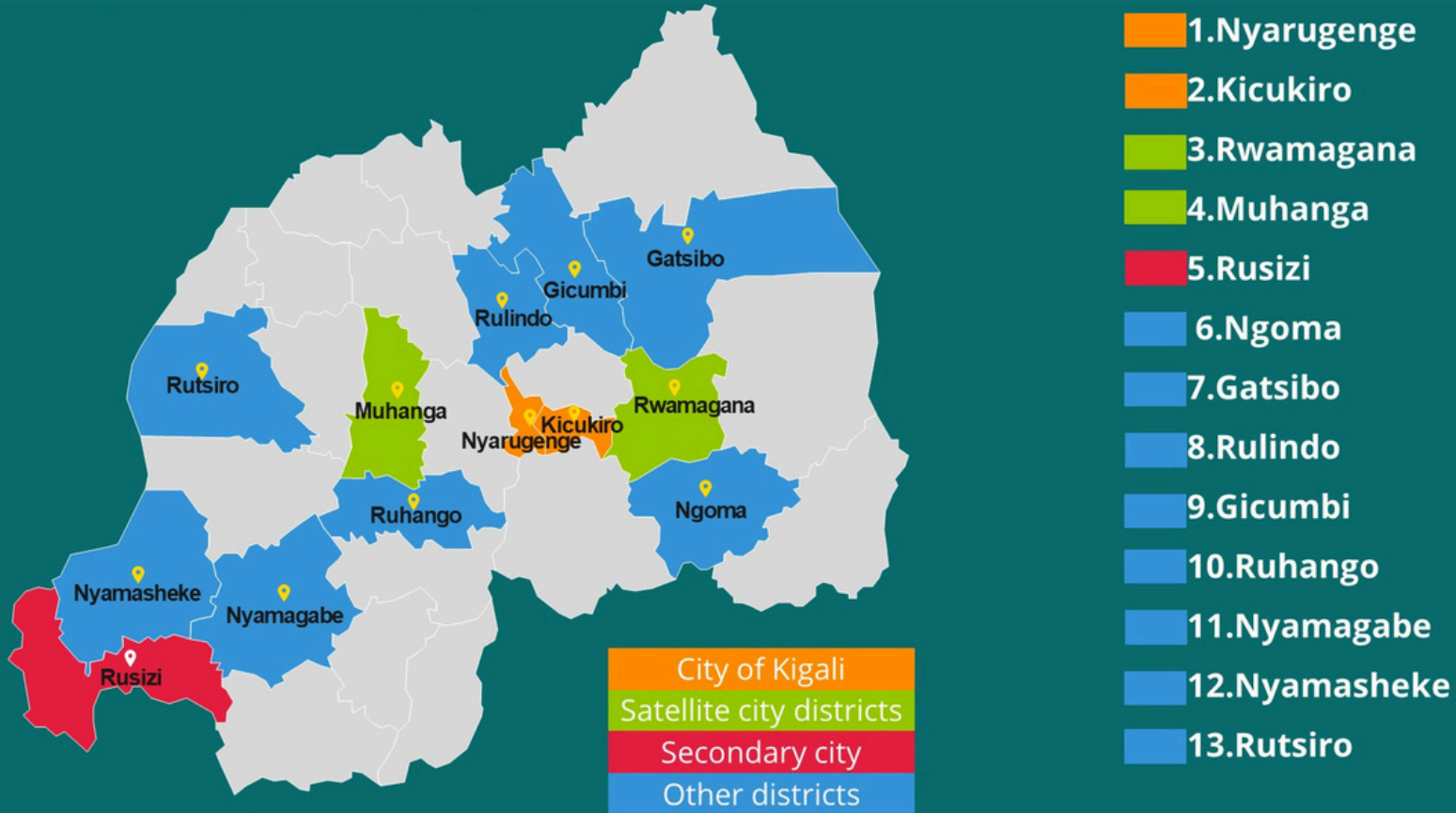
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Funded by the European Union

## LOCATION OF THE ACTION



## EDITORIAL

The Alliances and Partnerships for Evidence-led Environmental and Social Safeguarding Accountability (APESA) Project – known locally as ‘Ijwi Ryanjye multerambere Rirambye (INTERA)’ has been underway since May 2025 with the support of the European Union (EU). The project is managed by Transparency International Rwanda (TI-RW) and PTF Europe. It is a 36-month initiative that seeks to promote accountability and compliance with environmental and social safeguarding standards in government-funded infrastructure projects in 13 districts across Rwanda – in other words, to ensure that people’s rights are respected when infrastructure projects are being done in the country.

