Public debate reveals popular concerns on Mutuelle de Santé and Imihigo

Basing on its duty to advocate for the people on one hand, and considering the responsibility of the Government to be held accountable to the public on the other, the Rwanda Civil Society Platform (RCSP) organized a Public Debate on Citizen’s Participation in the Imihigo process and on the Community-Based Health Insurance Scheme (CBHI), popularly known as Mutuelle de Santé, in order to inform policy makers on the Citizen’s concerns on their implementation. This debate took place on the 13th of December 2011 at the Kigali Serena Hotel.

The survey on Citizen’s Participation in the Imihigo was launched during this public debate. The survey showed that Rwandans were generally happy with the contribution of performance contracts (Imihigo) in national development. In the survey, citizens suggested that performance contracts be adopted at the village level as a linkage between the leaders and the led for more effective implementation.

HLF-4: Developing nations appeal for removal of conditions on Aid

Since the last High Level Forum in Accra, more than 20,000 civil society organizations (CSOs) - including trade unions, women’s groups, youth groups, faith-based organizations and other social movements in more than 90 countries have been consulted on the process, agenda and expected outcomes of the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF-4) that was held from 29th November to 1st December of 2011.

The international meeting was convened to review the effectiveness of aid and development assistance given to developing countries in order to attain the Millennium Development Goals. In the aftermath of the Forum it became apparent that change would come to how Civil Society relates with Governments and Donors even as Aid delivery remains the same. The inclusion of civil society in negotiations was an important procedural innovation that contrasted with the reduced political space that CSOs are experiencing in many countries.

In Bussan, the CSOs were not given ample Platform in terms of consultations to contribute to the decisions of the forum. The ideas of the CSOs therefore are not reflected in the resolutions of the aid effectiveness forum as it had been agreed upon in Accra 2008. The Rwanda Civil Society Platform therefore would like to register its dissatisfaction in this regard. CSO’s ideas were not given due consideration and this applies to Rwanda as it applies to world as a whole.

CSOs noted with concern that donors and partner governments have failed to deliver on most of the commitments made in the Paris Declaration in 2005 and the Accra Agenda for Action of 2008. This has resulted in a need for bold decisions that outline time-bound and ambitious targets in order to reach the targets set by general consensus in 2005 and 2008. The Busan meeting is a follow-up on the previous meeting of donor and recipient countries in Paris amid growing concerns that development assistance was being fragmented and aid delivery was often hampered by bureaucracy. Lobbying countries, led by Rwanda, have received backing from civil society and advocacy groups from around the world on an appeal to donor nations for aid without any conditions. A call was made for donors to end the practice of linking aid to purchases from companies in donor countries as well as removing the conditions that come with aid in order to allow individual countries to map out their own developmental agenda.

President Kagame told delegates in Busan, South Korea that it would be futile to talk about competent use of aid without addressing impediments to its effectiveness. The President also drew the delegates’ attention to the fact that in the last two decades or so, African countries have registered on average annual economic growth of between 5 to 8% despite low foreign investment and the global economic slowdown since 2008 as evidence of Africa’s great promise.

If Paris was a triumph of technocratic organization, Busan has been an expression of shifting geopolitical realities, with the role of the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) proving more critical than ever before. But ultimately the same question applies to both participants to the forum – what differences will this forum mean for the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people? That will depend mostly on the collective actions of the international community rather than the grand intentions expressed at every successive Forum.

The second topic under discussion during the public debate was the implementation of the revised Community-Based Health Insurance scheme (CBHI), “Mutuelle de santé”, and related concerns.

During the ongoing Citizen Score Card process, conducted by the Public Policy Implementation Monitoring and Advocacy (PPIMA) project, the question frequently raised by citizens was why the CBHI fees have been raised without consideration for the capacity of citizens to pay the new premiums.

The premiums seem unaffordable for most of the poor segments of the Rwandan population; consequently local government can’t do otherwise but to force people to pay, including confiscating their properties.

It was suggested during the National dialogue that Civil Society organizations invest much in raising awareness of the population on their rights and existing development policies so that such practices may be put to an end and the population can take informed decisions to effectively play a role in implementation of such policies.

The RCSP recommends that for such policies that touch the lives of the people, consultations and engagement of citizens and or their representatives are very crucial for ownership and participation.

In 2010 the RCSP introduced Public Policy Dialogues with the intention of creating a platform for Rwandans to speak out on governance issues affecting them. The purpose of the Public Policy Dialogue on CBHI and on citizens’ participation in the Imihigo process was to share information from the district dialogue forums, the Community Score Card and to create a platform for citizens to publicly engage policy makers on the issues raised by both initiatives.

