Can IT leapfrog taxation development in Africa? ATAF Congress in Madagascar!

The African Tax Research Network (ATRN), founded by the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF), is holding its Third Annual Congress in Antananarivo, Madagascar from 4-6 September 2017. Hosted by the Direction Générale des Impôts of Madagascar (Madagascar’s Revenue Authority) and in partnership with l’Institut Nationale des Sciences Comptables et de l’Administration d’Entreprise (National Institute of accounting and management sciences - INSCAE), the retained theme for this year’s edition of the Congress is: “A Modern and Effective Taxation System to advance Domestic Resource Mobilisation in Africa: The Role of Information Technology and Tax Information Exchange.”

The world is changing rapidly with the latest technologies transforming our economies and how the private sector and government administrations do business and provide services to citizens. Africa must be ready to wrestle with these changes. New and profound innovations in Information Technology present African countries with important decisions and opportunities on how to use these to their benefit.

Organised around policy panel discussions and parallel research sessions, key Congress’s highlights will revolve around discussing how harnessing Information Technology (IT) systems can leapfrog the development of taxation in Africa. Discussions will also be centred around how IT can help collect information from the real economy and generate statistics to inform macro-economic policies at country levels.

ATRN has called upon tax researchers and academics in the field, to gather in Madagascar to share insights with their peers on modern technology and how the work of tax administrations can be transformed. “The work of ATRN is to continually challenge African researchers and academics to contribute to the growing body of tax knowledge about the continent and of information that can help us meet the challenges of our time.”, says Dr Nara Monkam, ATRN Chair and ATAF Director of Research.

This perspective is underscored by Mr Logan Wort, the Executive Secretary of ATAF Executive Secretary as he affirms that “This is the moment for us as Africans to shape a homegrown thought leadership on taxation, write our own narratives and thus encourage Africans to develop African solutions. That is at the heart of the purpose and thrust of ATRN.”

For the ATRN, this Congress and other similar events offer a seminal opportunity to raise the critical importance of taxation research in Africa. The Network believes that tax research is necessary to maintain accountability in governments, to help increase the tax base, to support and encourage peer-learning and to make it easier to evaluate tax reforms. An event of this nature helps grow a new crop of researchers and academics in the field as it creates an enabling environment for research by giving researchers a platform to present and publish their research, helps raise the bar of excellence and gives them the necessary recognition and credibility.

Real and significant tax reform in Africa will only happen if it relies on evidenced-based, credible and recognised research. Effective research is a tool for building knowledge and efficient learning on tax policy and administration. It is also a means to understand various issues, a means of proving what is conjecture and finding support for the facts. In the final analysis, it is a means to find, gauge, and seize opportunities for the continent.

The process is such that all the papers to be presented at the Congress are peer reviewed in a double-blind review process before they are considered for presentation at the Congress, for publication in the ATRN Working Paper Series and Policy Briefs and ultimately in an African
multidisciplinary Tax Journal. ATRN believes that academic rigour and discipline is necessary in changing the African narrative. The creation of new knowledge that is reliable and scholarly needs to become the new culture amongst Africans who are serious about changing the fortunes of African economies.

**About ATRN**
The African Tax Research Network (ATRN), founded and hosted by the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF), is a platform of choice for African tax research that aims to facilitate African capacity for credible research in tax policy, administration, law and leadership. The ATRN was created to meet the need for identifying potential synergies and linkage areas between academics and tax officials from the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF) member countries.

The objectives of ATRN are to:

- Generate research results for use by policy-makers and tax administrators.
- Promote links between tax researchers, policy-makers and stakeholders.
- Build an independent network of academics, policy-makers, tax administrators and independent tax researchers in Africa.
- Influence the African tax research agenda.

**About ATAF**
The African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF) is an international platform to enhance the performance of tax administrations in Africa. The Forum does this through developing a sustainable member-focussed organisation; fostering efficient and effective revenue authorities; driving the knowledge hub on tax matters; and informing and influencing the regional and global dialogue on taxation. Improved tax systems will increase accountability of the State to its citizens, enhance domestic resource mobilisation and thereby foster inclusive economic growth. Now in its eighth year of operation and headquartered in Pretoria, ATAF is an important voice in taxation globally with its membership of 38 African tax administrations and, therefore, the Forum is well positioned to influence the global dialogue on tax administration and tax policy.

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