

**REPORT OF AN INTERACTIVE SESSION ON BUDGET
ADVOCACY FOR CSOs IN THE WEST AFRICAN SUB-
REGION**

organised by

**CIVIL SOCIETY LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY CENTRE
(CISLAC)**

with support from

ACTIONAID INTERNATIONAL

DATE: JULY 1 – 2, 2008

VENUE: NANET HOTELS, ABUJA, NIGERIA

Introduction:

A two-day interactive session on budget advocacy among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) within the West African sub-region took place at NANET Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria between July 1 and 2, 2008. The session drew participants from Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

DAY ONE: Morning Session

In a welcome address, the Executive Director of Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), Mr. Auwal Musa (Rafsanjani) disclosed that the meeting was made possible with support from Action Aid International, adding that CISLAC was interested in helping to develop the capacity of CSOs to constructively engage the legislature for an effective policy intervention and advocacy on issues around budget.

“We realised that at different country levels in West Africa, Civil Society groups have made concerted efforts towards advancing budget advocacy work. Nevertheless, such efforts have not been properly synchronized and documented for possible cross- regional experience sharing. This, for us is a huge gap that needs to be filled, as there has been a missing link between the civil society engagement work on budget and parliamentary work.

“We plan to expand our work on legislative budgeting to a regional level to afford civil society activists working on budget issues across the sub-region to share experiences and exchange best practices towards enthroning good governance in their respective countries. CISLAC is working with other groups to ensure reforms aimed at entrenching the culture of democracy, the rule of law, transparency and accountability in Nigeria and the West African sub-region,” he said.

He also added that CISLAC had engaged the federal and state legislatures in Nigeria on varied issues bordering on capacity building, constituency relations, budget transparency, due process and good governance. He organization, he further disclosed had organised several activities on budget work such as: a training workshop on “*Budget Process by Civil Society*,” for members of the National Assembly and State Assemblies in October of 2005 with support from the European Commission; workshop on “*Budget Process for Legislative Support Staff of the House of Representatives and Senate Committees on Appropriations, Finance and Women Affairs*,” in October, 2005 supported by the British Council, “*Capacity Building Training on Budget for Legislative Support Staff of the House of Representatives and Senate Committees on Appropriations and Finance*,” in December, 2005, supported by Heinrich Boll Foundation. Also, in December, 2007, we held a budget summit for the National Assembly Committees on Finance and Appropriation in collaboration with the National Assembly Policy Analysis and Research Project (PARP), with support from Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

“Our engagement with the legislature also led to the enactment of some key legislation like the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) Act, and the Public Procurement Act, as well as the ongoing efforts to ensure the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill, the National Assembly Budget Office Bill and the Whistle Blowers’ Bill. We therefore

believe that there is need for CSOs to deepen their engagement with legislature through constructive engagement,” he noted.

Goodwill Message:

In goodwill message Hussaini Abdu, Governance Coordinator for Africa, Action Aid International, said that the past two decades was a period of public engagement with budget process in most parts of the world. He contended that before now budget was left in the hands of professionals who made budgets and executed them due to many years of military rule in the continent.

He noted that even in the advanced democracies, participatory budgeting had become popular. Action Aid International, he added, was concerned with broader perspectives to the fiscal policy, hence the introduction of its ELBAG – Economic Literacy and Budget Accountability for Governance project.

He was of the view that the budget process could not be engaged without properly understanding the basic issues in it. He believes that economics needed to be demystified for all the people to understand, including how to raise issues in national budget at the local level. It was based on this fact, he added, that Action Aid International encouraged groups in West Africa to work around ELBAG, adding that such engagement was being encouraged in the Eastern and Southern Africa. He therefore said that the experience sharing session was intended to engender popular participation and the need for civil society groups to work with the people.

Keynote Address:

The Director-General, Budget Office of the Federation of Nigeria, Dr Bright Okogu gave the keynote address, highlighting the basic efforts of government of Nigeria to involve the people in its budget making mechanisms. He said that the previous practice was the top-down approach. “But at the moment we insist that we must reach out to the people and get a feed back on all aspects of our budget.”

He noted that although budget development and advocacy works started years back in more developed economies, it first took root successfully in middle income countries, such as India, Brazil and Israel predominantly among civil society organizations. He added that more community based or grassroots organizations had of recent emerged among African countries and other developing countries in their engagement with the budget process.

“Government in the process of meeting its responsibility for delivery of modern, high quality services and promoting national development, has identified Public-Private Partnerships as a crucial component,” he said. He noted that such efforts were bringing in new investments, new ideas and improved management.

