

February 27 2013

**COMMUNIQUE OF THE FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY SESSION FOR THE
NORTH WEST ZONE**

INTRODUCTION

The Fiscal Responsibility Session for the North West Zone was convened by Centre for Social Justice with the support of the Open Society Initiative for West Africa at the Congregational Hall, City Campus, Sokoto on Wednesday February 27 2013. Participants were drawn from non- governmental organisations, faith based and community based organisations, the media and professional associations.

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 CWP and enlisting members into the CWP as active participants in the fiscal process.

PARTICIPANTS NOTED THE FOLLOWING

- (A).** The good intentions manifested in the enactment of several sunshine laws including the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA), the Public Procurement Act (PPA), the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI and lately the Freedom of Information Act (FOI).
- (B).** The gulf between the intentions and provisions of the various sunshine laws and the practice of fiscal governance in the country.
- (C).** Laws by themselves do not guarantee rights and freedoms until the citizens decide to actively engage and activate the mechanism for the claim of these rights.
- (D).** The growing debt profile of the Federation with nothing to show in terms of infrastructure and improvements in living conditions.
- (E).** Lack of consultation and popular participation in the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and budget process.
- (F).** The perennial late passage of budgets.
- (G).** Perennial poor capital budget implementation.

(H). Refusal and neglect of the Accountant-General of the Federation to draw up the Annual Cash Plan and the same refusal and neglect of the Minister of Finance to draw up Budget Disbursement Schedules.

(I). New and unimaginable heights of budgetary corruption.

THE PARTICIPANTS THEREAFTER RESOLVED AS FOLLOWS

(1). The Federal Government should remove all obstacles militating against the full implementation of the fiscal and sunshine laws. The lip service so far demonstrated in the implementation of these laws is a great disservice to the nation.

(2). Civil society should intensify the demand for the full implementation of the fiscal and sunshine laws including the constitution of the National Council on Public Procurement, early and timely budget preparation, demand for fiscal information under the Freedom of Information Act, etc.

(3). Nigerians should actively engage the fiscal system in the executive and legislature through proffering alternative fiscal policies and budgetary expenditure components, attending public hearings and making submissions, etc. The judiciary should also be engaged through litigations against obnoxious laws and policy implementation.

(4). Governments at all tiers must ensure strict compliance with the FRA's position on incurring debts notably that it should be for capital expenditure or human development provided that the interest rate is not above 3% with a long amortization period and subject to legislative approval. Debts should be tied to concrete and verifiable projects and activities.

(5). The Minister of Finance (considering her duties under the FRA) should engage in broad consultation and provide concrete opportunities for popular participation in the MTEF and budget formulation process.

(6). The ongoing constitution amendment process provides the opportunity for the legislature to set a constitutional time frame for the preparation, presentation, approval and assent to budgets at all tiers of government.

(7). The Federal Ministry of Finance and other MDAs must ensure the full implementation of the capital budget and any such vote unutilized by the end of the year should still be channeled towards the completion of the project in the next succeeding year. On no account should a vote meant for capital projects lapse and be re-channeled towards recurrent expenditure.

(8). The Accountant-General of the Federation is called upon to prepare the Annual Cash Plan for 2013 while the Minister of Finance should prepare the 2013 Budget Disbursement Schedule within one month from the President's assent to the budget.

(9). In line with recent suggestions by notable jurists, the Session calls for an amendment of the Constitution to ensure that interlocutory appeals do not act as a stay of proceedings in corruption proceedings.

(10). Participants agreed to monitor the implementation of federal capital budgets in the North West Zone and thereafter to use the reports for advocacy purposes.

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