

# REPORT OF THE TOWN HALL MEETING ORGANIZED BY WOMEN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION PROGRAMME (WREP)/ PUBLISH WHAT YOU PAY (PWYP) NIGERIA

## THEME: OUR MONEY, OUR RIGHT - (COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE)

VENUE: SALASI SOCIAL CENTRE, KARU, ABUJA

DATE: 13TH JUNE, 2008

The purpose of the town hall meeting was to build the capacity of identified stakeholders at the grass roots level to respond to the recurring decimal of corruption, and hold the Nigerian government accountable.

A total of 103 Participants at the town hall meeting were made up of persons from the Civil Society Organizations, the media, grassroots organizations, and women groups, and representative of the Chief of Karu. Specifically the group asked intelligent questions in the area of what each expects of the other in curbing corruption.

The lead presenter Prof Femi Olaleye adopted the participatory transformative approach that empower and create room for independent and sustainable action since they allow for local ownership

Opening session: The meeting commenced at 10.15, the facilitator called upon any participant moved to say the opening prayer, after which the participants introduced themselves.

The Executive Director of Women's Right to Education Programme (WREP) Ms Mimidoo Achakpa further apologized for the delayed arrival of the Chief of Karu who was scheduled to declare the town hall meeting open and give a good will message, in her welcome remarks, she expressed gratitude to the participants for making out time to attend the meeting. She explained that WREP is an organization which seeks to address issues affecting women, especially in the area of Education, she further explained that Publish What You Pay is a network of Civil organization which advocates for revenue transparency especially in the extractive sector (Oil and gas ), as well as ensuring that whatever revenue these industries generate its published and made known to the public and what revenue the government generates should be used for the general good of the citizens. She went on to say that the aim of organizing the town hall meeting is to create awareness of what PWYP is aimed at achieving and also to get inputs from the various civil society organizations.

The Facilitator then called upon the lead presenter, Prof Femi Olaleye, to make his presentation on the theme:- **Our Money Our Rights** in the context of PWYP.he began his presentation by giving background information on the History of Nigeria. In his presentation, he said that Nigeria as a Nation never existed from the beginning (Nigeria is not a pluralistic Nation) and that Nigeria became amalgamated in 1914. Before then, most of the ethnic groups brought together were nations on their own, and there existed various ethnic nations in Nigeria

before the Colonialist came. According to Prof Femi Olaleye the basic concept and foundation of Extractive Industry is that all Nigerians have a right to certain things and benefits. He said extractive industry (oil, gas, and minerals) has an effect on the land far beyond where this is been extracted. He went further to defined Transparency as a quality of something such as glass, that allows one to see through it. He said the activities of the extractive industries should be done in such a way that it becomes easy for people to see and understand what is happening, since Extractive Industry gets or generates its profit from the community, transparency becomes highly essential. These industries according to him have physical developmental, social and environmental impact on the society, Since it affects life and property of those around such areas.

Since the extractive industries amasses wealth of the community ,it then becomes essential that the people have the right to know, measurement of oil extracted should be known, by the public and also the revenue generated and accrued to the Government. Extractive Industries in charge of extraction should be made accountable because if these revenues are not judiciously used the people suffer, since their standard of living is not improved.

He ended up by saying the community has a right to ensure that the Government and Extractive Industry are Transparent and accountable in all their activities not to do so would mean opening our unborn generation to perpetual poverty.

The representative of His Royal Highness Chief of Karu, Mr Nuhu Gora, spoke on behalf of the chief and said the chief wished he were in attendance personally, but even though he could not make it, he was with us in spirit and thanked WREP/PWYP for finding his vicinity worthy of bringing such awareness to the grassroots people that he governs, he welcomed all and encouraged WREP/PWYP to organize regular foras for the people and said he looked *forward* to many more of these forums.

### **Reaction to Prof's presentation:**

- Mr. winner Chima of Fedup asked if the government is ignorant of the people's rights or that the people are not actually aware of their rights
- Lydia Adinnu of SESER expressed appreciation for a paper well delivered and further wanted to know how they could join in the fight of ensuring transparency and accountability in the extractive sector, especially those people who are not from the Niger Delta.
- Bensen Agum, of SESER asked to know how the people can make their cries heard
- Joseph Omeiza of Children's Right Network asked to know to what extent PWYP has gone to bring extractive industries to ensuring transparency. He also raised other questions as follows:
- What is the definition of our rights, since maybe the government could have a different definition from the public, and also how do the people fight for these rights
- Is it possible that non passage of the freedom of information bill will affect this cause?
- Ngozi Okoye asked that since most of the people in Nigeria are poor and ignorant, how then is it possible for them to make an impact and how can their voices be heard, she also suggested that such campaigns should be taken to the rural areas where people will be educated on their rights to enable them fight better for their rights.

### **Response:**

- Prof Olaleye emphasized that the political leaders know what they are supposed to do but the aristocratic oppression inherited from the colonial masters has overruled them. I.e. cheating

the poor on what rightfully belongs to them. It is on this basis that most of our leaders operate. He further emphasized that the establishment of PWYP is expected to achieve better results than freedom of information bill which does not publish activities of extractive industries, since freedom of information bill only empowers the public to challenge the authority on information withheld. It does not enforce accountability and transparency. He went further to say that most members of the public know their rights, to fight for their rights, there has to be determination and commitment. The public should get interested in monitoring government activities carried out, make reports on what they see going wrong, and join organizations that would represent their interest. He said ignorance breeds poverty and poverty is a state of mind since there exist people with no money who have made impact in the society, so he advised that the people should do their best to push forward.

The programme manager tried to make the participants understand the reason for the town hall meeting, that it is good for us all to be informed since the government belongs to us all. He said 95% of the money generated in Nigeria is from oil and gas, and so it becomes important to sensitize the ordinary man to make demands for basic amenities. Money generated should be used to dig boreholes, make good roads and install electricity, good health facilities etc. there should be a budget to cover all these needs, we should rise and fight not by violence but by organizing communal groups to campaign for our interest.

If the public starts demanding for fulfillment of their rights, the government officials would be forced to seat up in meeting their demands and responsibilities.

In closing the Executive Director of WREP wrapped up the session by thanking participants for their patience and explained to those who sought to know how PWYP operates one of the reasons for the town hall was to reach out to the grassroots organizations, and thereafter distributed membership forms to each organization to fill and return. Group photographs were taken; refreshments and the meeting came to a close. The town hall meeting came to a close at 12.10 pm.