Yaoundé, October 29, 2013

Summary Report

GOVERNANCE FORUM:
Greater citizen participation for improved service delivery and local governance

Idriss Linge and Abel Bove, with the assistance of Aristide Chimanye Motio and Désirée Etobe
Opening Session

About 300 participants attended the Governance Forum organized by the World Bank at the Hilton Hotel in Yaoundé on October 29, 2013. Several members of Government, including the Minister of Economy, Planning, and Regional Development (MINEPAT), the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER), and a number of other senior officials attended the opening session. A number of representatives from the diplomatic corps were also present.

In his opening speech, Mr. Binkert, World Bank Country Director for Cameroon, laid out the objectives of the Forum. “All around the world, governance issues pose major concerns, as the ultimate aim is to ensure that Government and private sector resources are used optimally to provide quality services to citizens,” he noted. He then congratulated the Government of Cameroon on efforts made to address these challenges and explained the rationale for the launch of the 2011 Development Marketplace initiative. “The Development Marketplace provided civil society with an opportunity to propose and test innovative initiatives designed to strengthen citizen participation for better local governance – and thus better service delivery – in the sectors of education, health, and forest resource management,” he said.¹ Binkert also noted that civil society can leverage the work and efforts of government, especially in the context of decentralization and with the objective to improve local governance.

Addressing Forum participants, Minister Emmanuel Nganou Djoumessi (MINEPAT) noted in his opening speech that “Governance concerns us all.” The Minister first reviewed the different consultative processes put in place by the Government of Cameroon and then announced that the Government will shortly “commit to a series of measures that will improve service delivery and local governance.” The opening speeches were followed by a documentary showcasing some of the Development Marketplace initiatives and a series of panel discussions.

¹ For more information on the Development Marketplace, visit http://wbi.worldbank.org/developmentmarketplace
Panel 1: Citizen Participation and Budget Monitoring

The first panel discussion, moderated by the High Commissioner of Canada to Cameroon, focused on citizen participation in public expenditure planning and monitoring at the local level. Mr. Edoa, Permanent Secretary of MINEPAT, stated that citizen participation is an integral component of public governance, and highlighted the positive results gained from participatory monitoring of the public investment budget.\(^2\) Edoa stated that this experience has, in some places, led to a “significant reduction in the number of projects that exist only on paper.”

Ms. Ngah, Coordinator of the National Community Development Program (PNDP), discussed the program’s contributions to the establishment of a framework for participatory budget management at the local level. She noted that the PNDP has “supported and strengthened citizen dialogue at the local level,” paving the way for the development of “Municipal Development Plans”. She also highlighted that through the PNDP, a system which involves citizens - so that they themselves can determine the standards for their project and ensure that these standards are met when micro-projects are being implemented - has been established. An important step in this regard, has been to encourage mayors to sign agreements with local radio stations to provide information to the public.

Mr. Abakar Ahamat, Governor of the Adamawa region of Cameroon, immediately addressed the myth surrounding the budget in his introductory words: “Generally speaking, talking, developing, ratifying, executing, and overseeing the management of a budget all seem to be a matter for specialists - because of its confidential nature, and not to mention the secrecy, attached to the figures.” As such, he commended the pilot initiative introduced by the World Bank, known as the Budget Transparency Initiative (BTI), in which he has been involved and which has served to demystify the budget. The Governor acknowledged that the decentralization process now underway is facing constraints, noting that “the sharing of roles between local elected officials and entities whose authority has

\(^2\)In the context of Participatory Public Investment Budget Monitoring Committees at the departmental, regional, national, and recently municipal levels (Prime Ministerial Decree No. 2013/7987/PM of September 13, 2013 establishing the formation, organization, and operations of the committees charged with monitoring the physical and financial execution of public investments).
been transferred to municipalities remains a distant goal because some reluctance is still obvious.” However, he pointed out that citizen participation raised issues of representativeness, legitimacy, and accountability, and proposed, as a general solution, the establishment of a system of structured participation, organized around the objective of demystifying the budget and refocusing the role of decentralized government officials, led by a central administration official. This solution has already been proposed by Edoa (MINEPAT).