He however, lamented the economic decay of Nigeria in the pre-1999 years, arguing that 54 per cent of Nigerians still live below the poverty line. “In an effort at national reorientation and upliftment from the challenges of the nation’s classification among the world’s poorest countries, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the Vision 2020-20, the MDGs and the President’s seven-point agenda were at various times conceived as strategies towards lifting Nigeria to the heights it should occupy in the comity of nations.”

He noted that efforts of the Nigerian government were captured in its Medium Term Sector Strategy (MTSS), which encouraged the involvement of the civil society and other stakeholders in the budgetary process.

“While global efforts at building budgeting groups are yielding fruits at various levels, a regional network of budget monitoring institutions has emerged in Africa,” he said, adding that the civil society had demonstrated the capacity to reach communities that were hitherto inaccessible by government agencies.

He said the framework for the 2009 budget is to engage all stakeholders, so they can be part of the MTSS process, and that the civil society in Nigeria had of recent earned respect as an effective tool for project monitoring.

Discussion on the Keynote Address:

While discussing the keynote address, Eze Onyekpere of Budget Transparency Network (BTN) Nigeria noted that the Fiscal Responsibility Bill already signed into law was one of the bills recently sent back to the National Assembly of Nigeria by President Umaru Yar’Adua. He said the Auditor-General of the Federation even recently organized a workshop to mobilize the states to embrace the law. He added that a quarterly report on the performance of the budget ought to be made public, but it was not so, and that the civil society never had the opportunity to be part of last year’s budget process.

On his part, Oladayo Olaide, the Economic Programme Officer for Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), expressed concern that the civil society participation in the budget process was only at the planning stage. “But we want more participation at the implementation stage where it gets more difficult. What are you doing to redress this?” he asked.

George-Hill Anthony of the Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group (NDEBUMOG) asked of what the Budget Office was doing to allow the public access annual budgets.

Response:

In response, Dr. Okogu said that Nigeria’s budget information was on the website of the Federal Ministry of Finance and that of the Budget Office of the Federation. He said all necessary requirements on the budget were captured in the Fiscal Responsibility law. According to him, it was nice for civil society to monitor budgets but that if the government was to fund such monitoring, it would compromise its independence. “It is good for such groups to have neutral funding for such monitoring,” he noted, adding that “we can introduce you to those who can grant support”.

He announced at the event that the MTSS of the federal government of Nigeria would start in the next two weeks. He added that a civil society organization had been contacted to identify a few, objective CSOs to be part of the process. He affirmed that the FR Bill was signed into law last year, noting that government officials working on the FR legislation and the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) had to tour some advanced countries with similar experiences before they were passed into law. Capital allocations every quarter were published and Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) were fully aware of this.

After the tea break, the experience sharing session began with the topic, **“Expectations of Civil Society Public Expenditure Management Work in Nigeria,”** delivered by **Eze Onyekpere Esq.**, Lead Director, Centre for Social Justice in Nigeria.

He opened the presentation by focusing on the experiences of the author from the work of Socio Economic Rights Initiative (SERI), Budget Transparency Network (BTN), Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) up to personal experiences which are not strictly organizational. “The term Public Expenditure Management (PEM) is used in this presentation as against the more narrow focus of budget advocacy work requested by the organizers”.

He said for the first time in recent history, Nigeria had an elected legislature in 1999 which was expected to work in accordance with the provisions of the 1999 Constitution - with rooms for public hearings, popular participation in law making including the annual appropriation, a public accounts committee, etc. The second was the application of existing and latent capacities in civil society to PEM work. The third was that it coincided with the development fad where donors became overtly interested in funding civil society budget work.

The discussion was divided into capacity building, research and documentation, advocacy for policy and legal reform, influencing appropriation, networking and information dissemination, he said.

He listed the group’s efforts to include the legal regulation of budgeting, executive budgeting practices, legislative budgeting practices, rights based and pro-poor approaches, gender and the budget, and civil society strategies.

At the level of local governments, SERI in the South East, Nigeria ran capacity building training for CSOs and LGA personnel on the rights based approach to budgeting. The thrust was to empower the grassroots to engage local governance and its budgeting for effective service delivery. Issues of empowering the voice, needs assessment, community, etc, mobilization came up strongly in addition to general budgetary engagement strategies.

