

CIVIL SOCIETY POSITION PAPER ON THE 2015 NATIONAL BUDGET DISCUSSIONS

The Budget Advocacy Network (BAN) consist of Civil Society Organizations in Sierra Leone committed to advocacy on budget transparency, accountability and participation to ensure that Sierra Leoneans benefit from pro poor policies and programmes. BAN members and other Non-State Actors participated in the 2015 budget discussions and also organized two weeks radio programme on the budget discussions to inform the public on the content of MDA's presentations of their plans and budgets to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED). Additionally, it was aimed at sourcing public opinion on what the MDAs presented and also solicited public opinion on what they want to see in the 2015 National Budget.

This position paper covers three main areas:

- The budget discussion processes
- The content of the MDAs presentations
- And what the public want to see in the 2015 National Budget.

We commence this position paper by commending MoFED for organizing the budget discussions amidst the current National Health Emergency and more especially for the continued involvement of CSOs in the budget discussions. We once again express our strongest desire for the continuation of the said processes and the inclusion of CSOs in other stages of the national budget processes.

The Budget Discussion Process

Adherence to MOFED Budget Call Circular

MoFED put out the Budget Call Circular as a guide to assist Ministries, Departments and Agencies to formulate Budget Estimates for the MTEF period, 2015-2017. MDA are advised in that Circular to adhere to the framework and guidelines stipulated in the 2012 Revised MTEF Guidelines to facilitate internal discussions and subsequent approval of Budget Proposals and estimates.

Despite the guidelines outlined in the Budget Call Circular, we observed that some MDAs did not follow the guidelines of the Budget Call Circular with regard to presenting all the necessary documents and information required to enhance transparent and accountability in budget discussions. Some MDAs were not able to present a number of documents, key among them are revenue computation, information on tax waivers, past expenditure, other sources of revenue outside government budget and many more.

We call on the MoFED to strictly ensure that MDAs follow the guidelines provided in the Budget Call Circular in the preparation of budgets.

We additionally call on the Ministry to timely provide copies of the Budget Call Circular to relevant CSOs and stakeholders as soon as it is shared with MDAs. This will aid public understanding and participation in the budget process. We further call on MoFED to publish the Budget Call Circular in newspapers as soon as it is shared with MDAs.

Documents for budget discussions are always given the day of budget discussions

The revised 2012 MTEF guidelines clearly stipulated that MDAs should disseminate their strategic plans and budgets at least two weeks before the budget discussions. Evidence from the Budget Call Circular indicates that enough time was given to the MDAs to comply with the revised MTEF guidelines.

We however observed that since 2012, MDAs, including MoFED do not comply with the requirements to disseminate their strategic plans and budgets for the allowable two weeks period before the budget discussions.

The lack of compliance from MDAs and more especially the lead institution for budget planning and development-MoFED, however limit critical analysis and input from CSOs and other stakeholder into MDAs presentations, especially their policy objectives and activity plans. Given the little time to study MDAs proposals coupled with the duration of sessions, MDAs proposals are often not sufficiently discussed and therefore lacking useful inputs provided by other stakeholders.

We call on MOFED to ensure that MDAs present their strategic plans and budget proposal to the Budget Bureau at least two weeks before the budget discussion period.

We further recommend to the Budget Bureau to ensure that key documents relevant to the budget process are shared on MoFED website two weeks before the budget discussion to enable Citizens and CSOs to have access and time to study the documents to effectively input into the budget process.

The Process was not taken seriously by some MDAs

It is unfortunate to observe that some MDAs boycotted the budget discussions, while others came very late. Many others came during the last two days of the discussions. As a result, very limited time was spent to discuss some of the critical MDAs budgets, and not much input was made into their budgets. In addition, sessions already planned to have to be re-adjusted quite often without clear picture of when they will present.

We therefore call on MoFED to address this at the cabinet level by including the budget development of MDAs as part of the performance contracts of ministers, permanent secretaries, and other professional heads'

Feedback on the Budget Discussion Process

We have serious concern about how much of our comments and queries are taken into consideration on the overall budget allocations. MoFED is yet from time immemorial to share the final report of the budget discussions or reverting back to civil society as to how the input of CSOs are considered in the final budgets that are later on approved by parliament. As a result of this, BAN and partners face difficulties to know how much input are incorporated or considered by MOFED

We recommend that a report from MDAs' previous budget discussions be shared and form the bases for future discussions and in addition form part of the agenda items for budget discussions

Budget Performance

The budget discussion process has not provided information of the performance of MDAs' in terms of the progress of budget implementation of the previous year. It is expected that MDs should provide quarterly reports to MOFED, which should then provide an opinion on the overall performance of MDAs budgets.

We therefore recommend that MoFED's opinion report on MDAs budget be shared with other stakeholders and also form part of MDAs agenda items of the budget discussions

MDAs Presentations

Lack of collaboration among MDAs

We observed that in preparing the budget there are signs of lack of collaboration between and among MDAs. Example, the structures that have been created in the Ministry of Information and Communication have led to the duplication of roles and responsibilities, hence creating additional cost on the National Budget. The Ministries of Fisheries and Marine Resources and the Ministry of Defense both budgeted for the purchase of surveillance boats, which is duplication as both boats will perform the same functions

We call on MOFED to conduct the mapping of activities of similar nature within MDAs in a bid to identify areas where MDAs should collaborate for effective budget management.

Health

We observed that MOHS activities and budget did not show clearly how they intend to address the Ebola response and the post Ebola recovery and also how it will strengthen our health system to prevent and control future health epidemics.

