

ANSA-Africa stakeholder conference

19-20 May 2008

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Overview of conference proceedings

Delegates from more than 30 African countries representing all the regional economic communities on the continent, and from international development organisations, donor organisations and academic institutions attended the third annual conference held by ANSA-Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 19 and 20 May 2008. The focus of the conference was on social accountability in fragile and post conflict societies in Africa. Delegates were welcomed to the host country by Eshetu Bekele, Director of the Poverty Action Network of Civil Society Organisations in Ethiopia who informed delegates that civil society organisations in the country were helping to scale up government development programmes in the country while also dealing with human rights and democracy issues. This new spirit of empowerment needed to find a home in every African country and civil society groups needed to network and exchange information across the continent.

Delivering the opening address Dr Michael Kahn of the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa, speaking for the Director, Dr Olive Shisana, said that social accountability could help fragile and post conflict societies in addressing the challenges they faced in improving governance and moving from underdevelopment to sustainable development. He pointed out that since the first conference ANSA, which is an African initiative, had expanded with new networks now established on the Indian subcontinent and in Indonesia. It remained important to grow the African network and to emphasise training and capacity building. The conference was an opportunity to hear about social accountability initiatives being undertaken by participants and how the ANSA secretariat can help to meet their needs. An important area was how to extend work to look at social accountability in the extractive industries which made vast profits on the continent often without any recognition of social responsibility. Participants would also have many opportunities to network and discuss their work with donors and development partners.

Mary McNeill of the World Bank Institute traced the origins of ANSA-Africa from its beginning in Ghana in 2005 to the present membership of 1600 organisations across the continent. The ANSA model had expanded because it reflected a global concern with good governance and fighting corruption, which have come to be recognised as prerequisites of sustainable development. These are areas where governments need the support of parliaments, the media and civil society to counter citizen's growing disillusionment with government performance and their demands for transformation. The focus on fragile and post conflict states is important because about 40% of African states fall into these categories. Initiatives to promote social accountability have shown the importance of political analysis and an understanding of the context in different societies in developing strategies, the crucial role that awareness raising and evidence based information play in civil society participation and the need for capacity building and partnerships with government.

Participants raised a number of issues in discussion including the relationship between ANSA-Africa, the AU and the regional economic communities (RECs), how the network could provide practical support to practitioners on the ground. Participants also asked how they could get governments to acknowledge the role of social accountability and adopt principles of transparency. In response the speakers pointed out that ANSA-Africa had to play to its strengths as a network in information exchange and technical support to the work being done at country level by its members. Improved relations with the AU and regional economic communities needed more attention.

The conference continued with a panel discussion that looked at the status of social accountability in Africa. Definitions of social accountability include initiatives that enable stakeholders to have a say in development; a process of partnership that provides a sense of ownership and brings sustainability to development programmes; community participation, awareness of rights and what citizens are entitled to in terms of service delivery; social accountability as a core principle of democracy, and its link to the ability of countries' ability to decide their own policies, which is undermined by external dependency, corruption and a weak fiscal foundation. The discussion noted that social accountability in Africa is undermined by the lack of a relevant legal framework in many countries, the lack of legitimacy of many governments, weak state-civil society synergy and lack of social inclusiveness. In many countries citizens lack the ability and know-how to track government expenditure. The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) can play an important role in bringing all sectors and government together to look at policy and resource allocation.

Delegates pointed out that in pursuing social accountability civil society organisations needed to ensure that they themselves were accountable to their constituency. They needed to report on their work and be transparent about their sources of funding. A shortcoming to date has been lack of monitoring of the implementation of recommendations by the AU. Delegates noted that the important role that social accountability could play in relation to HIV/Aids was an important area that needed attention.

