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SEATINI-UG WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

REGIONAL MEETING TO VALIDATE THE RESEARCH ON THE LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN THE EAST AFRICAN REGION.

The West Ministers Foundation for Democracy in conjunction with EACSO commissioned a policy focused research on the legislative environment for Civil Society Organizations in the East African Region and found findings as below;

The research revealed that different laws exist in different countries to regulate the conduct of CSOs.

“CSOS HAVE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE OF ASSISTING THE STATE TO MEET ITS SERVICE DELIVERY OBLIGATIONS BY MOBILIZING RESOURCES FROM DONORS AND PROVIDING SERVICES DIRECTLY TO CITIZENS”

Countries were found to put emphasis on different aspects of CSO work. In South Sudan, for instance, there is more emphasis on humanitarian work as opposed to advocacy work. The presence of laws regulating the work of CSOs is an indication of the importance that the governments put in the work of CSOs. The laws create frameworks that guide registration, funding, membership, and the

structure of CSOs, among other important aspects of CSO institutional aspects and programmatic interventions. However, the nature of the laws and the degree to which they restrict the work of CSOs is an indication of the tension that exists between CSOs and the governments. Nonetheless, there was evidence of collaboration between CSOs and governments in coming up with CSO legislation. In Uganda, CSOs took part in discussion on the NGO Act, 2016. The Kenyan case with the Public Benefits organizations Act at the same time demonstrates the possibility of government—CSO collaboration in coming up with legislation that promotes the work of CSOs and the tensions in government—CSO relationships. It also revealed that in some countries there is a multiplicity of laws that govern CSOs. In Tanzania, for instance, it was found that organizations are registered under the Non-Governmental organizations Act, 2012, The Societies Ordinance, 1954 (Cap. 337), The Trustees Incorporation Act, 1956 (Cap. 318), and the Companies Ordinance. These laws operate under the auspices of different ministries implying that organizations are regulated by different ministries. Although a similar situation exists in Kenya, there was evidence that in the latter country attempts had been made by government and civil

society to harmonize the legislation through the Public Benefits organizations (PBO) Act of 2013.

There is a shrink of the civil society policy space which can be attributed to a number of factors not only limited to the following;

The global embrace of liberal democracy and its key tenets including citizen participation seems to be waning. Liberal democracy therefore seems to be on retreat as nationalism and populism are on the rise.

Realities and challenges that face the state in Africa such as inability to provide services and continued elite corruption continued to expose the contradictions with the state. On the one hand, CSOs have played an important role of assisting the state to meet its service delivery obligations by mobilizing resources from donors and providing services directly to citizens. On the other hand, CSOs have also continued to question the inability of governments to provide services particularly in view of widespread official corruption.

There is also a tendency of Governments associating donor funding of Civil Society organizations to promotion of bad practices and ideologies.

The restriction of the civil society space has had the following negative impact;

In Burundi and South Sudan, some organizations have had to close down their operations while others have had to relocate. CSO leaders from Burundi had to go to exile in the aftermath of the post-election rupture and particularly so after the July 2015 coup.

In Kenya, the freezing of accounts of local CSOs and international organizations have disrupted their activities and alienated them from their constituencies. In the case of MUHURI and HAKI

Africa, a lot of time has been wasted going to court to pursue cases with obviously trumped up and frivolous charges.

Continued harassment and freezing of CSO accounts also has the potential to alienate organizations from funding sources.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE ON TAX JUSTICE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

SEATINI-Ug together with the Tax Justice Alliance, Women and Girl Child development Association (WEGCDA) and with support from OXFAM, organized a public dialogue to address the issue of Tax Justice for Women's rights. The dialogue aimed at bringing to light the challenges faced by women in the current tax and fiscal policies, increased participation of women in the process of revenue mobilization, allocation and utilization. It targeted policy makers; Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, Uganda Revenue Authority, Local Government Finance Commission, Civil Society Organizations, Private Sector as well as the media.

M/s Milly Nalukwago of Uganda Revenue Authority in her presentation highlighted a few issues in regards to the current tax system, implication on gender as well as some recommendations. A breakdown of the various taxes administered by URA was shown to further explain to the participants on which type of taxes apply to them and their respective businesses.

It was noted that although some taxes contribute highly to the overall tax base like the casino tax, it has quite a number of challenges as a huge number of Ugandan youths and men have been sucked into the habit of betting which has not only destroyed their lives but also their families.

Among the issues raised in regards to the compliance of women towards taxation was the requirements for the Tax Identification Number (TIN). This is a requirement for all individuals as well as business owners. However to register for a TIN, one requires computer literacy and internet which then becomes a challenge to most of these women as the majority aren't educated much. This has resulted in middlemen taking advantage of the situation to cheat them huge sums of money from women as a disguise of helping them acquire the Tin Numbers.

Also noted was the lack of credible statistics of women tax payers in the country as a big number of women are involved in the informal sector trade. This hinders better planning for women related activities.

Hon Kamateeka Jovah MP Mitooma stressed the need for CSOs to closely work in partnership with government in order to raise the tax base to acquire the much needed services like health, education, energy and infrastructure development in the country.

THIRD NATIONAL REFERENCE GROUP MEETING (NRG3)

FROM RESEARCH TO IMPLEMENTING POLICIES [PROMOTING CLIMATE- AWARE, TRADE-DRIVEN AND FOOD SECURITY-ENHANCING AGRO PROCESSING]

SEATINI-Ug in partnership with CUTS International, organized the third National Reference Grouping meeting to discuss the outcomes of a research study undertaken on how agro-processing can become more climate-aware, trade-driven and food security enhancing through more coherent policies. One of the key results of the meeting was to enable participants to start planning an advocacy campaign to engage with

policy makers towards feeding the study recommendations into policies. The meeting was organized as part of the project "Promoting Agriculture, Climate and Trade linkages in the EAC - phase 2" (PACT EAC2). Until 2019, the project will bring together, inform, train and move to advocacy action hundreds of stakeholders for more climate-aware, trade-driven and food security-enhancing agro-processing in East Africa.

From the background, it should be acknowledged that Agro-processing development has been earmarked as a key regional priority in East Africa. However, with the multi-pronged challenges facing the region, a question arose as to how can this process be at the same time climate-aware, trade-driven and food security enhancing? This question was at the heart of a research study which was released at this meeting under the title "Agro-industrial Development Policies: What Nexus to Climate, Food Security, and Trade?"

In an ideal scenario, trade policies should ensure the availability of inputs, markets for the processed products and access to cleaner technologies; while climate change policies support this effort through targeted adaptation and mitigation initiatives.

Participants at the event identified relevant policies where there is need for taking up certain recommendations of the study to kick start an advocacy campaign and engage with policy makers towards developing a policy framework.

Importantly, the role of international trade and climate negotiations in framing the policy space for such policies should not be overlooked, and this is why participants were also be briefed on their state of play.

In his remarks, Amb Nathan Irumba the Executive

Director SEATINI emphasized the relationship between climate change and trade. He said that at the grass root level as the government is implementing several projects including the Operation Wealth Creation (OWC), it should address the critical issue of climate change. The environment has everything to do with trade and therefore the two should go along side each other.

Dr Joshua Mutambi (PhD) Commissioner Processing and Marketing Department in the

Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives stressed that climate change is taking a rapid turn and therefore we need to address the issue urgently. He said that effects of climate change can be seen psychologically, physically and emotionally. It affects both animals and plants.

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