

CSOs push for budget transparency, information access and accountability



Mr. Julius Mukunda, Coordinator, Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group, the developments partners and other Government officials at the Accountability Sector Joint Annual Review 2016 at Office of the President in Kampala, Friday, 16th September 2016. |@CSBAG2016

“The Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG) has called on government to be more transparent in handling budget process and ensuring that the public has easy access to budget information for improved accountability”.

During the Accountability Sector Joint Annual Review meeting themed **“Deepening reforms and partnerships for enhanced accountability, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery”**, on Friday, September 16, 2016, CSBAG presented the CSOs statement on the Accountability sector achievements, reforms, challenges and recommendations FY 2015/16.

Presenting the CSO statement on the Accountability Sector performance FY2015/16, Julius Mukunda the Coordinator of CSBAG pointed out that increasing citizen participation in budget process is a good indicator for promoting budget transparency and accountability in Uganda,” Mukunda said.

He informed the participants that the co-option of CSBAG in the budget process and working in the sector committees like the Public Expenditure Management Committee (PEMCOM) goes a long way in strengthening accountability process. “Government’s deliberate effort to strengthen partnership with non- state actors is highly commendable,” Mukunda stated. The civil society lauded Government for introducing integrated financial management system (IMFS) with inbuilt additional security features which has helped in fixing potential area of leakages and the enactment of Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) which closed many loop holes. “Some of the gaps that were closed like funds remaining on LG accounts after the end of the Financial Year are now being threatened by requests by Local Governments through ULGA to revert to the old ways of holding onto funds till end of August-in the new financial year which is an old practice that shouldn’t be entertained. Mukunda cautioned

In the Civil Society statement: “The CSOs outlined sector issues in the Accountability performance which need to be addressed which included; decline of the overall outcome performance from 42% of the sector outcome indicator targets achieved in FY 2014/15 to 36% in 2015/16, highest inflation rise in comparison to the last three Financial years (FY2012/13-FY2014/15), increase of financing for the budget deficit through domestic borrowing via commercial banks with an increase from UGX 224bn to UGX 674bn in the FY2014/15 and 2015/16 respectively, the stagnant GDP ratio at 11.3% since FY 2009/10 which is lagging us behind, the prevailing high interest rates detrimental to private sector investment due to the high cost of accessing capital for investment and slow progress in investigating corruption cases, ” Mukunda stated.

Furthermore, the civil society raised concern of un-registered gaming and pooling companies, irregular tax refunds by URA and mischarge of expenditure by Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS).Mukunda stated that underfunding was affecting the Accountability Sector and therefore, there is need to increase funding.

To improve the performance of the accountability sector, the civil society highlighted key recommendations which include the need for Ministry of Finance the custodian of PFM Act 2015 to implement this law fully for better management of resources, encouraged Government to stop taking up subscriptions that we cannot afford as a country since the non-Payment puts at losses from FOREX and penalties from defaulting. The Ministry of Finance should close the linkage in tax systems as a way to enhance URA’s efforts for DRM and others.

Mukunda singled out Office of the Auditor General (OAG) and PPDA which can’t cover the whole country. He told the audience that most accounts in the sub-counties have never been audited which prompted Geoffrey Tukei the Internal Auditor of Bukedea district to confirm that the OAG is currently auditing only 7 sub-counties in Bukedea. Tukei proposed for more funding for the district Internal Audit Units. Haji Misack Wasswa the deputy CAO of Wakiso district tasked the CSOs to advocate for increased funding for Local Government since the district receive only 15% from the Central Government. Dr. Kabagambe the President of Procurement Institute of Uganda also emphasized that funding the Internal Audit Units is critical in realizing improved accountability.

On the disparities of salaries Mukunda moved the audience by informing them that it will take 10 years for the Permanent secretary to earn the money a Commissioner General at URA earns. He called for expedition of Salary Review Commission to address the disparities. Mukunda was supported by Development Partner Mark Meassick from USAID who said the Ministry of Public Service should engage all other stakeholders to harmonize the salary disparities. “Government needs to take serious steps in addressing disparities and take recognition of how funds are available for developing the country,” Meassick said.

Presenting the donor position during the Accountability Sector Joint Review for the FY2015/16 Mark Meassick the USAID Mission Director pointed out that government officials get away with corruption as they are not punished due to the patronage system of governance. “The legal and institutional framework which exists in Uganda is among the best in the world however, issues of regulatory authority, patronage and inconsistencies in which the offenders are punished undermine the system of accountability and foster an ever deepening culture of impunity,” Meassick said.

The donor’s fury was reinforced by the recent reports by Uganda National Road Authority commission which unearthed the misappropriation funds to the tune of UGX4 trillion. “Instead of that money going towards building 5,147 km of roads in Uganda, only 1,500 were built. Imagine what the Ugandan road network would look like today if that money had been used as intended. The urgency of this accountability work cannot be overstated,” he said.

In his remarks Mukunda noted that Accountability Sector is key in driving management of public funds for better growth realities for Uganda. He advised that for the Accountability sector to emphasize growth there is need to enhance measures which include boosting revenue mobilization, increased citizens’ involvement in economic decision making processes of government.

In presence of the Speaker of Parliament Rt. Hon Rebecca Kadaga, the Guest of Honor, in her closing remark, she pledged to support the efforts of Accountability Sector. “Count on me for the continuing support of Parliament and provide oversight role,” Kadaga said.