

REPORT OF THE FULL CIRCLE TAX WATCH FOR MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN



Cross section of participants and facilitators during the Advocacy Campaign in Sogakope, Ghana

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
AGENDA.....	4
REPORT ON ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN.....	5
CONCLUSION	13
LINK TO GALLERY:	13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Full Circle Tax Watch project aims to promote greater inclusion of young people's voices and priorities in the formulation and oversight of budgetary and tax policy processes and issues in Nigeria, Mali and Ghana with the support of the Voice Global, Netherlands. The project has successfully engaged and built the capacity of marginalized populations in the countries of implementation on Tax and Budget Monitoring. The participants have been trained on research methods and have engaged in face-to-face advocacy meetings with relevant stakeholders in-country. The findings from the research led to the rationale for an Advocacy Campaign.

The main objective of this Advocacy Campaign tagged "Inclusive Hangout", is to promote actions that will meaningfully engage marginalized persons in fiscal policymaking and practice monitoring dialogues. This idea is to: (i) expand the institutional support for the inclusion of marginalized people to proactively engage with tax and budget monitoring; and (ii) improve the understanding of budgets and fiscal monitoring, pro-poor tax policy, efficient tax collection, and public budget allocations by organizations addressing the health and education needs of marginalized population in project countries. This will equally influence and catalyze the creation of and access to open political spaces, processes, and participation for young people in Nigeria, Ghana and Mali.

In view of this, the Advocacy Campaign tagged "INCLUSIVE HANGOUT" was planned as a platform for the marginalized population to Speak Out and demand their meaningful engagement across the countries of implementation. In-country stakeholders were invited to participate in the Advocacy Campaign including media representatives.

The Ghana led implementation was dubbed: Inclusive Hangout Advocacy Campaign in Ghana: Promoting Inclusive Fiscal Policy: Voices of the Marginalized.

AGENDA

Time	Registration	Secretariat
10:00AM-10:15AM	Introduction and Opening Remarks	ICASA Director/SAA Coordinator
10:15AM-10:30AM	Brief Overview of Inclusive Advocacy Campaign	Facilitators from Consortium
10:30AM-11:00AM	Importance of Inclusive Fiscal Policy	Keynote Speaker (OXFAM) /ASDAG/USAID
11:00AM-11:30AM	Panel Discussion: Empowering Marginalized Communities: Insights and Strategies	Representative from the CCM Representative of CSO Advocates for Marginalized Populations Academic Expert in Fiscal Policy and Social Inclusion
11:30AM-12:00PM	Question and Answer Session (Q/A)	Participants
COCONUT REFRESHMENT		
12:15PM- 13:00PM	Testimonials: Personal Stories from Marginalized Individuals/Video Presentations or Live Testimonies	Participants s
13:00PM-14:00PM	Advocacy Campaign Launch: Unveiling of Campaign Slogans and Call to Action for Participants to Advocate for Inclusive Fiscal Policies	Facilitators from Consortium and participants
14:00PM – 14:15PM	Closing Remarks	ICASA Director/SAA Coordinator

REPORT ON ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN

Arrival and Registration

Participants embarked on a journey to the Cisneros Beach Resort, Sogakope, in the South of Ghana, specifically along the Volta River. A 30-seater bus from the Society for AIDS in Africa was provided to convey participants to and fro from the venue. All participants were duly registered and received folders containing all necessary information and documentation pertaining to this event.



Participants refresh themselves with fresh coconut during their arrival at the venue

Welcome address

Mr. Luc Armand Bodea, ICASA Director welcomed all participants and facilitators to the programme. He elaborated on the genesis of this project and the support of participants from its inception to its concluding stages. He introduced Mr. Martin Mary Falana, Kids and Teens Resource Centre, Nigeria, who in turn, informed participants of the objectives of this morning's programme/agenda.

This was followed by a light coconut refreshment package, which constituted a networking and bonding experience among participants. Participants present belonged to and were not limited to the following marginalized populations:

1. Persons living with Albinism
2. Persons living with HIV
3. Persons with Hearing Loss
4. Persons who inject/use drugs
5. Persons with Visual impediments

6. LGBTIQ
7. Men who have sex with men
8. Female sex workers
9. Youth
10. Transgender

The facilitators present were Mr. Luc Armand Bodea, ICASA Director and Coordinator of the Society for AIDS In Africa, Dr. Henry Nagai, Chief of Party USAID JSI Continuum, Mr. Martin Mary Falana, Kids and Teens Resource centre, Catherine Bentum, Ethics Officer of the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) and Mr. Katseku Kwamla Newton, representing the CSO Advocates for marginalized populations. Dr. Nagai proceeded to deliver his talk on the importance of inclusive fiscal policy. Dr. Nagai mentioned that the team from the Applied Sciences and Development Associates Ghana (ASDAG), through its continued collaboration with the Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA) has been part of this project since its inception in country.