This event was also an occasion to discuss how the population could engage with the government during Accountability Day as a way of improving transparency and service delivery in public institutions.

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Santé

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Santé
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Make it predictable, put it in the budget
The past 17 years in Rwanda have been characterized by economic

Where are we now?
Today there's increased transparency and accountability in aid
given. Increasingly aid is given directly to governments in developing
countries as budgetary support so that it pays for public services
such as education, health care, law enforcement and justice as well
as investing in underfunded sectors such as agriculture. Despite
these improvements, donor nations continue to seek to influence the
choices of recipient countries through imposing conditions on aid
that require them to adopt specific economic reforms or liberalise
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Access to Information Bill: Increased transparency but limits remain
Strong advocacy is required for the adoption and implementation
of an Access to Information Act. Inputs from the RCSP have been
made and sent to the parliament such as the position paper on the
Rwandan Access to Information Act that addresses citizens' concerns on access to information.

Paris Declaration: Rwanda setting international best practices in Aid Effectiveness
The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of March 2005 is recognized as significant in the history of development assistance and co-operation. It builds on the many lessons learnt over the years from programme and project support on negative practices and proposes a shift towards modalities of aid that give recipient-country governments more scope to make decisions based on their own priorities.

Rwanda’s Aid Policy sets out the preferences of the Government of Rwanda (GoR) in terms of the type of aid it wishes to attract and the processes to be used in its management. In the past, foreign aid was sometimes provided in a way that did not enhance national ownership of development activities.

The Aid Policy guides the GoR as it seeks to ensure that the impact of aid in the Rwandan citizen is maximised. It is relevant as Rwanda receives in excess of US$400 million per annum in foreign aid.

The impact of budgetary support
• UK budget support to Rwanda has helped increase recurrent expenditures in the health sector through recruitment, training and payment of salary costs of health workers. A report by the audit office also showed that defense spending in Rwanda fell between 2003 and 2007 illustrating that budget support does not necessarily lend itself to spending on non-development objectives.
• The money provided by donors through budget support has funded over 4600 locally implemented projects including the construction of classrooms, roads and clinics between 2004 and 2007. These funds also built on the capacity of the local government authorities involved, improving councilor and citizen involvement in planning and budget processes while reducing the overall cost of service delivery.

The Government of Rwanda and its development partners, through Vision 2020, agreed upon national medium-term development targets and this provided the framework for the budget allocation of identified priority sectors to ensure that the MDGs were met. This
vision provided a general framework for budgetary support by donor nations. More current data will be provided in the following newsletter.

Conclusion:
While Rwanda has emerged from difficult sets of development circumstances, it’s achievements in establishing an aid coordination, harmonization and alignment framework are currently being recognized as international best-practice.

OECD Report: Rwanda achieves A-rating
Rwanda was one of only two countries [the other being Tanzania] worldwide to achieve an A-rating in a survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on effective use of aid. Despite development aid increasing from US$37 billion in 1960 to US$128 billion last year, poor coordination and unpredictable aid overall has put to waste funds that should be eradicating poverty in the world’s most undeveloped countries. The survey by OECD, an organization which brings together donor countries, targeted 78 countries and territories that receive aid with the aim of ascertaining how effectively it was being put to use. The findings of the survey released on 16th of September 2011 in Paris gave Rwanda and Tanzania an A rating – the highest score a recipient country can achieve. The report indicates that Rwanda was praised by financers for owning its development process by initiating its own policies and then asking the donor community to fund them. Rwanda scored especially highly in the category of how reliable the procurement and public financial management systems are, notching up a ‘B’ on the former and 4.0, the highest score by any country, on the latter.

Ref:
• Rwanda Aid Policy as endorsed by the cabinet, Kigali, 26th July 2006
• www.devpartners.gov.rw
• OECD (2010) Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness Findings, recommendations and good practice, Better Aid, OECD Publishing

Transparency Rwanda shines a spotlight on petty and gender-based corruption
On the 13th of May this year, Transparency Rwanda (TR) launched the Rwanda Bribery Index 2010. Transparency Rwanda, a member of the Rwanda Civil Society Platform renowned for its fight against corruption, undertook this groundbreaking study to analyze petty corruption. The study showed that nearly 90% of all bribes were less than 50,000RWF of which 40.5% were below 5000RWF. This highlighted a need for further examination of this specific form of corruption of which the Rwanda Bribery Index is but the first step.