The project will cover 4 infrastructure sectors including buildings, electricity, roads, and water supply and sanitation.

The districts have been selected to provide a balanced and comprehensive picture of the issues covered by this project in Rwanda. This newsletter is the first of a regular series aimed at providing updates on the status of the project.

It covers the official launch of the EU-funded project; TI-RW and PTF Europe’s engagement with key stakeholders in Rwanda ahead of the launch; TI-RW’s engagement at the district level in all project districts; the establishment of Citizen Concern Committees (CCC) at the district level to strengthen citizen voices and accountability and increase citizen awareness of their rights; the Training of Trainers program on environmental and social safeguarding and social accountability implemented in Muhanga in November 2025 and a summary of the key findings of the baseline study conducted to assess the compliance of infrastructure development in Rwanda with its applicable legislation on environmental and social safeguards.



## TI-RWANDA AND PTF EUROPE OFFICIALLY LAUNCH EU-FUNDED “APESA” PROJECT

On 28 November 2025, Transparency International Rwanda (TI-Rwanda), in partnership with PTF Europe, officially launched the EU-funded “Alliances and Partnerships for Evidence-led Environmental and Social Safeguarding Accountability (APESA)” Project—locally known as “Ijwi Ryanjye mu Iterambere Rirambye (INTERA)” —marking a major milestone in Rwanda’s drive toward accountable and sustainable infrastructure development.

Held under the theme “Amplifying Citizens’ Voices for Accountable and Sustainable Development,” the launch convened senior government officials, civil society organizations, private sector actors, and development partners, signaling a strong multi-stakeholder commitment to strengthening environmental and social safeguards in public infrastructure projects.



APESA LAUNCH GROUP PHOTO

The event also featured the official dissemination of findings from the Baseline Study on the Status of Compliance of Public Infrastructure Development Processes with Environmental and Social Safeguards in Rwanda, providing an evidence-based foundation for the APESA Project’s interventions.

## A TRANSFORMATIVE INITIATIVE FOR EVIDENCE-LED ACCOUNTABILITY

Speaking at the launch, **Apollinaire Mupiganyi, Executive Director of TI-Rwanda**, emphasized that while Rwanda continues to make significant investments in sustainable infrastructure, the speed of development has not always been matched by strong implementation of environmental and social safeguards.



Apollinaire Mupiganyi, Executive Director of TI-Rwanda

“APESA is a transformative initiative designed to strengthen alliances among citizens, civil society organizations, and duty bearers, while building technical capacity and promoting evidence-based monitoring,” he said.

He added that the project seeks to ensure that communities are not just beneficiaries of development, but active participants in monitoring and safeguarding it.

Echoing this vision, **Hildegard Gacek, Vice Chairperson of PTF Europe**, highlighted that APESA builds on PTF’s extensive global experience, having implemented over 275 projects with 160 civil society organizations in 55 countries.



Hildegard Gacek, Vice Chairperson of PTF Europe

She stressed that trust-based cooperation among all partners—especially local authorities—is essential for meaningful and lasting impact, reaffirming PTF Europe’s commitment to providing full technical support throughout the project’s implementation.

## SAFEGUARDS AS A MATTER OF JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Officially opening the event, **Mbonera Théophile, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice and Guest of Honor**, underscored that APESA aligns directly with Rwanda’s national priorities, including the Justice and Accountability Programme implemented in partnership with the European Union.

“As Rwanda advances under Vision 2050, NST2 and SDG 16, strong institutions, transparency and citizen engagement are critical to ensuring that rapid infrastructure growth is responsible, inclusive and respectful of environmental and social safeguards,” he noted.

He further stressed that safeguards go beyond technical compliance: “They are matters of justice, equity and human rights—protecting communities from displacement, vulnerability and environmental harm.”



Mbonera Théophile, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice

The Permanent Secretary commended APESA for strengthening the link between communities and governance institutions through citizen-led monitoring, evidence-based advocacy and participatory mechanisms that uphold transparency and accountability.

