

June 18 2012

# **CALABAR FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY FORUM**

## **COMMUNIQUÉ**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Fiscal Responsibility Forum (“Forum”) for the South South Geopolitical Zone was convened by Centre for Social Justice (“CSJ”) with the support of the Ford Foundation at Channelview Hotel Calabar on June 18, 2012. Participation was drawn from Civil Society Organisations including non-governmental organisations, professional associations, academia, faith based and community based organisations, the media and the Fiscal Responsibility Commission. Over 150 organisations attended the Forum.

The Forum was convened to raise awareness and sensitize core stakeholders on topical issues in fiscal responsibility so that they can become change agents for the enthronement of sound, pro-poor fiscal governance practices at all levels of government in Nigeria. The Forum discussed key challenges of the 2012 federal budget; popular strategies and processes for achieving fiscal results; budget implementation and public procurement best practices. It further discussed the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (“MTEF”); budget formulation and design processes in the executive and legislature and the gamut of the provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility Act. It finally reviewed the Federal Capital Budget Pull-out for the South South Zone.

### **2. OBSERVATIONS**

*The Forum Made The Following Observations*

- a.** Nigerian Civil Society lacks effective organisation and mobilisation to respond concretely to the fiscal challenges facing society and this has contributed in no small measure to the growing corruption, impunity and abuse of office that has become the hallmark of governance in Nigeria
- b.** Flowing from above, there are no social sanctions and mechanisms to bring corrupt and derelict public officials to book, except the decadent judicial system which has failed in the discharge of its obligations to guarantee justice according to the law.
- c.** The establishment of the Citizens Wealth Platform is a step in the direction of harnessing the disparate energies of civil society into a momentum to address the challenges militating against sound fiscal governance. Essentially, there is the need to build a “street army” of fiscal enthusiasts ready and willing to engage the fiscal system.

**d.** The Federal Budget 2012 is loaded with so many illegal, immoral and unbecoming votes that have no place in appropriations of a civilised society. The resources dedicated to security votes, welfare packages, refreshment and meals, spectacles and other frivolities are clear evidence of the insensitivity of elected and appointed officials.

**e.** The Fiscal Responsibility Act (“FRA”) is premised on the need for enhanced transparency, accountability and popular participation of citizens in the fiscal operations of Government. Specifically s.48 of the Act indicates the clear intendment of the FRA thus:

*The Federal Government shall ensure that its fiscal and financial affairs are conducted in a transparent manner and accordingly ensure full and timely disclosure and wide publication of all transactions and decisions involving public revenues and expenditures and their implications for its finances.*

**f.** The FRA also has an added potency in that it has a revolutionary provision that grants individuals unhindered access and *locus standi* to enforce compliance through the Citizens’ Rights Action in Section 51 which provides thus:

*A person shall have legal capacity to enforce the provisions of this Act by obtaining prerogative orders or other remedies at the Federal High Court, without having to show any special and particular interest.*

**g.** The above provisions of the FRA are further reinforced by the access to information provisions of the Freedom of Information Act. Unfortunately, both the provisions of the FRA and the Freedom of Information Act have been under-utilised.

**h.** The South South Capital Budget Pull-out is an invaluable tool for monitoring federal capital budgets in the zone

### **3. RESOLUTIONS**

*Based On The Foregoing Observations, The Forum Resolved As Follows:*

**a.** Civil Society Organisations should organise and mobilise to proactively set the agenda for fiscal governance and where there is the need to react to official government policies; CSOs should provide effective alternative frameworks and ideas for social change.

**b.** Further to Paragraph 1 above, CSOs should act timely and set the agenda for the next Medium Term Expenditure Framework and the 2013 federal budget which should be commencing soon at the Federal Ministry of Finance.

**c.** The Forum affirms and proclaims to all Nigerians that there is a fundamental right and duty to resist tyranny, corruption and bad governance. Civil Society organisations should therefore utilise the fundamental rights and freedoms entrenched in the

Constitution, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights and other national and international standards to resist fiscal tyranny, oppression and subjugation of Nigerians.

**d.** Civil Society Organisations should devise and provide effective sanction mechanisms beyond the ineffective judicial machinery that has failed Nigerians. For example, a National Book of Shame – some form of Black Book can be opened for corrupt officials and those who misappropriate, misallocate and mismanage national resources or who have contributed greatly to the economic adversity of Nigeria.

**e.** CSOs should coalesce and join the Citizens Wealth Platform and make it more effective as a tool to engage fiscal governance at all levels of government.

**f.** Considering the premises of the FRA, stakeholders should demand enhanced transparency, accountability and popular participation from the fiscal authorities. If entreaties fail to yield results, resort should be made to the provisions of S.51 for the enforcement of rights and duties.

**g.** The South South Capital Budget Pull-out should be used to monitor, track and report on the 2012 federal budget and use the result of monitoring for effective advocacy for fiscal change.

**h.** CSOs should make full and effective use of the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act to enhance fiscal transparency.

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