SERI also ran specific and customized training for some agencies including the training for Trocaire Partners in Nigeria, the Benue State NGO Network, Oxfam partners in Nigeria, etc. SERI was also part of a collaboration that involved the Nigeria Labour Congress, Justice Development and Peace Commission of the Catholic Church and Community Action for Popular Participation in training and engagement of the budget process through a programme on civil society oversight on the management and public expenditure.

Under BTN, the following were undertaken:

- ❖ Capacity building for engagement of the federal procurement reforms
- ❖ Capacity building for MDAs and civil society organizations in Abia State for the development of the MTSS and MTEF.
- ❖ Training on PEM reforms for civil society groups in Cross Rivers, Ebonyi and Kano States and

- ❖ Further training for the engagement of procurement reforms was undertaken for civil society groups in Cross River and Ebonyi States

The following manuals and readers have been developed:

- ❖ *The Budget and the Citizen (A Manual for Popular Participation)*- SERI
- ❖ *Civil Society and the Budget- A Reader*- SERI
- ❖ *Critical Issues in Public Expenditure Management*-BTN

He said the group was involved in the civil society budget summits to guarantee the rights of the vulnerable groups.

SERI and BTN, he said, participated extensively in various advocacy projects for policy and legal reform. *Civil Society and the Budget- A Reader* dedicates many of its chapters to advocacy for legal and policy reform. Incidentally, he disclosed many of the laws that it penciled down for enactment or change have either been enacted or are in the works.

BTN was also engaging state level procurement reforms. Following the training for civil society actors in Cross River and Ebonyi State, model state level procurement legislation was drafted and published by BTN. This was being used by CSOs in the state for the engagement of the reforms.

He said the achievements of his group included; kick-starting civil society work on the budget and PEM. “A good number of civil society organizations working on PEM today are beneficiaries of our initial capacity building training and advocacy” he said

- ❖ Contribution to the enactment of various reform legislation including Fiscal Responsibility (FRA) and the Public Procurement (PPA) Acts. The FRA has come with a liberalized space and locus standi for civil society to seek the enforcement of its provisions while the PPA has officially given civil society an opportunity to monitor procurement proceedings.
- ❖ Giving civil society a strong voice in governmental circles through informed analysis and advocacy. Civil society currently gets invitations for pre budget briefing and the yearly drafting and review of MTSS.

The second lead paper titled “**Overview of the Oversight Role of Appropriations Committee in Legislative Budget Process,**” was presented by Dr. H. O. OLUTOYE, *Deputy Director/Secretary, Appropriation Committee, House of Representatives, National Assembly, Abuja, Nigeria.*

He said the issue of budgeting was becoming more contentious in Nigeria with the advent of democracy in 1999 for the following reasons:

- The power of the purse was meant to change from the Executive to the Legislators which the Executive finds difficult to accept.
- During the Military era, there were no hard and fast rules on budget exercise as it was not based on legislation.

- During the Military, there were no separation of powers, there was no conflict talk less of resolution but with the advent of democracy, conflicts between the Executive and the Legislators on Budget emerged.
- The Assembly lacks the wherewithal to handle budget as it should.

He explained the workings of the legislature with regards to budget making, income and expenditure of government. He also gave an insight into the various stages of the budget process, including its formulation by government agencies, public hearing, ceiling for each department, approval by the executive branch of government and its eventual presentation to the legislature for passage into an appropriation law as required by the Constitution. The function of the legislature, he added, included oversight of government expenditure.

He identified some of the shortcomings of Nigeria's legislative budget process to include; Ill equipped bureaucracy i.e. lack of technical support which can be provided by the Budget Office if it had been well established; Assertiveness of the Executive on budget matters; Ignorance on the part of the Assembly; Greed and corruptive tendencies in handling of budget which makes the Assembly to be subservient to MDAs; PAC has not impacted on the budget process; MDAs do not rendering report as at when due on the implementation.

He suggested that sufficient time must be given for the processing of the budget by the legislature; setting up of a budget circle to avoid delays; establishment of a Budget Office; better training for budget staff; detailed breakdown of the budget, and proper reporting of budget performance by agencies and departments.

Discussion:

Oladayo Olaide demanded to know the status of the Bills recently returned to the National Assembly by President Yar'Adua.

Eze Onyekpere noted that the Audit Bill was not passed in the last dispensation, and his group was still having discussion with National Assembly committee for its presentation and public hearing. He said he had written the Auditor-General of the Federation, written to Accountant-General of the Federation and tried to bring in gender lenses into its discussion. He added that the Public Finance Management Act of 1959 was not also repealed.