## EU BACKS RWANDA'S INCLUSIVE AND ACCOUNTABLE DEVELOPMENT PATH



Sotirios Bazikamwe  
EU Governance Advisor

Delivering the keynote address on behalf of the **EU Ambassador to Rwanda, Sotirios Bazikamwe, EU Governance Advisor**, noted that APESA comes at a critical moment as Rwanda accelerates major investments in roads, energy, housing and urban development.

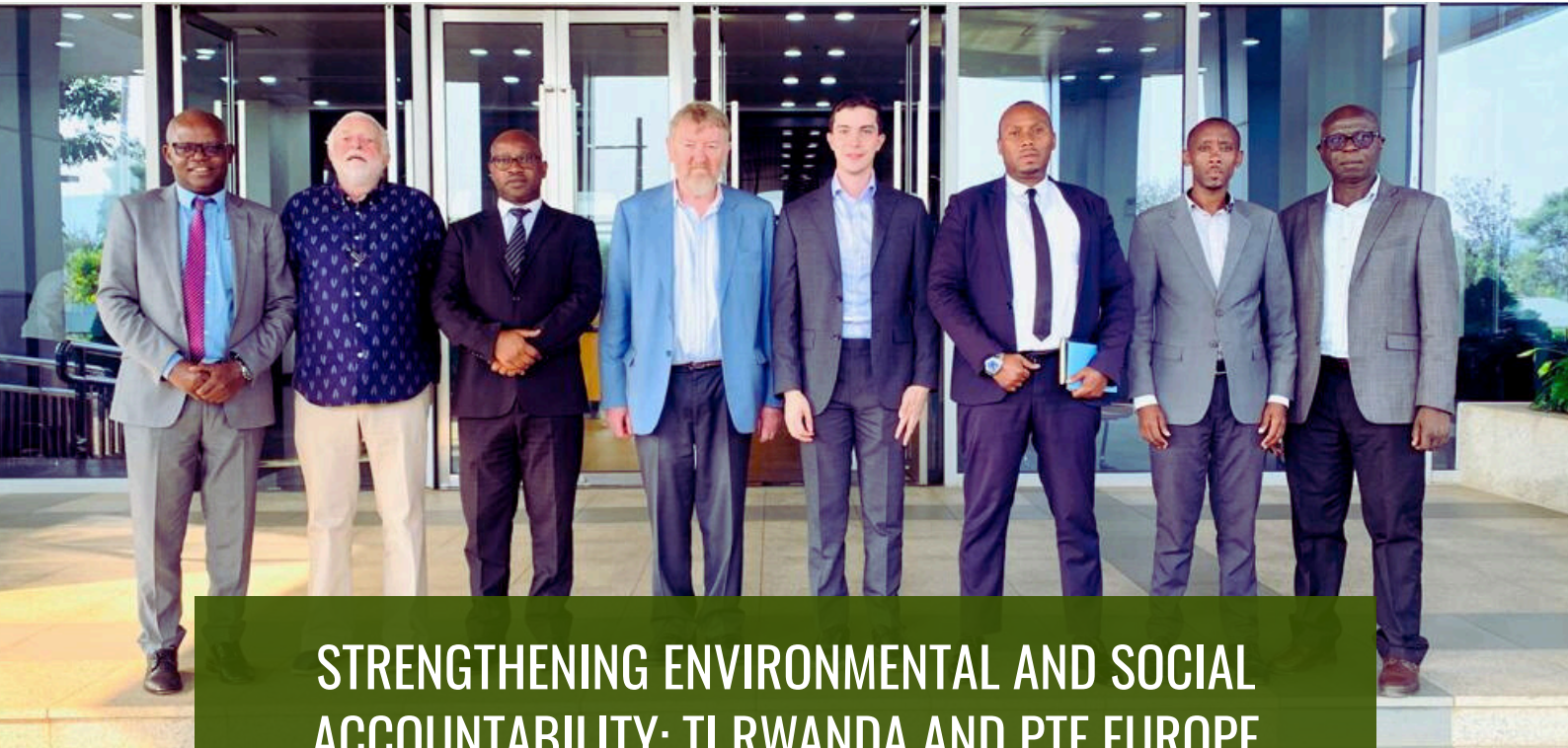
“With such rapid transformation comes the responsibility to ensure inclusiveness, environmental and social protection, and respect for citizens’ rights, so that no one is left behind,” he said.

He reaffirmed that APESA is part of the broader EU Justice and Accountability Programme, through which the European Union supports stronger justice systems, human rights protection, reconciliation and accountable public service delivery in Rwanda.

## STRENGTHENING VOICES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The participants in the launching event came to a consensus that, by bringing together citizens, civil society and public institutions around evidence-led monitoring and accountability, the APESA (INTERA) Project will play a vital role in ensuring that Rwanda’s impressive infrastructure growth goes hand-in-hand with strong environmental and social safeguards, transparency, and community empowerment.

As Rwanda continues its journey toward sustainable development, APESA stands as a powerful platform for ensuring that citizens’ voices remain at the heart of progress.



## STRENGTHENING ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY: TI RWANDA AND PTF EUROPE TEAM ENGAGE RWANDA'S KEY INSTITUTIONS

Rwandan Institutions welcomed the APESA project, affirming its relevance and timely contribution to strengthening environmental and social accountability, and expressing their commitment to collaborate toward achieving its objectives.

This was during a high-level engagement mission conducted across Rwanda from July 15–25, 2025, by Transparency International Rwanda and a PTF Europe delegation composed of Donal O'Leary, Richard Holloway, and Yacine Belhaj-Bouabdallah, aimed at advancing the APESA initiative on environmental and social safeguards in public infrastructure development.

## KEY VISIT HIGHLIGHTS

### 1. WORLD BANK

With the World Bank Country Manager Sahr Kpundeh, discussions focused on Rwanda's experience with infrastructure projects, stakeholder engagement, and ESS implementation. The Bank emphasized that while the Government of Rwanda supports transformative approaches, challenges remain around stakeholder engagement, capacity building, and land acquisition. Regarding CSOs, the Bank noted that "funding remained a perennial issue," limiting the capacity of many organizations to specialize. They also highlighted their training initiatives, including advanced e-procurement and post-professional project management courses at the University of Rwanda.

## 2. OFFICE OF OMBUDSMAN

The Chief Ombudsman Madeleine Nirere and her deputies highlighted their mandate to promote a Rwanda free of corruption. They emphasized the role of citizen awareness, noting that “the Rwanda Governance Scorecard 2024 found 89% of people knew her office.” The team highlighted that APESA would complement their work on environmental justice, particularly regarding land issues, expropriations, and misuse of funds, reinforcing accountability mechanisms at both local and national level



TI Rwanda and PTF Europe Team at the Office of Ombudsman



Meeting at the office of Ombudsman

## 3. MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

The discussions included potential webinars for ministry officials and CSOs, building on successful models by PTF Africa, to further integrate human

rights and social accountability into project implementation. Note that APESA project will be directly implemented under the Ministry of Justice in the Justice and Accountability Programme (JAP).

The Permanent Secretary at MINIJUST, Théophile Mbonera welcomed the project and emphasized its alignment with existing government strategies. On land expropriation, he stressed that “even one case is not tolerable,” highlighting ongoing legal reviews and the need for capacity building among duty bearers.

## 4. LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE ENTITIES DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (LODA)

LODA officials outlined their work in social protection, poverty reduction, and capacity development across the districts. They welcomed APESA’s complementary role and stressed the importance of grievance redress committees at the district level. As noted by LODA, “community meetings held country-wide every Tuesday are important in identifying issues hindering development,” underscoring the project’s focus on enhancing citizen participation in infrastructure planning and monitoring.

## 5. THE CITY OF KIGALI

The City of Kigali, represented by Vice Mayor Dusabimana Fulgence, highlighted the coordination of urban infrastructure projects, including roads, housing, water, and electricity. On expropriation issues, the Vice Mayor acknowledged that only a small fraction of cases reach court, emphasizing preemptive dispute resolution.

He welcomed APESA's involvement, stating that "it is good to have another 'eye' that is not there to criticize but to give information," reinforcing the project's no-harm, supportive approach.

## 6. NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Providence Umurungi, Chairperson of NCHR, emphasized the project's relevance, particularly in expanding access to information for vulnerable groups. She observed that while resettlement processes can be well-intentioned, "the way it is done and the concurrent lack of information is not," highlighting the importance of transparency. NCHR welcomed collaboration in awareness-raising and human rights-based approaches for infrastructure projects.

## 7. EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

The EU, represented by Agnes Nigwire Safari, Project Manager for Civil Society and Governance, underscored the importance of APESA's objectives and highlighted avenues for future engagement, including integration into general CSO meetings and Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) initiatives.

She advised that the Project Coordinator hire the Project Auditor promptly and provided guidance on budget reallocations and reporting requirements, demonstrating the EU's strong oversight and support for effective implementation.

In conclusion, the high-level engagements of the TI Rwanda and PTF Europe team in Rwanda underscored a shared commitment to environmental and social safeguarding, citizen participation, and accountability. Across government, civil society, and development partners, stakeholders reaffirmed the importance of transparent, inclusive, and sustainable infrastructure development. As the APESA project moves forward, these collaborations are poised to strengthen Rwanda's governance landscape, ensuring that infrastructure projects benefit all citizens equitably while safeguarding human rights and the environment.



## KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM APESA BASELINE STUDY

As infrastructure investment continues to expand across Rwanda, effective environmental and social safeguards remain an essential in promoting inclusive and sustainable development. It is in that regard that, Transparency International Rwanda, through the APESA Project has conducted a baseline assessment in 13 districts on how environmental and social safeguards (ESS) are implemented in public infrastructure projects.

Findings revealed that Rwanda has strong legal framework on ESS, including obligation to conduct impact assessments, public consultation, and grievance redress mechanisms. Findings confirmed that those mechanisms are largely in place and functional. However, the assessment highlights gaps between policy commitments and routine implementation,

hence emphasizing the need to amplify monitoring efforts, strengthen institutional capacity, and active stakeholders' engagement.



Rutsiro District: dirt slides along new roadway

Across sectors, the assessment identified best practices and areas for improvement. Road projects generally meet procedural requirements but face challenges related to site safety, environmental protection measures, and consistent use of personal protective equipment.



Cables near public areas without proper safety controls (Nyarugenge District)

Electricity projects show strong adherence to environmental and social safeguard planning and expanded energy access, though improvements are needed in occupational safety practices and community awareness of electrical risks. In the water and sanitation, operational delays after construction were noted, hence underscoring the need to ensure sustainable planning into project lifecycle.

Regarding citizen consultation and feedback, findings reveal that even if citizens attend consultation forums, 67.1% of People Affected by Projects, 79.7% of workers, and 76.9% of nearby citizens reported that they did not have opportunities to influence project decisions. This might be the reason for citizens' satisfaction reported low, evidenced (35.1%) overall citizen satisfaction, (27.5%) satisfaction rate among project-affected persons (PAPs), (35.4%) in workers category and (40.1%) of citizens living near project respectively. Connected to that, access to grievance redress mechanisms and access to justice through legal assistance remains uneven, yet (46.2%) of people affected lost their land.

This reflects the need to deliver legal aid services, strengthen participation and accountability efforts to build trust between communities and implementing agencies.



Houses are very closer to the vertical cliff caused by road construction cuts (Ngoma District)

The findings recommends priority areas for action, notably: “strengthening institutional capacity, improving monitoring tools, enhancing citizen engagement, and ensuring that social safeguards are integrated into construction and operational phases”. The findings provide a foundation for improving data-driven accountability, where progress can be measured and evaluated.

The added value of assessment in the implementation of APESA Project is that, it set a basis for analyzing effectiveness of APESA project interventions especially in the variables of citizen satisfaction on environment and safeguarding, compensation mechanisms, citizen engagement, consultation and their involvement in the project activities.

Gaps identified, provide a basis for designing responsive interventions that protect the environment, promote safety, and respond to the needs and voices of local communities in areas of buildings, electricity, roads and water supply and sanitation (WSS) hence translating policy commitments into measurable outcomes.



## TRAINING OF TRAINERS (TOT) ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDING

***"Building Better, Not Just Bigger":***  
Lessons from Muhanga's Training of Trainers under APESA Project.

From 10–20 November 2025, Muhanga District hosted a landmark Training of Trainers (ToT) event under the APESA project, organized by TI-Rwanda with support from the Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF) Europe. The training convened 43 participants including district leaders, civil society, and development partners, to strengthen Rwanda's capacity in environmental and social safeguarding as the nation advances toward Vision 2050.

The Vice Mayor for Economic Affairs of Muhanga District opened the training sessions.

In his remarks, he underscored that sustainable development must respect environment, safeguard communities, and uphold human dignity while implementing infrastructure development project



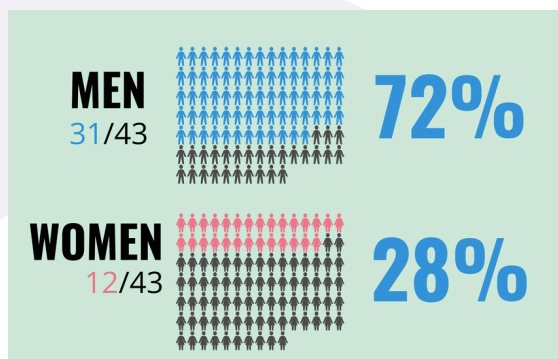
TOT opening ceremony officiated by Muhanga district authority alongside TI-Rwanda and PTF Europe



ERIC BIZIMANA, Vice Mayor for Economic Affairs, Muhanga District

“Sustainable development is not only about physical structures; it is about ensuring that our projects respect the environment by safeguarding community”: Said Vice Mayor.

Trainers included international experts from PTF and three local specialists, ensuring both global and local perspectives of the event.



The training was attended by 72% men and 28% women, representing ministries, government institutions, districts, and CSOs in environmental and social justice niche.

## COVERED THEMES

The themes covered were grounded on environmental and social standards (ESS) as promulgated by World Bank for borrowers' use to comply with the requirements before implementation of infrastructure projects. The major themes covered by the training include Environmental and Social Risk Management or ESS1, Labor, Community Health, and Safety or ESS2 & ESS4, Land Acquisition and Resettlement or ESS5, Biodiversity and Natural Resource Management or ESS6, Cultural Heritage and Stakeholder Engagement or ESS8 & ESS10, and Social Accountability as a Cross-Cutting Pillar

- **FIELD VISIT**

Field visit was one of the methods used during the training; Participants visited World Bank-financed RTDA projects, including roads linking Nyanza-Nyamata and Karongi-Kiziba refugee camp.



Visit to Karongi – Mahama refugee's camp road

They engaged with contractors, RTDA officials, and community grievance committees, witnessing firsthand how safeguards and accountability mechanisms operate on the ground.

Rwanda’s legal framework—anchored in the Constitution, Environment Law, ESIA regulations, and land policies, provides strong foundations. Yet challenges persist like limited technical capacity, weak accountability, and gaps between policy and practice.

The ToT underscored that safeguards are not obstacles, but enablers of inclusive, transparent, and sustainable development. By equipping trainers with knowledge of the World Bank’s Environmental and Social Standards (ESS1–ESS10), the APESA project strengthens local governance and accountability.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Sustained follow-up, institutional support, and continuous learning will be crucial to ensure that trained trainers cascade knowledge effectively, bridging the gap between policy and practice, and ensuring Rwanda’s infrastructure truly serves its people.





## LOCAL AUTHORITIES WELCOME APESA PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Local governments have warmly welcomed the introduction of a new project aimed at supporting the implementation of infrastructure initiatives with greater consideration for community needs, an aspect that has often been overlooked in traditional project design and execution. This initiative represents a significant step forward in promoting inclusive development, where sustainability is measured not only by physical outcomes but also by the extent to which communities are engaged in shaping them.

- **TRUE PROGRESS IN SUSTAINABILITY BEGINS WITH ENGAGEMENT.**

Between 28 August 2025 and 28 October 2025, a series of courtesy

visits were conducted across 13 districts covered by the APESA project. These engagements were led by the TI Rwanda team, who spearheaded discussions on the importance of such a project in Rwanda, particularly at the local government level.

The team emphasized how the initiative would foster a citizen-centered model of governance, ensuring that community voices-often overlooked during the design and implementation of infrastructure projects-would be meaningfully integrated.

The project presentation captured the attention of district authorities, who hold the mandate to safeguard both the environment and community welfare.

Their interest was demonstrated through a strong commitment to support the project's implementation, including the nomination of a District Focal Person to work closely with TI Rwanda.

The interactions were ended by identification of four sectors per district to be involved in the APESA coverage activities. The selection of these sectors was guided by a defined criterion: priority was given to sectors where public infrastructure development projects were being implemented under the pro-poor basket fund financed by KfW (German Development Cooperation Bank) and Agence Française de Développement (AFD).



TI-Rwanda team Visit to Rutsiro District

In districts where such projects were not present, Mayors proposed alternative sectors based on the type of infrastructure development underway in their respective districts.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

A key lesson learned from this engagement is the critical importance of early and structured involvement of local stakeholders.

By prioritizing dialogue and courtesy visits before rolling out activities, the APESA project ensured that stakeholders were not only informed but actively invested in shaping its direction.

## SEVERAL INSIGHTS STAND OUT:

**Ownership through participation:** District leaders demonstrated stronger commitment once they understood the project's relevance to citizen-centered governance. Their nomination of focal persons shows that early engagement builds ownership.

**Alignment with local priorities:** Using clear criteria for sector selection, such as ongoing pro-poor infrastructure projects, helped align the initiative with existing development agendas, increasing its legitimacy and sustainability.

**Demand for inclusivity:** The desire of district leaders to have all sectors covered highlights the appetite for broader community involvement, reinforcing that inclusivity is a driver of trust and accountability.

**Practical collaboration:** The rapid assessments conducted during discussions illustrate how engagement can quickly move from dialogue to actionable steps, bridging policy intent with operational reality.



## STRENGTHENING CITIZEN VOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH GRASSROOTS COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Despite Rwanda's strong infrastructure progress, weak enforcement of environmental and social safeguards and limited citizen awareness and participation hinder effective public project implementation, contrary to Article 48 of the Constitution, which mandates all Rwandans to actively participate in national development.

### FROM GAP TO ACTION: TI-RW'S CCC INITIATIVE

To bridge that gap, since 2012 TI-RW initiated an establishment of the structure entitled "Citizen Concerned Committees (CCCs)"

as a community-based mechanism to enhance citizen participation and accountability. The establishment of CCCs is in line with Rwanda's vision 2050 priorities regarding "ensuring efficient and accountable institutions for socioeconomic transformation."



Community gathering in Ngoma District

Citizen Concern Committees are voluntary, sector-level grassroots structures that serve as a bridge between citizens, local authorities and duty bearers. They amplify citizen voices, safeguard community interests, and promote transparency, integrity, and accountability in public service delivery, with particular attention to environmental protection and social welfare.

## DEMOCRATIC SELECTION FOR STRONGER ACCOUNTABILITY

Members of CCCs are elected through community assemblies (Inteko z'Abaturage) democratically, ensuring openness, inclusiveness, and close collaboration with district and sector authorities. This is a distinctive approach used by TI Rwanda in establishing CCCs, where members are elected by their peers. This enables communities to choose individuals they consider to have the commitment and capacity, and whom community members recognize as people who understand their challenges at the local level and are able to help find solutions.

The committees are expected to enhance citizen awareness, strengthen community participation, improve monitoring of public infrastructure projects, reduce corruption risks, and foster stronger collaboration between citizens, local authorities, and civil society actors.



Democratic selection

## ACHIEVEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

Initially, before the EU-funded "Alliances and Partnerships for Evidence-led Environmental and Social Safeguarding Accountability (APESA) Project, locally known as Ijwi Ryanjye mu Iterambere Rirambye (INTERA), 472 Citizen-Concerned Committee (CCC) members were present in 59 sectors across 11 districts (Huye, Nyamasheke, Rubavu, Musanze, Kayanza, Burera, Nyabihu, Nyamagabe, Kamonyi, Gicumbi and Nyaruguru).

Through APESA initiative, an additional 336 CCC members were successfully established in 42 new sectors in 11 districts (Ngoma, Kicukiro, Nyarugenge, Gatsibo, Muhanga, Ruhango, Rulindo, Rusizi, Rutsiro, Rwamagana and and Nyamasheke).

This brings the total number of CCC members to 808 in 101 sectors across 21 districts nationwide. Each CCC is composed of eight elected members representing women, men, youth, and persons with disabilities.



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