

ANSA-Africa hosts series of public dialogues on Extractive Industries and Natural Resource Management

Southern Africa kicks off dialogue series with Governance and Transparency in Extractive Industries in Johannesburg

ANSA-Africa hosted the first in a series of dialogues on Governance and Transparency in Extractive Industries and Natural Resource Management in Johannesburg on the 27th and 28th of May 2010. The dialogues are intended to create a platform for sharing of experiences on extractive industries and natural resource management, as well as investigating its effects on the economy, the environment and communities. These engagements are also the starting point for targeted in-country action as well as building the foundation for networking across borders towards an Africa wide movement.

The opening dialogue brought together over 50 civil society representatives from Southern Africa to discuss the challenges caused by extractive industries, as well as document the successes in improving transparency and accountability achieved by civil society. “In Africa, the executive has dominated economic decision making to the extent that citizens, whose life are intimately connected to these decision, are largely treated as customers or recipients” said Paul Graham, the executive director of Idasa, in his opening speech. As such, the dialogue sought to develop regional and country specific strategies for a more sustainable and inclusive extractive sector.

The dialogue presented country experiences from Malawi, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Although these countries find themselves in different stages and means of extraction there were many commonality in their presentations. Generally countries fail to take advantage of the wealth natural resources potentially represent, either because of weak state capacity or the lack of political will to redistribute the state revenue. The impacts of extractive industries on communities were elaborated on by Eric Mokoua from the Benchmarks Foundation. His presentation highlighted the multiple ways mining affect communities in terms of negative effects on the environment, social structures, local economic development, and political dynamics. Mining communities in Limpopo have seen the collapse of traditional cultural structures, displacement, loss of grazing and agricultural land, pollution of ground water and air, waste dumping, insufficient health facilities, and limited opportunities for economic development. His claims were supported by David van Wyk’s (North West University) research on Corporate Social Responsibility and Economic Justice Network’s (presented by Percy Makombe) research on ecological debt.

The major part of the dialogue focused on creating in-country strategies for multi-stakeholder interventions for improved governance. Some of the most essential issues to come out of these group exercises were the importance of creating enabling legislation for increased accountability and as well as institutionalising civilian and parliamentary oversight. It is crucial to diversify ownership of minerals and mines to include local communities and enhance their capacity to be active stakeholders. Environmental impact of extractive industries and the accumulation of ecological debt by private companies should be put firmly on the agenda and it is vital to establish a framework for adequate environmental impact assessment as well as monitoring the implementation of these assessments.

A vibrant civil society is essential in order to facilitate this process. However, there is also a need to bring government and the private sector on board and in this regards multi-

stakeholder initiatives like the EITI have the potential to insure amplify public involvement and access to information.

West African civil society and government come together in Senegal to improve governance of natural resources.

On the 1st to the 3rd of June 2010, over 40 representatives from civil society and government in West Africa gathered by the seaside in Saly, Senegal, for a dialogue on Transparency and Social Accountability in the Governance of Natural Resources in the region. The dialogue was hosted by the capable IED Afrique, the implementing partner in West Africa for ANSA-Africa.

The dialogue was opened by the Minister of Environment, Mr Amadou L.Diagne. He highlighted the role of community participation and government accountability as the cornerstones of sustainable governance. The next couple of days were filled with insightful and inspiring case studies on civil society interventions in mining and forestry from the region followed by challenging discussions.

Legislative reform quickly surfaced as one of the most pressing issues relating to natural resource governance in West Africa. Most resource rich countries are dependent on their natural resources but are unable to extract benefits from them because of weaknesses in the legislature framework and limited capacity to apply oversight to the regulations that are actually in place. The example of land tenure in Senegal illustrates these challenges clearly. Land is owned by the Senegalese state but the most prominent problem is still land grabbing by private companies. This does not only display a lack of capacity to enforce legislation but more disturbingly a severe lack of political will to empower citizens.

West Africa displays an impressive diversity in resources, diversity of stakeholders, diversity in legal frameworks, and diversity in the use and governance of these resources. One of the major obstacles for social accountability is the lack of public knowledge about the legislation, which in many instances allows for public participation. Several of the civil society organisations participating at the dialogue, including IED Afrique, have done extensive work on popular legal education at the local level to equip mining communities with tools to demand accountability from their elected representatives.

The dialogue also presented innovative approaches to successful community involvement in forest management. Concrete results from civil society actions can be seen in Burkina Faso and Mali with legal frameworks including public participation. In Madagascar people are effectively managing their own resources. Guinea has also implemented a successful participatory management process of forest resources which has lead to increased purchasing power. In Madagascar, local communities are involved in management committees in protected areas, which have prevented displacement and conflicts are resolved through customary mechanisms. In Burkina Faso, a process of cataloguing traditional practices has been completed leading to the inclusion of these practices in legal frameworks. In Guinea, Rural Integrated Plans deal with land tenure and property rights in a community sensitive manner.

The dialogue concluded with a roadmap for further regional networking and the strong desire to consolidate and expand ANSA-Africa in Francophone Africa.

Conference papers can be found at <http://www.iedafrique.org/Communications-de-l-atelier.html> and www.ansa-africa.net