The next speaker, Mr. Tomo, representing the Voix Nouvelles association, described the role that a civil society organization can fulfill in participatory budget monitoring. He recounted his organization’s activities (information, training, awareness-raising, and support) which, in his opinion, have produced convincing results by facilitating direct citizen involvement in monitoring the execution and implementation of the public investment budget. He did, however, note that civil society engagement may encounter challenges, such as access to information related to public investment budget proposals, public motivation, language issues, and the (technical) complexity of the budget. Tomo stated that demand for better governance is a matter that concerns not only the public, but the Government as well.

The panel discussion identified a number of challenges linked to citizen participation and budget monitoring. These included the issues of representativeness and the public’s ability to grasp the importance of its involvement, which were raised by Governor Ahamat. Participants asked about the possibility of creating a legal framework that would hold elected officials accountable to the public. Another suggestion was to raise awareness at the grassroots level so that this becomes a collective culture. Another challenge raised by the panel concerned the coordination of civil society initiatives. Lastly, the discussion turned to the constraints concerning the participatory budget monitoring committee and the Municipal Development Plans, which continue to hinder public involvement in budget formulation.

The PNDP Coordinator suggested that actions be directed towards political parties, which ultimately serve as recruitment frameworks for municipal executives and other managers of decentralized regional and local administrations, so that they can appoint local management specialists. She also suggested enforcement of a 2012 circular from the President of the Republic which requires that the

3Apart from the Journal des Projets published by MINEPAT.
Numerous frameworks provide opportunities for local budget participation in Cameroon, but obstacles remain. The decentralization process still faces resistance from some central agencies. For more effective participation, the public must demand and receive a more comprehensive explanation of the budget: the figures need to be demystified. Not to discourage ongoing efforts to promote participation in the formulation of Municipal Development Plans, the Plans should be taken into account in budget planning at the central level. Effective participation results in improved spending.

Panel 2: Whistleblower Responsibility

The members of this panel all emphasized the need to include the practice of whistleblowing in the law. Unfortunately, Cameroonian law does not protect effectively whistleblowers in Cameroon, so whistleblowing remains a risky activity.

Mr. Etom, from the National Anti-Corruption Commission (CONAC), said he believes the concept of whistleblowing is present in the minds of Cameroonians. He shared with the audience CONAC statistics, which started out with limited involvement (1 call per week), and has increased significantly to this day (1,500 calls per week).

Mr. Nguini (Transparency International Cameroon) emphasized the need to incorporate the United Nations Convention signed by Cameroon, which provides a framework for whistleblowing mechanisms, into national law. He believes that once this is done, the number of whistleblowing cases will increase.
Sharing the experience of Treatment Access Watch Network (TAW), Mr. Tsamo said it is important to do more to raise people’s awareness of their rights and the possibility of resorting to whistleblowing whenever these rights are not respected. He noted that the public often perceives government action as a favor, not a right, which explains the reluctance to blow the whistle on dysfunctional practices - for fear of losing access to government-provided services. Furthermore, citizens also fear reprisals.

Mr. Djateng of Zenu Network noted that involving people – in this case, the members of a student community – in the identification of acts of corruption to be punished and in the whistleblowing process makes the latter more effective. The systems implemented by TI-C (hotline), Zenu Network (MEPRODEC in school facilities), TAW Network (for access to treatment), and CONAC provide a way to (i) gather whistleblowing incidents that previously were not necessarily expressed or taken into account, and (ii) filter/verify whistleblowing incidents to the extent possible, depending on budget constraints and partnerships between various civil society organizations and government agencies.4

According to Djateng, impunity remains the most important challenge regarding whistleblowing. To encourage citizen involvement, the whistleblower must see the impact of his or her action and that the incident has been examined and the problem addressed. The Zenu Network and TAW systems facilitate this particular aspect, and the results are clear and visible. By involving students and an adult from outside the school facility, whose integrity is recognized by all parties, school managers have an incentive to look into the reported cases.