Luc Armand H. Bodea, ICASA Director / SAA Coordinator giving an open speech to set the programme in motion

He stated that one of the things that ASDAG continues to do is to promote engagement and support how we can strengthen LGBTIQ and other vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups, to hold governments and structures, civil society organizations (CSOs) accountable and to support and improve livelihoods of members of the marginalized community.

Setting the Stage for the Campaign

Mr. Luc Armand Bodea on his part stated that the anti-homophobic bill is not only affecting the marginalized community but the whole health system in Africa. He stated that in the case of Ghana, the bill has not been passed into law, yet the best approach is to continue advocating, while waiting for the

next step. He was hopeful that the bill would not be passed. He stated that this was one of the reasons why the team had gathered here to deliberate on such issues of national interest, equal opportunity and equal access to health systems for all.

Mr. Martin-Mary Falana, Kids and Teens Resource Centre, stated that for the case of Nigeria, the bill has been passed and it is already affecting lives of people within the marginalized populations. He mentioned that during an interview with the media, he asked how the LGBTQ community is contributing to the situation of bad roads in the country as well as poor access to electricity and transportation. He stated the passage of the bill was thus a misplacement of priorities.



Martin-Mary Falana, CEO of Kids & Teens; interacting with the participants

“Live and let live”. Treat everyone as equal. He stated that there were challenges in the region, and we are looking at places, opportunities and spaces to continuously engage and ensure that we fill up these gaps. A marginalized population is a broad concept. The consortium therefore put together the proposal and received funding for this project so that we can have meaningful engagement of the marginalized population in tax and budgetary processes in the region.

This initiative was successfully implemented in Nigeria, Ghana and Mali with the hope of going further very soon. Recounting the journey, he stated that the process started with a research phase, which was facilitated by Accountability International, and the identified groups participated, by administering questionnaires to stakeholders in our various countries.

He mentioned that in the case of Nigeria, the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA), as a state actor was involved. He mentioned that many marginalised groups were trained to be able to go and do a face-to-face interaction with these policymakers. He mentioned that during the interactions, the beneficiaries of the project questioned how Nigeria had adhered to the provisions of the Abuja Declaration,

which stipulates that 15% of National budget is be allocated to the Health sector. Despite all these interventions, marginalized populations still experience discrimination and limited access to services and even those who might have access, are plagued with discrimination.

Mr. Falana indicated that the project has already enhanced the capacity of marginalized populations to be able to know their rights, know that they need to participate actively in budget processes at both the national and sub-national levels. It was based on this premise that the Ghana team was implementing the Advocacy campaign.

Highlighting on the campaign messages, Mr. Falana stressed the messages were strongly derived from the research results. These messages have been designed in a way that we can all use them to snap campaign pictures. The campaign messages were shared among participants. Each participant could identify with at least one of the messages as they related to each stage of project implementation.

Dr. Henry Nagai educated participants on some peculiar issues facing Ghana. He stated that the various budget cycles, especially for the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) in Ghana, is currently part of the Grant Cycle Seven and all other things that had impacted on social demographically disadvantaged groups within the country. He stated that this should inform some of the discussions and the stories that we want to hear today. He mentioned that many of the issues faced in Ghana bother on budget and taxes.



Dr. Henry Nagai, sharing with participants

He stated that the call on the President of Ghana to assent the Anti LGBTQI Bill into law and whether to go forward with it or not, bordered on budgetary implication. It is also because most donor partners have reiterated that there will be consequences if the bill is signed, and Ghana would most likely not receive resources amidst other sanctions.

However, if the president refuses to sign the bill, there is most likely going to be a backlash and accrue to political misfortunes for his political party in the upcoming elections. He stated that all these kinds of considerations bordered on budgets.

Dr. Nagai mentioned that we need to make our voices very loud, but it should not be empty loudness. It should be informed by evidence. Our advocacy should be based on data and information that will make decision makers to think. He stated that if you have a need and are unable to express your position well or you cannot talk about it in a coherent manner and be able to make the necessary impact, then decisions would not be made in your direction.

Recounting an experience, Dr. Nagai noted, “recently, we had a side meeting with a very high-level group within the government level, not the politicians, the directors, etc. And about 60, 70 percent of them did not even know that if the bill is passed and I'm a landlord and I actually offer a space to a member of the community and I'm reported, I can be jailed as a facilitator of a behavior that is against the law or a promoter.” It is not about the rule of law. It is the law that rules.

In view of this, we need to continue to advocate properly. We need to continue to do the things that we know at the end of the day, whatever policy or law is passed, will serve our interests. That is very important. So we need to be organised and we have to speak about these things with evidence in a coherent manner.