George-Hill Anthony demanded to know the impression of Dr Olutoye on plans to involve the civil society in monitoring budget making and implementation. What happens to unused funds, if the president fails to authorize its usage and to what account should the excess crude oil revenue be paid into? He argued that there was the need for ministries to be involved in the conception of budget plans instead of arbitrary allocation of budget envelopes.

Ahonma Okoro argued that since the lawmakers are closer to the people they were in a more convenient position to make adjustments to the budgets. If National Assembly (NASS) leaves up to its responsibility, he said, it can identify needs of the communities before comparing them with the government proposals.

Omar Jobe of the Gambia said that if legislative oversight was not working very well in Nigeria, what role has the civil society played? He questioned if there was anything like participatory process for civil society to engage the budget process. Was there a civil society group in Nigeria that follows up budget implementation?

Ene Obi of Action Aid Nigeria commended the presentation. She lamented that it was frustrating that you have someone who can work and ready to work, but some will not allow things to work. If we have the likes of you (Olutoye) and the DG Budget (Okogu), it means something good is happening, she noted. She said the NASS can call on the Auditor-General and Accountant-General of the Federation to account for the previous years' budgets so the people can compare their performances. In Brazil, budget starts in March, she added, suggesting that the civil society should push for the next budget to be started in May latest.

Uchenna Utoko of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) narrated an experience to show that the federal lawmakers were making efforts to engage the civil society. She said the House of Representatives committee wanted to summon Ministry of Women Affairs on gender issues in the budget with support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). She said CDD was invited to the session and "We raised issues and they made lots of changes and asked Ministry of Women Affairs to tie their programmes to health and other gender matters".

Oladayo Olaide of OSIWA asked whether the audit report was a public document. What is the principle behind oversight functions in the ongoing probe of ministries and agencies since monies are never recovered? It is only as useful as exposing them, but they keep walking freely in society, he said. He wondered how to advise NASS on how to avoid underestimation and overestimation in its activities.

Iliya Yohanna from Jos, Nigeria, asked: Why is the budget office is still not in place? He rejected calls by the presenter that those in the federal legislature should be voted out because of their insensitivity to national development. Yohanna argued that the older the better for our democracy process.

Response:

Mr. Olutoye, in a response to the comments on his presentation, noted that unused funds realized towards the end of 2007 was about N300bn, and that NASS ploughed all into the budget. He explained that the excess crude oil revenue was not part of that. He said that the excess crude revenue ought to be kept in the Federation Account, saying that the current disbursement of the funds was not based on demand and appropriation.

He said the NASS made up of people from different constituencies, and former President Olusegun Obasanjo normally gave N50 billion to the two chambers for constituency projects. Each lawmaker submitted requests. To that extent they participated in the conception of budget, he said. He added that NASS also has its own agenda. The Nigeria's satellite programme, SATCOM was initiated by NASS and incorporated into the budget with an allocation of N4 billion. He noted, "We will not have a common agenda until we are able to have a Legislative Budget Office".

He stressed the need for the civil society groups to be involved in oversight functions. There should be town hall meetings at the village level for

representatives to put up projects ahead of budget making. In implementation, Nigerians are always scared of challenging the government and this will continue until we have the Freedom of Information Bill passed, he said. He was confident that if the CSOs alert NASS on defects in projects execution they will be acted upon. He suggested that all monetary releases should be published as was done under former Finance Minister, Mrs Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. He argued that audited accounts of previous years were not related to projects and that until we have project audit we will continue to have the problem.

On the time table for the budget, he said it will never happen until the Budget Office Bill was passed, adding that there must be discipline in allocations in budget. He also said that the pattern of expenditure at the NASS made it impossible for the legislators to exercise any moral right to oversight ministries and agencies.

Afternoon Session

The session was devoted to the experiences of some West African countries, namely the Gambia, Sierra Leone and Senegal.

An experience titled, "**Legislative Advocacy in the Gambia,**" was delivered by Mr Omar Ousman Jobe of "**Pro-Poor Advocacy Group,**" the Gambia.

He began by explaining the mission of the group, which is "To serve as a watchdog agency to advocate for the improved standards of living of the poor, the marginalized and excluded; especially women, girls and children by empowering them to actively participate in transparent and accountable development of pro-poor policies, projects and programmes, budgetary formulation processes and expenditure tracking.

He said the group was involved in scrutinizing the National Budget from the perspective of the poor, and facilitate the participation of communities in the budget process. He said the group was the first civil society in the Gambia to engage the Parliament in terms of capacity building and oversight functions.