- Whistleblowers must be protected by the law.
- Whistleblowing incidents must be monitored and examined and related problems resolved.
- The results of looking into a whistleblowing incident must be visible and known in order to promote citizen involvement and build trust in the process based on concrete actions.

4 On the government side, ANIF, CONAC and its units in each ministry (anti-corruption units), CONSUPE, the Audit Office, MINJUSTICE, and the Special Anti-Corruption Court are all involved, either directly or indirectly, in anti-corruption activities. On the civil society side, CONAC works with the National Coalition to Combat Corruption (CNLCC).
Panel 3: Possible Role of ICTs in the Improvement of Local Governance

During this panel discussion, Ms. Essono from the Water and Urban Development Program (PDUE) underscored the complexity and challenge of promoting the notion “living together” in the cities. As a result, information and communication technologies (ICTs) are becoming an important tool for citizen participation, particularly in urban areas with high coverage rates in terms of mass media (e.g. radios) as well as personalized media (e.g. computers, mobile phones). She noted that these means of communication are used to involve people in PDUE implementation.

Mr. Nguebou (ASSOAL) provided a concrete example of how ICTs have played an important role in improving a municipal budget process.\(^5\) “We had found that people very quickly grew tired of coming to meetings on the municipal budget (in Yaoundé 2). Reaching out to people directly and allowing them to respond in real time was one of the solutions we came up with,” by using SMS to inform and mobilize citizens, and to let them vote on their preferences in the allocation of a portion of the municipal budget to specific municipal investment projects.

According to Nguebou, this approach has led to the following impact. First, the number of persons directly contributing to budget preparation has increased significantly, with close to 45,000 people having responded to messages sent to them on their mobile phones.\(^6\) Secondly, the mayor has, in this case, taken the preferences expressed by citizens into account and has even increased the budget allowance from year to year.\(^7\)

Mr. Weber (World Bank) noted that technology by itself is not enough to mobilize citizens; they also need to care about the issue. He stated that in Kenya, an African country highly advanced in the use of ICTs, digital governance projects have not been particularly successful. This was, according to Weber, because the issues raised were often “far removed from citizens’ concerns” and that the opinions

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\(^5\) Piloted in the municipalities of Bertoua 1 and 2; Yaoundé 1, 2, 5, and 6; Douala 3, 5, and 6; and Edzendoa.

\(^6\) Example: Yaoundé 6, participatory budget process without ICTs: 200 citizens voted in the first cycle, versus 1,000 thanks to ICTs in the following cycle.

\(^7\) Example: The Yaoundé 2 participatory budget allowance is CFAF 175 million in 2013.
expressed by citizens were not taken into consideration. Conversely, in the context of the participatory budget process, citizens show themselves to be more committed because this directly affects their daily life.

Mr. Tetka (Ushahidi) also showed how the use of ICTs in Cameroon can facilitate citizen participation in the monitoring of public policies (of the Government or financed by technical and financial partners) or elections. The Ushahidi SMS complaints geo-location system\(^8\) has been piloted in Cameroon to collect complaints of corruption in access to medicines and in the monitoring of recent legislative and municipal elections. This tool is now being adapted to local practices: Cameroonian would rather “beep” and leave a message than send an SMS.

Concerns about the use of ICTs for criminal or political purposes (e.g. cybercrime, repression) were discussed during the session, and according to panelists, the risks can be mitigated by a number of protocols and practices. The issue of proper data management was also raised. Mr. Tetka concluded that “technology remains a tool that can improve things” – in terms of communicating on a larger scale and at a lower cost – “but ultimately we must not forget that it is people who must find the solutions. The way in which this technology is used can lead to success or it can lead to added difficulties.”

Concerns were expressed over democratization (cost and technical barrier for citizens) and the coverage of ICTs, especially in rural areas. Nguebou indicated that, “with a penetration level of 85 percent, mobile phones remain an effective way to reach individuals. Other solutions may exist, such as call-back beeping or call centers, for example.” Furthermore, the ICT pilot phase for the participatory budget in rural parts of the Kivu province in the DRC has shown that this is possible.

