

SOROTI DISTRICT CIVIL SOCIETY COORDINATION DIALOGUE HELD AT TIK TIK ROYALE ON JUNE 17, 2011

CSOs consultations on coordination

The main purpose of the consultation dialogue organised by SODANN for Civil Society Organisations in Soroti District was to seek for strategies of enhancing coordination to increase CSOs impact and to examine the CSOs operating environment in the changing political trends in Uganda. Over 70 CSOs representatives from national NGOs, CBOs, Faith Based Organization, international organization and technical staff from the district local government attended.

Status of CSOs in Soroti District

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) observed that most CSOs in Soroti District are carrying out similar activities in the field of education, health and agriculture and there was need for them to coordinate amongst themselves to avoid duplication of activities and services in order to avoid wastage of resources. With proper coordination and information sharing, service delivery will drastically improve.

CSOs were advised to ensure that their plans/activities are in line with the Soroti District 5Year Development Plan. This would address the challenges that the District faces in terms of the priority areas that are not funded.

For instance, if one's area of intervention is in education then identify the gaps that are not supported /funded within that sector and compliment.

CSOs registration with SODANN

CAO emphasized that CSOs, should register with SODANN so that they are known in terms of their

operational areas (Sub county/County/Parish), target groups, work plans and their budget allocations. A warning was passed to the CSOs who withhold/ were not willing to submit their information to SODANN and that action would be taken upon such organisations because they undermine the relevance of coordination and the need to effectively utilise the minimum resources to maximize the impact. It is through registration and

coordination that organisations with unknown agenda can be identified and held to account.

Chief Administrative Officer, Soroti District addressing Civil Society Organisations at Tik Tik Royale.

CSOs representatives listening to CAO as he emphasized that NGOs should enhance coordination and networking to improve on their impact and reduce duplication of the limited resources.

The CAO applauded CSOs for the commendable work that they are doing to support poor communities and for complimenting the District Local Government, although a number of challenges remain un-addressed.

CAO urged SODANN to regularly update the CSOs data bank to have such information easily available for planning and coordination purposes.

CSOs Coordination and operating environment in Soroti District

Since 2000, Ugandan government has put in place a number of laws and regulations that would be interpreted to better the work of CSOs whereas in the actual sense they constrain the working & operating environment of CSOs. Regular amendments of the NGO laws without sufficient consultation of CSOs

have had a negative bearing on the CSOs legal operating environment.

The amendment of the NGO Registration Act of 2006 (Amendment Act) provides a partial definition of

NGOs that recognizes NGOs that provide service delivery and not those that are advocacy oriented. There

is a disproportionate role of the executive that gives a lot of power to control NGO activities to the

Ministry of Internal Affairs as well as to interfere with the activities of the NGOs sector as and when they dim it fit.

The functionality limitations and mandatory regulations section 2 (1) states that “No organisations shall

operate in Uganda unless it has been dully registered with the Board established under section 3 of this

Act and has a valid permit issued by the Board. It further criminalizes the unregistered NGOs.

Authoritarian registration procedures have been considered under the NGO Act over bearing on the NGO

sector. The element of dual liability/double punishment that seeks to implicate the NGO personnel and

their organisation over the same offence has been introduced.

Furthermore, lack of representation in terms of composition and the role of the NGO Board that mainly

comprises of representatives from the various government ministries deprives NGOs the opportunity to participate on key decisions that affect them and their operations. This is re-enforced by making no provision for appeals process in case of being aggrieved and worse off irrational terms and dissolution of an NGO.

In 2008, proposals for the 2008 NGO regulations were made. These proposals frustrate NGO application

for registration process, provides for a redundant supervisory role including registration of operation areas

and other aspects therein. Creates double registration of NGOs in which the certificate and the permit are

to be issued. Institutes reprehensible termination and dissolution of an NGO.

The enactment of the 2008 NGO policy, compounds the complex coordination structure of the NGOs

sector that compels the involvement of government in the coordination of NGOs at various levels of

Government. It provides for disapproval of the registration of transparency, accountability and self-

registration as in section 5.4 of the 2008 NGO Policy.

All these and many more factors threaten the NGOs operating environment in Uganda, especially those

NGOs involved in advocacy, human rights and governance activities.

It was observed that participation of CSOs on very critical issues was very minimal for example the

Mabira saga and Walk to work protest. It could be partly due to the oppressive legislative framework and

mistaken intent by government.

The mandate of ensuring development is the role of government; CSOs are supposed to compliment in

service delivery and to engage government on accountability by way of advocacy.

The government expects NGOs to do their work very well unfortunately they are taken up by a number of trends.

NGOs were urged to promote coordination and networking vertically and horizontally and that it's not

about SODANN but rather it is about all NGOs involved.

Coordination is sustainable but when misconstrued, it leads to duplication and misuse of resources.

Recommendations:

1. SODANN should hold regular coordination fora for CSOs and local government,
2. Develop advocacy strategy to focus on the deteriorating CSOs operational environment in collaboration with the national and international CSOs;

3. Promote active networking among CSOs working on service delivery and advocacy;
4. Review the CSOs data base and regularly update for planning and coordination
5. Organise capacity building trainings in various CSOs sectors for the weaker CSOs to improve their capacity to meet their stated objectives.