Some of the advocacy activities of the group, he disclosed, include the demand for "Education for All (in partnership with Education for All Network, Commonwealth Education Fund and ANCEFA); The MDGs (in partnership with the National Planning Commission and the UNDP); Child-Friendly Budgeting (in partnership with the Child Protection Alliance and UNICEF); Gender Responsive Budgeting (in partnership with the Women's Bureau and UNICEF); Women's Bill (in partnership with Women's Bureau, UNICEF & Action Aid); Domestication of International Conventions and Instruments.

Jobe said the group was engaging the budget process in all the four regions of the country (Community, Ward and Regional Action Plans); an interface with government ministries in budget plans, and the defence of community budgets by officials.

He added that the group was also involved in; Building Capacity to Track the National Budget Workshop for the Education Select Committee of the National Assembly and CSO partners (Financed by the Commonwealth Education Fund); Strengthening the Public Accounts and Public Enterprise Committees of the

National Assembly (PAC & PEC) to exercise their scrutiny and oversight function over public enterprises (Accountability & Transparency in practice).

Mr Aly Sagne of **La Lumiere** of Senegal told the participants that the group was working on advocacy on child rights, budget and democracy.

He said the activities of *La Lumiere* and other civil society groups had in 2005 made the Senegalese government to sign a convention on mining, while another one was signed in 2007 between the government and mining companies operating in the East of Senegal.

He disclosed that the work of the CSOs had resulted in measures that would mitigate the negative impact of mining on local communities. He added that the group was working to make mining companies more accountable and respect human rights, as well as increase involvement of CSOs in mining issues, reform to enhance participation of local population and laws that protect mining communities. Part of this, he said, was the ongoing effort to push government to compel companies to give information on their activities.

He disclosed that *La Lumiere* has the support of OSIWA, EU and other donors in its advocacy to enlighten the Senegalese on civic education and popular participation.

Such efforts, he said, had caused government in 2006 to, for the first time call a meeting of a social mining programme, including communities, mining companies and CSOs. The Minister of Mines had to set up a committee to monitor the implementation of the social mining fund. In April of 2008, the government developed a social programme on mining to the tune of 3.6 billion CFA. He added that with the support of OSIWA, the group organized a workshop on participatory budget with Minister of Mines, CSOs, media and CBOs in attendance, the first of such efforts in the country.

The major challenge for the organization, he said, was how to push the government to develop a participatory document on mining; make companies more accountable; and increased CSOs monitoring of the process.

Reflecting on the Abuja session, he said the scenario in Senegal was different. “We start from top and get process down,” he said, adding, “we want the process to have a national focus, but the political context will not allow it”.

Mrs. Lavina Banduah of the **National Accountability Group**, Freetown, gave the perspective of civil society budget work in Sierra Leone.

She explained that the National Accountability Group (NAG) is a civil society membership organization partnering with the Transparency International’s global network, TIRI of the United Kingdom, and the Anti-Corruption Commission in Sierra Leone. It is dedicated to achieving greater accountability, transparency and integrity in private and public affairs, curbing corruption, and holding local and national government accountable to the people of Sierra Leone.

“Our Mission is to empower the citizenry of Sierra Leone through information, education and participation, to demand accountability, transparency and integrity from government, the public and private sector and civil society,” she said.

“We work to ensure accountability and transparency and fight corruption by bringing together relevant actors from government, civil society, business and media to promote greater transparency in business and government, to work for citizen’s rights to information and to lobby government to implement anti-corruption reforms.”

She noted that as a result of NAG’s strategy of establishing constructive partnerships with relevant institutions to heighten the impact of its project outcomes, NAG was involved in constant negotiations with the Ministry of Finance which consequently led to it being invited to join the Budget Oversight Committee of the Ministry to monitor the drafting and implementation of the National Budget and facilitate the active participation of civil society in the process. This committee was formed as a result of the passage of the Government Budgeting and Accountability Act of 2004 which makes provision for civil society to make an input in the budget process.

According to her, NAG held a two-day Civil Society Summit aimed at evaluating the 2006 budget for participants to develop an understanding of how best to address their concerns regarding the formulation of the 2007 Budgetary Allocations which was to be discussed in Parliament with reference to the Appropriation Figures presented by the Executive arm of the government. The summit attracted civil society organizations, youth groups, professional and business associations from the twelve districts and the Western Area, and also International Organizations and Permanent Secretaries from various Ministries.