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\(^8\) Ushahidi is a free and unrestricted software program.
Panel 4: Role of Civil Society in Improved Service Delivery

All panelists during this final session of the Forum recognized the importance of the role of civil society in service delivery. In the health sector, for example, the Ministry of Health contracts (and finances) civil society to ensure access to treatment and to assess patient satisfaction at health centers involved in a performance-based financing initiative. In the education sector, Government has established a framework for participatory management of schools together with Parent Teacher Associations (APEEs) and, more recently, school councils. However, citizens are not evenly invested in these frameworks: some function well, others not so well, and some are even “pockets of corruption.” The objective of the Ministry of Basic Education is to “municipalize school management” pursuant to Law No. 2004/017 of July 22, 2004, which organizes school management, and which would assign greater responsibility and accountability to school officials and APEEs.

Ms. Bihina Perrot (Care Cameroon) illustrated concretely how a civil society organization can partner with Government to improve service delivery. The Care Cameroon project in the North region uses self-assessment of the quality of health services by health staff and communities, as well as shared responsibility in service delivery by government agencies and communities. This has led to a significant improvement in the quality of services. In a similar vein, Mr. Ayissi cited the partnership with civil society coaches, trained by the CONAC in the Rapid Results Approach, who have assisted a number of interested ministries, notably the Ministry of Health, in making concrete and pragmatic changes that have had a real impact in terms of the quality of services and revenues in targeted hospitals.

Describing the experience of the members of PLANOSCAM, an umbrella organization of various civil society networks, Ayissi indicated that there were close to
33 platforms for collaboration with civil society in Cameroon, in which member networks of PLANOSCAM participate. In his opinion, for civil society to truly fulfill its role, it must be well organized, adhere to specific rules and have shared objectives, along with accountability requirements.

Ayissi is also concerned by the way in which civil society actors are appointed to consultative bodies: “Until recently, Government was responsible for appointing civil society representatives to these bodies. The number of civil society representatives remains very low in comparison to government actors.”

Yet this does not alter the fact that changes have occurred because of civil society interventions. Ayissi noted, for instance, the success of Dynamique Citoyenne in advocating for the enforcement of Article 66 of the Constitution on the disclosure of assets, which led to the first set of regulations, requiring election board members to disclose their assets before assuming their positions.

Following interventions from representatives from the Ministries of Health and Basic Education, there was much debate regarding the quality and coverage of service delivery, revealing the extent to which these sectors mobilize citizens’ interests, and the importance of improving service delivery today and involving citizens in the management of these services.

- Civil society is an indispensable actor in the improvement of service delivery, as shown by numerous examples of partnerships.
- However, it needs to be structured and credible and follow certain rules. On the other hand, there is also a need to clarify and systematize a process for the legitimate appointment of its members to consultative bodies.
- Health and Education offer concrete examples of partnerships between civil society and government agencies that have improved the quality of service provided.
- Locally, consultative bodies formally exist (Education/Health), but they are not always supported by the communities or civil society or facilitated by deconcentrated agencies (access to information, etc.).
- Successfully municipalized school management could create a strengthened local accountability system.

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9 For example: COS-C2D, ITIE Platform, National Public Issue Monitoring Committee, Public Finance Reform Dialogue Platform, Interministerial Local Services Committee, Local BIP Monitoring Committees, National AIDS Control Committee, Intersectoral Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, etc.
For further information:

ASSOAL, Participatory budget proposal using SMS: [http://www.ecoledelagouvernance-cm.org/](http://www.ecoledelagouvernance-cm.org/)


CONAC: [http://www.conac-cameroun.net/](http://www.conac-cameroun.net/)


National Participatory Development Project (PNDP, MINEPAT): [www.pndp.org](http://www.pndp.org)

PLANOSCAM: [http://www.planoscam.org](http://www.planoscam.org)


Water and Urban Development Project (PDUE, MINDUH): [www.pdue.cm](http://www.pdue.cm)

World Bank, Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/worldbank.cameroon](https://www.facebook.com/worldbank.cameroon) and website: [http://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/cameroun](http://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/country/cameroun)