The afternoon breakaway sessions looked at social accountability in fragile and post conflict states, in the context of decentralisation and revenue generation and at social accountability tools. Sylvain Boko of Wake Forest University noted that conflict hindered economic growth and development. In many fragile and post conflict states the institutional environment is so weak that governments lack the capability or will to deliver core services. In the aftermath of conflict states need to first establish a safe and stable environment and address humanitarian needs. Then they need to address reconciliation and reconstruction to establish a platform to broaden participation.

Decentralisation can help to reduce conflict by granting political power to people with a better knowledge of local resources and needs and integrating marginalised groups into the mainstream. However, if it is not done well and if people do not have trust in government it can increase separatist tendencies. The rapid rural initiative employed in Sierra Leone has helped to build trust by identifying immediate needs at local level such as schools, transport and agricultural support. In the discussion participants noted the need to lobby political leaders to recognise people's right to social accountability and the problem of poverty, which both contributes to instability and make it difficult for people to focus on accountability issues in the face of the struggle to survive.

Looking at UN-Habitat's experience Mohamed Halfani noted that social accountability was a key ingredient for improving governance; that decentralisation is a prerequisite for social accountability and that financial decentralisation in particular is a key element. African states have made significant progress in setting a constitutional and legislative framework for decentralisation and in devolving power from central to provincial and local governments. However, progress in involving civil society has been marginal. The lack of a revenue base and dependence on transfers from central government were impediments to local initiatives.

The breakaway group on fragile and post colonial states looked at the situation in Liberia which faced the challenge of development in the context of healing a divided nation. Its experience shows that the challenge of democratisation does not end with elections but is an ongoing process in which the participation of civil society plays a crucial role. Social accountability in post conflict states is about ongoing negotiation of the interface between citizens and government. The session on emerging social accountability tools noted the importance of addressing both quantity and quality in service delivery, which emerged from work on distributing school text books in the Philippines, and the cost savings and reduction in corruption that can be achieved through decentralisation. A farmer support project in Zimbabwe pointed to the importance of engaging in an open deliberative process with beneficiaries in planning programmes and once again underlined the importance of awareness.

The day ended with a Knowledge Faire and cocktail dinner that gave participants an opportunity to showcase their organisations and work to promote social accountability on the continent, network and build relationships. They were entertained by music from Ethiopia's rich musical heritage accompanied by a dance troupe performing regional dances from around the country.

Day two began with four case studies from across the continent that looked at the extractive industries; promoting social accountability through gender responsiveness budgeting; the state of social accountability in the Great Lakes region; and mechanisms for participation in social accountability in Benin. John Ikubaje of the Centre for Democracy and Development indicated that through an initial audit of the oil and gas sector, which established significant failure to account for funds in the industry, Nigeria's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) was able to engage with the government. This led to the institutionalisation of the initiative and the government funding. This promises sustainability but also raises problems of political influence over appointments. Civil society engagement will continue to be a key pillar of NEITI's ongoing effectiveness. The organisation has a programme to develop stakeholder understanding of the extractive industries. NEITI's experience offers possible lessons for other organisations in engaging with government.

Turning to the promotion of social accountability through gender responsive budgeting Dede Kadiri of the Development Initiatives Network said that the budget is the most important policy document for tracking social accountability and inclusiveness as it indicates what government intends to do. Given that the government of Nigeria has committed itself to gender equality it is important to see whether this commitment is expressed in the budget. The project has adopted three major strategies, collaboration, budget policy research and information dissemination. It has also engaged in training communities and government officials. A critical success factor has been a multi-focus strategy that looks at a range of partners and stakeholders. It has had to face a number of problems including the lack of a freedom of information regime and of gender disaggregated information, and limited

community participation in the budget process due to high levels of poverty and low literacy levels.

Taking the Great Lakes Region Pact as a case study of social accountability Joseph Chilengi of Africa Internally Displaced Persons Voice (IDP) indicated that the whole region was shaken by the Rwandan genocide and the subsequent wars. The region is now moving from the ravages of war to creating mechanisms of social accountability. The process is based on the principle of inclusiveness with all sectors of society including civil society involved. Dialogue and consultation identified the root causes of the conflict and formed the basis of the Dar Es Salaam Declaration, which looks at peace and security, democracy and governance, economic development and regional integration, and humanitarian and social issues. This formed the basis of the programme of action in the Nairobi Pact. Challenges include ownership of the process, funding and implementing regional projects.