Mrs. Banduah also revealed that a two-day summit to be held in Freetown will aim at evaluating the 2008 budget in order for participants to develop an understanding of how best to address their concerns for the upcoming 2009 budget, which will be discussed with reference to the appropriation figures presented by the Executive.

As a result of its efforts, she noted, NAG is member of the following: The Budget Advocacy Network (BAN) which is a network of civil society organizations advocating for a pro-poor budget in Sierra Leone. BAN has drafted an analysis of the budget process from 2003 -2007; The West African Budget Transparency Initiative; The West African Civil Society Budget Advocacy Project of OSIWA; The Budget Oversight Committee of the Ministry of Finance in Sierra Leone; NAG has been in close contact with the International Budget Project (IBP)

Discussions:

Discussions on the three presentations were taken simultaneously for proper synthesis of common issues that permeate the region on the subject matter.

Iliya Yohana of CBD-NGO Forum demanded to know what efforts were being made by the groups to relate with other organizations in their respective countries.

Ene Obi of Action Aid Nigeria stressed the need for synergies among groups working on budget at all levels. She said many government officials do not have the capacity to relate with the CSOs on budget information. She called for increased capacity for officials of Local Governments and the states.

Responses:

Lavina Banduah in her response said the media in Sierra Leone were more interested in sensational stories to the detriment of CSO activities.

Oumar Jobe agreed with most of the comments and demanded for more interactive sessions on several other aspects of development, good governance and transparency among the civil society organizations in the sub-region.

Aly Sagne noted that he was delighted to discover that issues on budget, transparency and gender remained a common feature among countries of West Africa, and called for concerted efforts to overcome shortcomings in the interest of the people.

The presentation by Action Aid Nigeria was delivered by Ms. Ene Obi who represented the Country Director, Dr. Otive Igbuzor. The presentation was titled “**Overview of the Action Aid Budget Work in Nigeria**”. She described budget as the most important instrument in any modern state apart from the constitution. She, therefore, expressed the need for citizen’s participation and parliamentary oversight.

Budgets have crucial roles in the planning and control of the economic activities of any nation, she said.

She listed the functions of budget to include: ensuring government accountability; planning for national development, and as a socio-economic development – allocation and distribution.

Action Aid, she noted, was involved in promoting citizen’s participation in governance through public policy analysis with support of EU, and that the group had developed a centre for budget and policy advocacy; manuals on public finance analysis and HIV Budget tracking.

She disclosed that Action Aid Nigeria was engaged in the development of the civil society through capacity building through education; research and analysis; legislative advocacy; media advocacy; popular participation and gender responsive budget.

Obi disclosed that Action Aid Nigeria organized CSO summits on budgets, health, education and HIV/AIDS. She explained that such efforts were held for stakeholders at different levels. She added that the body had created network of other NGOs on issues of development and empowerment in Nigeria.

DAY TWO

The second day of the session witnessed presentations by local NGOs on their engagement with the budget process at various levels in Nigeria.

The first of such experience was relayed by Dr. Abiodun Folawewo of the Centre for Private-Public Cooperation (CPPC), Ibadan. It was titled ``**Highlights of Advocacy Activities on Budget and Budgetary Process in Nigeria**”.

The mission of the organization, he said, was to become a lead agent for the promotion of democracy, good governance and transparency in Nigeria and other developing countries. Therefore, there was the need for partnership, as government alone cannot do it in terms of development, he noted.

The strategy adopted, he said, include fostering of mutual understanding and cooperation among public and private sectors of the economy, as well as the civil society groups; providing intellectual and technical support towards the empowerment of democratic institutions, civil society, public and private sector organizations.

He listed some of the group’s programmes to include; an economic literacy programme for non-state actors, empowerment of the legislature on its oversight functions, capacity enhancement programme aimed at periodic assessment of the non-state actors, gender and reproductive health with emphasis on HIV/AIDS and malaria related issues.

The group also organized a media workshop in 2001 with support from Friedrich Ebert Foundation, where journalists were taught how to analyze basic micro-economic barometers of the budget. It organized a workshop on budget democracy in Abuja for the purpose of evolving a framework for the promotion of budget and fiscal democracy in the country.

CPPC further embarked upon ``Promoting Stakeholders Participation in Economic Transition” (PROSPECT) in Nigeria between 2002 and 2004. It was aimed at educating citizens on fiscal policies. It also encompassed the training of CSOs and NGOs on budget formulation, implementation and monitoring.

