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WORKSHOPS TO STRENGTHEN LEGISLATURES IN COMMONWEALTH WEST AFRICA

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OBSERVATIONS

PARLIAMENT AND ITS ROLE IN THE BUDGET CYCLE

- The legislature has a role to play throughout the budget cycle. Parliament's role of scrutinizing and approving the budget after its presentation to the House should not be seen as the last step in the budget process, especially because Parliament currently does not make much impact at this point, instead it should be seen as a first step in the budget process which should continue with constant monitoring and evaluation.
- It is important for Parliament to exercise its mandate as stated in the 1992 constitution. The standing orders of Parliament, which exist to guide Parliament's work, should be reviewed to ensure that Parliament exercises its powers.
- The Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) serves as the broad policy framework for Ghana but experiences shared by former Members of Parliament show very little relationship between the GPRS and the budget. As representatives of the people, Members of Parliament have a role to play to ensure that the needs of the poor are adequately catered for.
- Access to relevant, timely and up-to-date information is a challenge. Parliament should ask for the inclusion of an index providing data highlighting pro-poor indicators, in addition to the macro economic indicators when the budget is presented. Demand should also be made for complete information showing actual expenditure for the previous year.
- Parliament is under resourced and this impacts negatively on its work. Parliament therefore needs to take action to ensure it is properly budgeted for, as well as

develop strategies to improve its link to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), research institutions and development partners.

- Parliamentary committees are really important for effective oversight of the executive in democratic governance. Members of Parliament should be assigned to committees based on their area of expertise but equally important is the need for Members of Parliament to keep abreast with national and international developments especially those that are central to the work of committees they serve on.
- The Public Accounts Committee needs to look at current spending issues not just those from previous financial years. The relationship between the Public Accounts Committee and the Auditor General's department needs to be strengthened. The challenge of late presentation of the auditor general's reports needs to be addressed and value for money audits should be sustained. Strategies need to be developed to ensure implementation of Parliament's Instructions.

PRO-POOR AND GENDER-SENSITIVE BUDGETING

- The budget has traditionally over-concentrated on macro-economic situation, broadly reviewing sectoral performances and projections for the ensuing year. It does not reflect employment and unemployment issues, but focuses more on the private sector through regulatory framework. Participants suggest that budget needs to go beyond the provision of regulatory environment.
- Members of Parliament stressed the need for bipartisan recognition that the problem of poor economic performance over the years (especially as revealed by the non-micro economic indicators) is not limited to any one political regime.
- Members of Parliament were unanimous that there is need to have reliable, accurate and timely relevant information for both budget formulation and for members own use to debate budget statement.
- Members also agreed on the need for institutional capacity improvement of the National Development Planning Commission and Statistical Services Department to generate more analytically relevant data. Consistency in methods of calculating micro-economic indicators, such as inflation and the avoidance of anecdotal and selective use of the data was a general concern.
- The discussion on gender analysis and gender budgeting provoked a critical interest among Members of Parliament on how budgets differently affect women and men. It was recognized that there is need for gender sensitive budget, although with some degree of uncertainty among some male participants as to how budgets actually negatively affected women disproportionately.

- Members of Parliament agreed that gender is a development issue and urged that gender advocates needed to help clarify/differentiate gender from feminism, which could be misconstrued for antagonism between women and men.
- There is a need to disaggregate data according to gender.
- There is degree of gender analysis of poverty situation by the GPRS; for example, the GPRS notes that poverty is predominantly a feminine phenomenon. There is however weak link between the GPRS and the budget as there is hardly any statement on gender, and an over emphasis of micro-economic indicators.

CIVIL SOCIETY AS A PARTNER IN OVERSIGHT

- It is crucial to develop mechanisms and means that ensure community involvement in governance related issues. Our current governance structure has weak mechanisms for the participation of the poor.
- CSO-led monitoring is an effective tool but there is the need to build the capacity of CSO to achieve its full potential.
- Accountability is undermined by poor governance practices and current communication systems are very weak. The poor in Ghana must exercise their right and have access to information as well as a platform for contributing to policy-making processes.
- Collaboration between Parliament and CSOs need to be developed. CSO advocacy strategies could include CSO presentations to parliamentary committees, joint monitoring activities between parliamentary committees and CSOs, presentation of memo to committees and making inputs to inform MPs' questions to Ministers.
- For effective oversight of the executive there is the need for strong collaboration between parliamentary committees especially PAC and the Audit Service and the functions of the Auditor General should remain independent.