Akplogan Huguette epouse Dossa of Social Watch Benin spoke about a mechanism to ensure that citizens are able to hold government accountable for delivering quality services. Despite an expressed commitment to democratisation and poverty reduction Benin has not seen effective popular mobilisation. Social Watch aims to mobilise civil society for poverty reduction. It has done this through producing a shadow report on the budget and establishing antennas in municipalities to assess people's needs. It uses all forms of media to sensitise the population and present analyses of government programmes. Challenges are to extend the network, convince all levels of government to accept idea of accountability and secure funding.

Turning to the ANSA-Africa network Craig Schwabe said that the organisation was addressing important stakeholder needs for capacity building, networking and resources. It has met objectives for setting up the secretariat, providing sub grants for capacity building and training, and has taken note of calls to look at fragile and post conflict states and focus research on domestic revenue generation and decentralisation. The development of a web portal has been a major success. The portal receives 1600-4500 hits a day with 67% of users being new visitors showing that usage continues to grow. The portal is playing an active part in sharing resources with ten African countries being amongst those registering the most use. It provides access to more than 400 articles on social accountability and to ANSA's monthly Full Circle newsletter and Building Blocks teaching series on social accountability. Plans include working on an African sourcebook on social accountability, holding video conferences on social accountability using the World Bank's knowledge centres, identifying regional and global partners and integrating social accountability more closely with the AU and APRM, and the MDGs. In the discussion participants requested more French and Portuguese language content on the web site. The World Bank's role in ANSA was also questioned. In response Mary McNeil of the World Bank Institute said that the bank had provided seed money and at present had two seats on the executive committee but this did not give it a majority and it did not intend to control the organisation. When its term of office expires at the end of the year the Bank intends to stand back and hopes that ANSA-Africa will go forward based on demand on the continent.

The conference then looked at alternative initiatives and models of supporting social accountability. Daniel Ritchie described the work of the Partnership for Transparency Fund, an organisation of volunteers that makes small grants to civil society organisations in developing countries, builds capacity and promotes learning through workshops. The organisation works with CSOs that are committed to fighting corruption and supporting good

governance and that are willing to promote constructive engagement with public sector organisations. It has had considerable success in monitoring public procurement, delivery of services and public expenditure, drafting legislation, supporting media campaigns, developing information systems and protecting whistle blowers.

Dr Angelito Gregorio-Medel presented the work of ANSA East Asia Pacific, which aims to improve demand side governance in the region by strengthening partnership and monitoring capacities in key sectors of education, health, public infrastructure and environment focusing on budgets, public expenditure and service delivery. The intended outcomes are to improve delivery of public services, particularly for those most in need, and to make government and civil society aware of the costs and benefits of good governance and responsible citizenship. The network will build on existing regional and in-country networks and promote emerging models.

Jeff Kwaterski presented the work of the Impact Alliance Pact, which aims to help stakeholders in governance systems by translating complex concepts into practical, locally specific and easy to understand indicators, generating governance criteria and standards, comparing the quality of governance in different situations and recommending a plan for actions to improve. Implementation starts with understanding the context and continues with identification, orientation and training of main stakeholders, modeling data collection and processing and culminates in the presentation of results to stakeholder, participatory analysis and development of an action plan. Key outcomes are enhanced awareness, knowledge and skills, more effective relationships and an improved vision for service delivery.

Participants then broke into four groups to attend workshops on strategic planning for ANSA-Africa; monitoring and evaluation to assess the impact of social accountability initiatives, communications for social accountability and participating planning and monitoring in the extractive industries.

In closing speakers called on participants to continue interacting and sharing and to take up the banner of social accountability in their own countries.