The major lesson from the programme, he added, it was not useful for NGOs to monitor government activities if they were not knowledgeable about the issues. Consequently, the group plans an NGO training on NEEDS 2 document and the seven-point agenda of the Nigeria’s federal government.

Mr. Oladayo Olaide, *Economic Programme Officer/Coordinator* of Open Society for West Africa (OSIWA) spoke on the group's efforts in a paper titled "**Transparency and Accountability through Budget Interventions – Lessons, Challenges, Opportunities**".

He explained that OSIWA strengthens values and principles of Open Society, key among them *Transparency and Accountability*- where they exist and facilitate the emergence where they don't exist, through the instrumentalities of: grants, partnership initiatives and advocacy.

He said the group stimulates CSOs' participation in budget work; support CSOs coalitions on budget work and build capacity of budget groups and coalitions on budget tracking and budget advocacy in the medium term. He added that the OSIWA supports appropriate legislations to facilitate budget work in Nigeria, and foster linkages between State and non-State actors in the long term.

Budget transparency work of the group, included; three local governments in each of the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, where a consultant is appointed to monitor implementation and promote learning and experience sharing.

Some of the challenges experienced by OSIWA, he disclosed, included; weak legislations and regulations; lack of planning frameworks; tenure insecurity of LG administrators; politicization of budgeting information and budgetary process; over-emphasis on national budgets; poor Advocacy skills, and inadequate mass of budget advocates.

Mr. Iliya Yohana of **Community Based Development-NGO Forum** said the group had in 1997 noticed a gap between electorate and the government, and that budget became part of the issues being pursued by the organization. He said CBD-NGO Forum had partnered with Action Aid Nigeria in empowering citizens' participation in budget process, by deepening participation, efficiency in government allocation and management of resources at all levels.

He disclosed that the group had 150 members from CSOs, professional bodies and academic at the state level, and had 300 members in the coalition at the local government level. We also have a technical committee that assist in raising that capacity of the Forum. As a result of the difficulty in relating with government due to low level of awareness, the group uses some informal means of getting information on budget from government, after convincing the sources of the value of our job, he said.

Some of the major activities of the CBD-NGO Forum, he noted, were the sensitization of stakeholders on budget issues, setting up of community development committees, linkages with government institutions and advocacy. He added that the group was involved in some budget analysis at the state level, an activity that is more difficult at the LG level. "We analyze post-budget speech of the governor, bring our strong points and cause changes," the noted.

The experience of the **Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group (NDEBUMOG)** was relayed by its National Coordinator, Mr. George-Hill Anthony. He said the group was conceptualized and founded by a Pan Niger Delta Youths NGO (Commonwealth of Niger Delta Youths) in July 2005.

The mission of NDEBUMOG, he said, was to promote transparency and accountability in public resource management through pro-poor budgeting and anti-corruption campaigns for sustainable development in the Niger Delta and democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

He explained that such efforts were being done by simplifying and disseminating budget information; identifying and setting (budget) priorities; influencing revenue policies; identifying budget trends and providing projections; highlighting best practices; tracking revenues and expenditures; promoting synergies of all tiers of government towards meeting the MDGs.

“Fiscal budget(s) and appropriations for states in Nigeria were previously considered and seen as “secret documents”. More worrisome were the facts that all the stealing, under-disclosures and corruption (which are) endemic within the African governance system are possible either through doctoring, inflating, padding or duplicating expenditure envelop(s) within the fiscal budgets of government annually.

“However, among our success stories in the Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group (NDEBUMOG) are the fact that, today, we are able to access (almost) all the state(s) budgets in the Niger Delta up to the disposition of even the State(s) voluntarily making their fiscal budgets available to our office(s). We are willing to share how we maneuvered the landmines to come about such a success with other Civil Society colleagues across the sub-region,” he said.

Lessons Learnt from the Session

At the end of deliberations, some lesson were drawn which include;

- There is a common trend in the pattern of governance among West African countries in the form of mismanagement and corruption;
- Lack of accountability and transparency by political office holders;
- General apathy among the people of the region on incomes and expenditure of government;
- Reluctance to engage the citizens in the conceptualization and implementation of budgets by governments;
- There is not enough experience sharing between CSOs working on budget and its implication for development;
- Effective monitoring of fiscal policies and budget by CSOs was crucial to the attainment of the MDGs;
- CSOs involved in budget process across the West African sub-region need increased interaction to enhance experience sharing.

COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE END OF A TWO-DAY INTERACTIVE SESSION ON BUDGET ADVOCACY FOR CSOs IN WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION HELD AT NANET SUITES, ABUJA BETWEEN JULY 1 AND 2, 2008

Introduction:

A two-day interactive session on budget advocacy for Civil Society Organization (CSOs) in the West African Sub-Region was held at the Nanet Suites, Abuja, Nigeria, between July 1st and 2nd 2008. The event organized by the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), Abuja, Nigeria with support from ActionAid International, was attended by more than 20 participants drawn from the Gambia, Senegal, Sierra Leone and host Nigeria.

The Executive Director of CISLAC, Mr. Auwal Musa (Rafsanjani) gave a welcome address with a goodwill message delivered by Hussaini Abdu, Governance Coordinator for Africa, ActionAid International. A keynote address was delivered by Dr Bright Okogu, Director-General, Budget Office of the Federation of Nigeria.

Participants across the region and their Nigerian counterparts made vivid presentations on the roles of the CSOs in the budget processes across the West African Sub- region and the relevance of further regional interaction on popular participation in the conception and implementation of budgets across the region.

Observations:

After presentations, debate and discussions on all the shared experiences, participants made the following observations:

1. That the budget is the most important instrument in any modern state apart from the constitution, which play crucial roles in the planning and control of the economic activities of any nation.
2. There is a common trend across the West African countries in the form of corruption and mismanagement of resources by political office holders.
3. The electorate at the grassroots is yet to be integrated into understanding their roles in the planning and execution of fiscal budgets.
4. The officials at the local and state government levels do not have the requisite capacity to deliver pro-poor budget or information to the people and civil society groups for budget performance assessment.
5. There is not enough partnership and synergy between CSOs and the media, leading to inadequate coverage of the activities of the CSOs and their partners.
6. Many civil society actors do not have enough capacity to engage the budget process at all levels of governance.
7. Elected representatives focus more on their personal interest as against the developmental needs of their constituents.
8. There is a huge gap between CSOs working on budget across the sub-region and their parliaments.
9. CSOs working on budget have difficulty in having access to the parliaments at country level, in spite of the global campaign for such mutual interaction.

Recommendations:

Participants at the session made the following recommendations:

1. There is the need for regular interaction among civil society groups engaged in budget advocacy in the West African Sub-Region as a means of sharing from experiences in their respective countries and bridging the gaps.
2. CSOs should strive to enhance the capacity of public officials at country levels on how best to disseminate budget information.
3. Training programmes should be intensified for CSOs involved in budget advocacy across the Sub-Region.
4. Drawing from the experience of some developing countries, there is the need to organize town hall meetings at the village, ward, local government and state levels during the conception of budgets to engender popular participation in the process.
5. The setting up of a budget office is crucial to the principle of good governance, transparency and accountability. There is, therefore, the need for legislatures in the sub-region to pass the bill on the National Assembly Budget Office to reverse the current excesses of the executive.
6. There is the desire for increased capacity building programmes for staff of the legislatures, to enable them provide the necessary support for the lawmakers.
7. The current attitude of governments towards budget process is still below international best practices. The session, therefore, calls on the governments, especially the Nigerian government to ensure submission of budget proposals to the National Assembly latest by May of each year, while the lawmakers should process it as a national priority.
8. CSOs across the Sub-Region must advocate for the passage of the Fiscal Responsibility legislation among tiers of government for countries within the Sub-Region.
9. CSOs should make more efforts to engage their respective national parliaments on the budget process and build synergies with MDAs for better budget performance.
10. MDGs are crucial strategies towards the development of the region and its people. CSOs should, therefore, focus on effective monitoring, evaluation and tracking of projects aimed at their attainment at country level.
11. Appeal to ECOWAS Parliament to encourage national parliaments to create more access, by establishing the CSO Liaison Office to facilitate effective CS-legislative intervention.

Conclusion:

Participants were unanimous in their commendation for CISLAC and ActionAid International for organizing the session, and call on other NGOs and donor agencies involved in budget making to provide more of such platform. Efforts should be intensified to create more synergies among CSOs at the regional level so that popular participation and civic education on good governance can be enhanced in West Africa.

Auwal Musa (Rafsanjani)
Executive Director, CISLAC

Mrs. Lavina Banduah
National Accountability Group, Sierra Leone

Participant Registration Form

Name of Event: INTERACTIVE SESSION ON BUDGET ADVOCACY FOR CSOS IN THE WEST AFRICAN SUB- REGION

Date(s) for Event: 1ST & 2ND JULY 2008 **Organization:** CISLAC **With Support From:** ACTIONAID INTERNATIONAL

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