We will like to see the following clearly costed and budgeted for in the MOHS budget for 2015:

- *Human Resource plan to address the gaps already created by the Ebola crises in the health sector in terms of training, recruitment and motivation of health workers to function effectively for improved health service delivery.*
- *Adequate and functional health infrastructure to serve the people of Sierra Leone*
- *An integrated approach to address Reproductive Child, Newborn and Maternal Health issues including the Free Health Care initiative into Ebola response and post Ebola plans*

Water facilities in Health Facilities

Based on WHO estimates, the low level of access to water and good sanitation equates to an economic cost of 2% of GDP per year for Sierra Leone. The proportion of WASH in the national budget has decreased each year since 2011. In 2013, it was still too low. Lack of access to clean water contributes to maternal and child death. In 2013, the Government invested only 270 Leones per person on WASH. Reducing infection through the provision of safe water and good hygiene practices could save at least 1 out of every 7 women who die daily in Sierra Leone from childbirth.

A report from the Facility Improvement Team Assessment led by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in partnership with Mamaye revealed that out of 72 selected health facilities in the country only 20 fully met the requirement for safe water and sanitation.

We call on the Ministry of Water resources to ensure that the budget for GUMA and SALWACO for 2015 appropriately address water supply to health facilities across the country and that MOFED allocate and approve such investment to the health sector to promote universal infection prevention and control measures.

National Pharmaceutical Procurement Unit

According to the National Pharmaceutical Procurement Unit Act, 2012, the National Pharmaceutical Procurement Unit is an autonomous body responsible for the procurement, storage, distribution and management of drugs and medical supplies, for and on behalf of all public health facilities throughout Sierra Leone. It is charged with the responsibility to establish a National Pharmaceutical Procurement Unit Board and to provide for other related matters.

The NPPU presented a clear plan to address the drugs and medical supplies problem in the country. Their plan included a clear plan for Drug handling and the need for best Storage practices and general warehousing. Despite this, we learned that some of the core functions of NPPU are performed by other agencies contrary to national laws. This makes it difficult for national planning and budgeting for the procurement of Drugs and medical supplies and further worsens the lack of coordination in the procurement of Medical Supplies.

We strongly recommend that the government and the Ministry of Finance should ensure that all resources for the procurement of Drugs, Medical Supplies and Medical Equipment should be channeled through the NPPU. All international organizations and multilateral bodies must also channel their resources and support through NPPU.

Agriculture

We realized that the activities that focused on the production and management of livestock were inadequately budgeted for. There is the need for more funds for this department to raise many livestock in 2015 to augment the nutritional needs of the population of the country; considering the fact that the EBOLA has created fear on people not eat bush meat. This makes a strong case for the department to be well funded in order to provide alternative protein for the people of Sierra Leone.

We therefore recommend a reduction in other budget lines within the Ministry of Agriculture to adequately raise more livestock for the country in 2015.

Exorbitant Board Allowances

We recognize the importance of board members in supporting the work on MDAs. We are however concerned that incentives provided to board members are highly exorbitant. Some MDAs created too many budget lines for board members such as for board remuneration, subsistence allowance, sitting fees, salary, and facilitation fees. In our view, we think that these amounts are too exorbitant. The board allowances for some MDAs are even bigger than a whole ministry's budget. Example, the National Revenue Authority provided a budget submission of Le 1.6bn for board allowances in the 2015 budget. This amount is three times the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency and more than the Local Government Service Commission budgets for 2015

We recommend that MoFED establish a standard rate for all board allowances covering all MDAs in order to save additional resources to allocate to other sub-vented agencies

High overseas travel expenditure

During the budget discussions, we observed that MDAs overseas travel cost proposals are very high. This was also manifested in the 2011 and 2012 actual budget expenditure, where government spent 13.5bn and 15.5bn respectively on overseas travel.

We call on MoFED to streamline overseas travels for MDAs, so as to save resources to be allocated to other priority areas

Underfunding for key sensitive MDAs

Some MDAs such as the National Drug Enforcement Agency and Local Government Service Commission are inadequately funded. This compromises their legitimacy and functions. There are also disparities in the funding allocation framework which needs to be addressed. For example, the traveling budget allocated for the administrative wing of MOFED is two times the budget allocated to the National Drug Enforcement Agency

We recommend that adequate budget be provided for these agencies to enable them effectively carryout their legal functions and mandate.

Citizen's expectations for the 2015

The two weeks budget discussions facilitated by BAN members through the support of Christian Aid, collated the following issues that citizens want to see in the 2015 budget as follows:

- Budget line for health related research and development
- Improvement in manpower/technical training for health workers
- Separate budget line for the management and maintenance of Ambulances by the Ministry of Health
- More funding for Health and education
- Increment in pension for retired civil servants
- Reduction in oversea traveling
- More resources to be allocated for animal husbandry
- Continuation of roads and bridges already in progress
- Payment of benefits for Sierra National Airline worker
- Purchase of new ferries for Freetown to Lungi
- Increased allocations specifically to MDAs to support their activities around Ebola eradication
- Increased allocations for the procurement of more vehicles for public transport
- Payment of Teacher salaries and backlogs
- Support schools to invest in modern technology to promote productive education in the country
- Resource allocation for the construction of more schools to avoid double shift
- Increased budget allocation to provide more public pumps and improve on save drinking water to cater for more people in the country

About BAN

The Budget Advocacy Network (BAN) is a Network of Civil Society Organisations in Sierra Leone committed to work on budgets and budget policies to enhance policy making and implementation for

sustainable and equitable development. BAN was established in 2006 and consists of local and international organizations such as the Transparency International (TISL) Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD), Western Area Budget Education Network (WABEAN), Actionaid International Sierra Leone (AASISL), Search for Common Ground (SFCG), and Christian Aid (CA).

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