Lastly Dr. Nagai mentioned that in the medical community, currently, as we speak, as you might all know, the scientists, medics have removed the membership of the LGBT community from our DMSA, the Diagnostic Manual of Psychiatric Diseases. The reason is that nobody now considers these issues as a disease or mental disorder anymore. It has also been removed from the ICD-10, the International Classification of Diseases 10.

Panel Discussion

The next activity was the panel discussion on “Empowering marginalized communities: Insights and Strategies”. The panelists were Emmanuel Nuworzah, ASDAG, Katseku Kwamla Newton, representative of the CSO Advocates for marginalised populations and Catherine Bentum, Ethics Officer, CCM Ghana.



Katseku Kwamla Newton, Catherine Bentum, Ethics Officer of the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM) and Emmanuel Nuworzah, ASDAG

Mr. Nuworzah in his opening remarks, stated that there was one issue all participants and facilitators were guilty of. He stated that in registering CSOs, we are asking which group do you want to help? So you are going to help one group and leave another group without thinking that connecting them will be the best approach. He further stated, "If I'm standing in for persons living with HIV and my brother is standing in for persons living with albinism and he's concentrating just on that as default, it is wrong. If my target is people who are living with HIV, without thinking that the person who is living with albinism can also be a person living with HIV, then we have a problem".

"This kind of thinking has limited the strength of CSOs to work together for one common good. The voice of CSOs must be one and it must be connected from the central point amongst all of them, so that what I feel in my group you also feel it in your group. And I think today, tomorrow and the days to come that you too can meet my problem and my need somewhere along the line".

Mr. Nuworzah also mentioned that during the collection of taxes, money from everybody, including the marginalized person is taken. He also stated that it is a constitutional right to be provided with access to services. He asked rhetorically, **"Why is it that taking the money has been easy? But giving it to the point where I must benefit has become discriminatory?"**

In collecting the taxes, you didn't ask whether I'm LGBTIQ+. You took my money. So in trying to tell us that we are being accorded help, we are not being helped, we are being robbed. So from here, every CSO must start to group around with its people and say that today, we want to think broadly.

Lastly, he asked how often we meet for what we are doing, as a collective. How often do we have forums and workshops like this? We are over-concentrating on our individual groups, such that we are not coming out enough. He stated that we needed to do more as a collective and have joint planning meetings and develop a common strategy on how to come out and rally around that one voice and design activities that are continuously implemented as a collective. He stated there was a collective need for resource mobilization to sustain this proposed initiative.

Mr. Kwamla Newton provided the community perspective. He mentioned that identifying marginalized individuals or people has become a very difficult task for individuals in society, including government. Explaining the point further, he stated that In Ghana, there is no segregated data that shows the number of disability groupings or persons with disabilities. "So planning for these people who you don't have data on, how effective is it going to be for you to plan and give them the needed support?".

Looking at the issues broadly, Mr. Newton mentioned that in Ghana, we have what you call exclusion rather than inclusion. So marginalized people, a person with disability, including a person with albinism, are very excluded in every part of our developmental sphere, let alone the tax and budgetary issues. It was not until 2015, where individuals in the Ghanaian population began to identify or accept albinism as part of the marginalized and disability communities in the country.

"If it takes us that long period for you to identify such a person, how has been our strategic plan? What do we plan? How do we plan for them? How do we include them rather than now and so what you are doing is a tokenism?" One of the slogans on marginalized groups for the campaign is: "nothing about us without us". To Mr. Newton, the big question to answer is, "How do we get involved"?

He mentioned that the involvement of disability communities in tax monitoring cycle had been non-existent until the implementation of this project. In our data collection, even in our census population,

they ask questions using a short form of Washington group of questions to collate data without knowing the orientation that the data collectors receive. He wondered if the data entry/collation officers received any orientation to be able to identify persons living with disabilities.

Elaborate strategies must be put in place in dealing with the issues that pertain to them, that address their peculiar needs. Provision of health care is becoming a challenge for persons with albinism as well as our health delivery system generally. There is no policy talking about health delivery for persons with disability and persons with albinism.

The number of people with disabilities working in the private and public sector and businesses pay taxes. As the adage goes, collecting taxes is very easy but how are these taxes being utilized? How many of our marginalized communities, persons with disabilities are being employed and also benefit the tax waiver that we have received from the people who pay the tax to the government?

The proposed strategy is to consider a targeted approach in dealing with our members of our community. Let us also mainstream our policies and programs to include persons living with disabilities. As of today, there are over 27 categories of disabilities in Ghana. There must be policies and approaches aimed at mainstreaming programs and interventions that include persons with disabilities and persons with albinism.

The last panelist for this session was Catherine Bentum, Ethics officer for CCM Ghana. She spoke about representation and inclusion. She mentioned that the needs of the members of the various marginalized groups differ. Even within the MSM or LGBTQI space, the needs of older LGBTQI+ are different from the younger ones. It is just the same as the PLHIV community as the younger ones needs differ. But unfortunately, sometimes when we are putting together policies, we just box everything together. These gaps are often exposed during implementation of these policies as the resources available are not tailored to their needs.



