

March 11 2013

COMMUNIQUE OF THE FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY SESSION FOR THE SOUTH SOUTH ZONE

[I] INTRODUCTION

The Fiscal Responsibility Session for the South South Zone was convened by Centre for Social Justice, with the support of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa at the Taland Place Hotel, Port Harcourt on Monday March 11, 2013. Over 157 participants drawn from non-governmental organisations, faith based and community based organisations, the media and professional associations attended the event.

The Session was convened with the objective of building capacity and a popular mass movement - the Citizens Wealth Platform, for fiscal governance interventions, especially as it relates to the budget. The expected outputs include increased demand and effective engagement for good fiscal governance by diverse stakeholders under the umbrella of the CWP and enlisting members into the CWP as active stakeholders in the fiscal governance process.

Presentations at the Session focused on understanding the windows of possible interventions under the Fiscal Responsibility Act and review of ongoing budget monitoring work in the Niger Delta, with a view to learning from best practices and surmounting challenges. The Director the National Orientation Agency in Rivers State, representatives of the Commissioner of Police, Chairman of the Nigeria Bar Association Port Harcourt Chapter and the Justice Development and Peace Commission gave goodwill messages.

[II] PARTICIPANTS NOTED THE FOLLOWING

(A). The participants commended the publication of the capital budget pull out on a geopolitical zone basis for the year 2012 federal budget by Citizens Wealth Platform and reiterated its importance in providing information for citizens to hold government accountable.

(B). The need to strengthen existing critical constituencies in budget work through which demands for accountability could be channeled to the respective agencies of government.

(C). The successes so far recorded in budget tracking by CWP members in Rivers State was commended.

(D). Some unique provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, Public Procurement Act and the Freedom of Information Act, with particular emphasis on the provision(s) of the laws, which liberalize access to the court and throwing overboard the restrictive locus standi rules.

(E). Majority of Nigerians live below the poverty line and have nothing to lose (except their debilitating poverty) by constructively engaging the federal, state and local governments using all legal and legitimate means of expressing grievances and demanding for social change aimed at ensuring that public resources are made to work for the collective good of all Nigerians.

(F). The lip service to the fight against corruption manifested in the recent involvement of Alhaji Abdul Rasheed Maina in the Police Pension Funds scandal and the fact that nothing has been done to punish those who perpetrated the N100b – (45,000) ghost workers scam.

(G). Beyond the federal budget, the need to engage state and local government budgeting processes.

(H). Opportunities offered by the social media for communication and dissemination of information.

[[III]] THE PARTICIPANTS THEREAFTER RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS

(A). Considering that the implementation of the 2012 federal capital budget should have ended in December 2012 , CSOs in the South South Zone should follow-up with detailed monitoring of project implementation, especially focusing on the projects for which funds were released. This should be done with a view to making the existing reports more detailed and actionable.

(B). NGOs should collaborate with strong grassroots groups (including communities who are victims of fiscal rascality and maladministration) in making demands for fiscal accountability. Collaboration with professional groups and organized labour is also necessary for success in the campaign for fiscal responsibility.

(C). The use of social media for advocacy focusing on behavioral change communication and dissemination of information should be intensified, considering its wide use by a major segment of Nigeria's population.

(D). CSOs should take advantage of the provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, Public Procurement Act, the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Act and the Freedom of Information Act in making demands for value for money and increased accountability at all levels. Requests for information, demands on government officials to follow the stated fiscal rules and possible litigations should be explored to enforce citizen's fiscal accountability rights.

(E). There is an ever increasing need for oppressed Nigerians, especially those living below the poverty line to demand for sound fiscal governance in accordance with the law. Sitting on the fence and doing nothing is not an option. It will only deepen the misery index and further entrench impunity in the fiscal system.

(F). Beyond access to courts and publications in the media, citizens groups should consider exercising their fundamental right to organize and the right to freedom of movement as tools to consolidate the struggle against corruption and impunity.

(G). CSOs should take active interest and engage state and local government budgeting processes. This should include all stages of the process from formulation, approval, monitoring implementation to evaluation of results achieved with budgetary resources.

(H). It is imperative that, the Federal government takes steps to ensure the repatriation of Alhaji AbdulRasheed Maina of the Police Pension Task Team to Nigeria to face prosecution for stealing public funds which will provide him with an opportunity to explain his role in the entire scam. The FGN should also take steps to bring to book all those who perpetrated the N100b scam through the ghost workers scheme.

Participants thanked OSIWA, CSJ and the CWP for bringing the event to Port Harcourt, soliciting for more of such engagements across the country.

Eze Onyekpere
Centre for Social Justice

George-Hill Anthony
Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group