



CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AT THE HEART OF THE BUDGET ORIENTATION DEBATE: A CONSTRUCTIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR TRANSPARENT MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC RESOURCES

In accordance with the Law on the Financial Regime of the State and Other Public Entities and the Decree on the State Budget Calendar, every year since 2020, the Budget Orientation Debate (DOB) has been a key moment in Cameroon's democratic life. It sets the broad budgetary guidelines for the next three years and establishes priorities in terms of public spending. Traditionally reserved for political and administrative players, this process is now evolving, with increased participation from civil society. The latter is playing an increasingly active role in preparing the DOB, thereby contributing to more transparent management of public resources.

One of the main advantages of involving civil society is its ability to take a critical look at the budgetary choices proposed. Thanks to their expertise, these players are able to analyse public policies and assess their real impact on society. They can thus make valuable recommendations, based on factual data, for a more efficient and equitable allocation of public resources.



In 2023, the DOB was a key moment in the legislative process when parliamentarians examined and debated the government's major budgetary and financial guidelines for the years 2024-2026. This debate, which preceded the examination of the Finance Bill, gave members of parliament the opportunity to question the government on the guidelines in terms of budgetary transparency and choices. To ensure that the DOB ran smoothly, civil society had to go through a number of essential stages that were conducive to constructive debate. This article presents the CSO actions that contributed to these positive results.



A. PREPARATION FOR THE DEBATE

Before the debate, it was necessary to carry out meticulous preparation with the parliamentarians to ensure the quality of the exchanges. Here are some of the key stages:

- a) Updating the national network of parliamentarians in the fight against illegal financial flows and taxation (APNIFFT-Cameroon) with a presentation of the Cameroon national caucus signed by parliamentarians in 2022 to improve budget governance;
- b) Analysis of the legal framework governing the DOB, with the Cameroon Caucus of Parliamentarians Network on Illicit Financial Flows and Taxation (APNIFFT Caucus) in order to formulate recommendations and policy guidelines for the various actors involved in the implementation of the DOB to promote active and meaningful citizen participation in the budgetary process in Cameroon;
- c) