INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

## Building the Rwanda Revenue Authority

After a 1994 genocide that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, Rwanda's tax collection collapsed. Aside from its desperate need for money to pay for reconstruction, the new government was also determined to break its dependence on foreign donors by becoming entirely self-funding. To do that, it had to convince a traumatized and distrustful public to pay its fair share of taxes. In 1998, the government replaced the existing tax and customs departments with the Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA), a semiautonomous tax agency. The RRA overhauled tax collection procedures, increased staff capacity, improved information management, and launched a massive and sustained public education campaign in an effort to build a new social contract. As a result, in 2017 Rwanda collected in three weeks the same amount of tax it had collected annually a dozen years earlier. From 1998 to 2017, Rwanda's tax-to-GDP ratio improved from 10.8% to 16.7%, and total tax revenues collected grew more than 10-fold to $1.3 billion. By 207, the government financed 62% of its annual budget from domestic tax revenues, up from just 39% in 2000, marking significant progress towards ending donor dependence.

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Rwanda Revenue Authority office in Umutara, Rwanda. Photo by Antoinetorrens. [CC BY-SA 3.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], from Wikimedia Commons.

## Featured ISS Interview

In this interview, **Richard Tusabe** discusses the early challenges that the Rwanda Revenue Authority (RRA) faced in terms of capacity building and reinvigorating the economy after the Rwandan genocide. He also outlines the path forward for the RRA, including using big data and analytics to monitor compliance. The commissioner general of the RRA, Tusabe emphasizes the importance of the agency's autonomy and its zero-tolerance policy for corruption as well as the larger government's endorsement of technology as an enabler.



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