Respondents to the study mentioned that the Rwanda National Police were the institution at the forefront of the fight against corruption with 43.2% of them stating that they had faith in the Police’s efforts. The Ombudsman’s office followed at a distant second with 17.6% while the Office of the President came in third with 15.5%.

In its recommendations following the results of the Index, TR states that a more integrated effort from public institutions, the private sector and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) will be required to overcome corruption. It recommended that CSOs use their local knowledge to help develop country specific evaluation indicators that would improve project monitoring and evaluation. By increasing the accountability of donors and the government to intended beneficiaries through their newly developed indicators, CSOs can play an important role in minimizing corruption and promoting effective development.

In another report published by Transparency Rwanda in August of 2011 it was revealed that there is considerable gender-based corruption in the workplace. The report, which is the first of its kind, reveals that 5% of respondents’ surveyed personally experienced gender based corruption at the workplace. This 5% extended to both homogenous and heterogeneous groups of respondents who were either already employed or seeking employment. Gender-based corruption refers to immoral sexual behavior as motivational actions for gaining employment or securing a pay rise.

Focus group discussions indicated that the incidence of this form of corruption is higher than previously believed. The private sector was considered by 58.3% of the individuals interviewed to be most affected by gender-based corruption, coming far ahead of the public sector and civil society who polled 51.4% and 43.1% respectively. The interviewees overwhelmingly placed women as the victims of this form of corruption at 84.5% with men in positions of authority as the perpetrators according to 83.2% of the same respondents.

TR called on the Government to raise awareness on this form of corruption, encourage women to report it whenever it occurs and establish a specialized reporting structure such as a specialized office within the Office of the Ombudsman or the Gender Monitoring Office. Additionally, TR called for a review of current legislation to ensure that gender-based corruption is included as a specific form of corruption punishable by law. TR urged all employers and organizations to sensitise their personnel and install mechanisms of detection, prevention and reporting of gender based corruption, especially in their manuals on recruitment, code of conduct and staff management. Corruption is operationally defined by Transparency International as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain and while the focus has been on embezzlement of public resources, sexual favours obtained in exchange for recruitment or promotion is no less worthy of our attention.

Exchange of money for service
Role of the citizens in the Budget Process

In Rwanda, as in many countries civil society organizations (CSOs) are influencing public policy in a myriad of ways. The capacities of CSOs are limited and therefore their interactions with government are not always as effective as they would have been hoped. CSOs in Rwanda play multiple roles in relation to government – the advocacy role to encourage policies and actions that represent the needs of different constituencies in the political discourse; the watchdog role, which serves as a check on the power of the government by providing feedback on its performance; and a partnership role, in which CSOs work together with government on policy implementation.

The preparation, as well as comprehension of the National Budget should be the concern of every citizen. The Human Rights Umbrella Organization (CLADHO) has encouraged citizens to share their ideas during the national budget preparatory process. Some of the recommendations from this participation were eventually considered for purposes of monitoring the implementation process.

Due to the fact that the budget-making process can be difficult to understand by the average citizen, CLADHO has been conducting an awareness campaign to teach people how to participate in its preparation.

Additionally, the Ministry of Finance in conjunction with CLADHO has published a guide that will help the public learn how to present their recommendations on the National Budget. CLADHO invited people from various development sectors to give their proposals on the budget. These suggestions are later synthesized into a report, which is sent to the Ministry of Finance for consideration. The report encouraged citizens to present their proposals to their respective district offices. The districts’ advisory councils would then vet the recommendations and include them in the districts’ budget suggestions.

Citizens play a crucial role in deciding on what the government will spend Rwandans’ money on and monitoring the results of the Government’s work.

It is important that the citizens voice their needs and desires early so that the state budget is responsive to those needs. Citizens should also hold government accountable for its promises.

Citizens can get involved and hold authorities accountable during Parliamentary budget hearings, the elaboration of District Development Plans, Accountability days, Joint Action Forums as well as by directly engaging with CSOs in order that they play an advocacy role for the citizens’ concerns. Local authorities should provide information to all citizens on any tax changes, on services like public cleaning and fees charged for administrative services on immovable property so that any proposals made are well informed.

Reports from Claddho

Mission of the Rwanda Civil Society Platform:

“Increase the well-being of the population through citizen participation”

The objectives of the Rwanda Civil Society Platform:

- Analyze the major challenges faced by the Rwandan population, and adopt common positions and strategies to resolve them
- Set up and maintain an information system to enable the civil society to achieve its mission
- Lobbying and advocating on national, regional and international issues on behalf of the RCSP members and citizens.

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