Catherine Bentum, Ethics Officer of the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM)

In terms of representation, the constitution and governance document of the CCM has gone through some reviews. This document is currently at the validation stage. There is a representation from the LGBT community but unfortunately, it's only limited to the MSM community. This is problematic. She was of the view that the decision is to be left to that community to decide who represents them. She stated that various marginalized populations such as the trans community, female sex workers and persons living with Albinism were missing. She also mentioned that Young KPs are also advocating for representation since their needs vary.

Another issue she raised was that, most often than not, the mistake often made when describing Key populations are also limited to MSM and FSW. She stated that there have been additional calls to include persons with mental health issues as a marginalized group. She mentioned the first call, was for these various marginalized groups to officially write to the CCM to request for observer status. She mentioned that the only caveat is that an observer cannot vote on issues but enjoys any other privilege as any member. Observers can contribute to discussions, attend meetings that are called by and for all CCM members.

Furthermore, she highlighted that access to healthcare is a human right issue and the voices of marginalized populations must be heard. She stated that in terms of ethics and prohibited practices you realize that our key vulnerable populations are the ones that people are taking advantage of. She referred to instances of harassment and exploitation by members of the MSM group. They refused to take it up with the authorities on the grounds that the current legislation did not permit them to talk about it.

She also referred to a case where a young person living with HIV, got the medication seized by somebody because they did not consent to have a sexual relationship. Various participants mentioned that these were daily occurrences amongst their communities.

She further cited another example, where she was part of a team engaging female sex workers, on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment but faced heavy discrimination amongst women and even religious leaders within that community.

As a contribution, Dr. Nagai mentioned that he was going to advocate for the CCM to situate the inclusion of members of disadvantaged or vulnerable groups from the ethics point of view as he chairs the Ethics committee of the CCM. He mentioned that it was going to be done in such a way that people would see that it is even unethical not to include any marginalised group at the CCM level.

This session was very interactive as we had participants sharing their experiences as well as asking our various resource persons questions and seeking clarity on some concerning issues. Some participants also expressed concerns of the type of activism within the marginalized space. Others called on all who are truly passionate about helping people and communities in their diversities, to stay focused and continue the fight. On the other hand, those who were in it for personal gains, need to reorient their mindsets and look at the bigger picture of making impactful change in the lives of all people. Mr. Bodea, ICASA Director referred to the moving of the Hosting Rights of Uganda after human rights violations were committed during their election, to stand in solidarity and also advocate for human rights for all people. He also mentioned that after this campaign, there is a plan to have quarterly meetings to continue the discussions.

One of the participants mentioned that he worked as a disability inclusion advisor. He stated that with support from the United Nations, the Ghana Statistical Service has been engaged to design a data questionnaire for the collection of national data on persons with disabilities. Currently, the questionnaires are being developed and tested to be able to provide us with requisite data.

CONCLUSION

The "Inclusive Hangout" Advocacy Campaign has been a significant endeavor in promoting the meaningful engagement of marginalized populations in fiscal policymaking across Nigeria, Ghana, and Mali. Through our concerted efforts, we have strived to expand institutional support for inclusivity, enhance understanding of budgetary processes among marginalized communities, and catalyze the creation of open political spaces for youth participation. We have noticed that during this study, most of the marginalized populations were unaware of the 15% allocation of CCM budget to marginalized populations.

Throughout the campaign, stakeholders from diverse backgrounds have been invited to engage in dialogue, fostering a platform where the voices of the marginalized can be heard and their demands for meaningful engagement can be articulated. In Ghana particularly, under the banner of "Inclusive Hangout Advocacy Campaign in Ghana: Promoting Inclusive Fiscal Policy: Voices of the Marginalized," significant strides have been made in raising awareness and advocating for inclusive fiscal policies.

However, our work is far from over. This project only focused on Greater Accra Region whereas Ghana is made up of 16 regions. As we conclude this phase of the campaign, it is imperative that we continue to push for sustained action and commitment towards inclusive fiscal policies. We must build upon the momentum generated and work collaboratively with government, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to ensure that marginalized populations are not only included but actively participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Moving forward, we remain steadfast in our commitment to promoting inclusivity and advocating for the rights and empowerment of marginalized communities. By working together, we can create a more just and equitable society where everyone who pays taxes, monitors and benefits from it.

LINK TO GALLERY: <https://www.saafrica.org/pages/gallery/full-circle-tax-watch-for-marginalised-populations-inclusive-handout-advocacy-campaign-in-ghana-promoting-inclusive-fiscal-policy-voices-of-the-marginalised/>