

WEST AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT (WAIFEM)



REGIONAL FORUM ON THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN ACHIEVING THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS, (MDGs), BANJUL, THE GAMBIA, APRIL 7 -11, 2008

COMMUNIQUE

1.0 Introduction

A Regional Forum on the Role of the Parliament in Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was organized by the West African Institute for Financial and Economic Management (WAIFEM) with financial support from the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), at the Paradise Suites Hotel in Banjul, The Gambia from 7 to 11 April 2008.

1.1 Background to the Forum

The organisation of the Forum was predicated on the need to sensitise the Parliament towards accelerating the regional achievement of the MDGs through their legislative oversight function on the national

budget and the MDG-related programmes and projects of governments.

2.0 Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony was chaired by the Deputy Speaker, National Assembly of The Gambia, Rt. Hon. Abdoulie Bojang who represented the Chairperson, Rt. Hon. Fatoumata Jahumpa-Ceesay, Speaker, National Assembly of The Gambia. Others present were the Governor, Central Bank of The Gambia, Hon. Momodou Bamba Saho; the Deputy Governor of the Bank, Mrs. Oumie Samba; and, the Director Macroeconomic Management Department of WAIFEM, Mr. Momodou Foon who represented the Director General of WAIFEM, Dr. Osi C. Itsede.

In his keynote address, the Governor of the Central Bank of The Gambia commended WAIFEM for addressing the inadequate human and institutional capacity for economic and financial sector management which is a key constraining factor in Africa's development. The Governor acknowledged the fact that this Forum would enhance the capacities of regional legislative bodies to accelerate the achievement of the MDGs in West Africa.

He observed that with less than eight years left to realize the MDGs, the African continent might miss the 2015 deadline unless appropriate laws are enacted and implemented. The Governor concluded by calling on the legislature to exercise its oversight function effectively

with a view to ensuring that public resources are efficiently utilized in executing pro-poor programmes and projects, entrenching good governance, and accelerating growth and development in the sub-region.

Earlier, in his welcoming address, the Director General of WAIFEM, ably represented by the Director of Macroeconomic Management Department in WAIFEM, gave a background of the Institute and its achievements since inception. He expressed the Institute's gratitude to the President, Government and the people of the Republic of The Gambia for the permission granted to WAIFEM to organize the Forum in Banjul. The Director General also thanked the Governor, Management and Staff of the Central Bank of The Gambia for the hospitality accorded WAIFEM staff and participants since their arrival in Banjul. Finally, the Director General expressed sincere appreciation to the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) for its financial contribution towards the organization of the Forum.

3.0 Objectives of the Forum

The principal objective of the Forum was to enhance the knowledge and skills of legislators to assess, evaluate and appraise economic and financial programmes and projects related to MDGs as well as budgets emanating from the executive arm of government. It was also intended to strengthen the capacity of legislators in enacting appropriate legislation geared towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) within the current liberalized framework of economic management.

4.0 Main Themes

The following main themes were covered during the Forum:

- Legislative Oversight in Economic Management;
- MDGs: Africa's Performance and Way Forward;
- Uses and Interpretation of Macroeconomic Indicators;
- The Role of Fiscal Policy and Monetary Policy in Economic Management;
- Strategies for Upgrading Economic and Financial Management Capacities of National Parliaments;
- The MTEF, the Budget as a Tool of Economic Management and an Instrument for Poverty Reduction; and
- West African Monetary Integration: Prospects and Challenges.

5.0 Participation

The one-week Forum was attended by thirty-three (33) legislators and executive level officials from the public sector in The Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, as well as the ECOWAS Commission and the West African Monetary Institute.

6.0 Facilitation

The Forum was facilitated by experts from the public sector, the academia in the sub-region, and the WAIFEM faculty. The delivery methodology was a combination of lectures, country presentations and tour of The Gambia's National Assembly.

7.0 Observations and Recommendations

7.1 Observations

Following the lectures, syndicate discussions and study tour, we, the participants, made the following observations:

- That both the national Parliament and the ECOWAS Parliament have roles to play in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- That corruption militates against the achievement of the MDGs;
- That the budget is the single most important instrument of power;
- That there are differences in the appropriation powers of the national parliaments;
- That the parliament should be financially independent of the Executive;
- That some national parliaments do not have specific committee on MDGs;

- That the Public Accounts Committee is not effectively resourced to monitor the utilisation of public resources;
- That there are inadequate human, financial and material resources for legislative duties;
- That there is dearth of well-trained parliamentary support staff; and
- That there are regional and national initiatives in implementing MDG-related projects.

7.2 Recommendations

In light of the foregoing observations, we wish to make the following recommendations:

- That parliamentarians as representatives of their citizens, should ensure, once elected, that national interests override party aspirations;
- That all parliaments are urged to establish parliamentary committee dealing with MDGs where it does not exist, to ensure adequate tracking of budgetary activities towards the attainment of the MDGs by 2015 ;
- That parliaments should always monitor effectively the utilisation of MDG grants to ensure probity, transparency and accountability in order to encourage other donors to support MDG projects;

- That parliaments must continuously assert their financial independence;
- That the logic of separation of powers dictate that budgetary allocations to the parliament should be first-line charges as it is done for the Judiciary;
- That parliamentarians should be well remunerated and provided with adequate human, material and financial resources to minimise distraction in the effective discharge of their legislative duties, including the recruitment of permanent secretaries for provision of relevant information and data to parliamentary committees;
- That parliaments should seek independent sources of information from think tank, universities etc for oversight activities;
- That Parliaments should establish a legislative budget and research office, and a Legislative Compliance Committee;
- That to ensure transparency, the Public Accounts Committee of the Parliament should be chaired by the opposition party, equipped properly and encouraged to fulfil its constitutional role of monitoring public accounts;
- That based on training needs assessment, there should be regular training and re-training of parliamentarians and parliamentary

support staff in the areas of economic and financial oversight functions, job schedules and general day-to-day activities.

- That public education must be intensified to allow the constituencies to have a better understanding of their roles and those of the Parliament in achieving the MDGs;
- That the economic and financial support of the regional integration should be incorporated into national development strategies and targets;
- That regional parliamentary coalition group should be established to monitor the achievements of the MDGs in the sub-region;
- That there should be closer cooperation between the Legislature and sub-regional bodies; and
- That under the auspices of ECOWAS Commission, exchange visits among the national parliaments should be promoted.

8.0 Conclusion

We, the participants, would like to seize this opportunity to thank WAIFEM and ACBF for enhancing the capacity of the legislative arm of government. We appreciate the constitutional role of the Parliament to ensure the well being of our people as encapsulated in the MDGs. We are sure that the knowledge and skills acquired from this Forum will

enhance our capacity in the discharge of oversight functions. On this note, we commend WAIFEM for a creditable organisation of this Forum and our various institutions for permitting us to participate in this Forum.

DONE in Banjul, The Gambia, This 11th Day of April 2008.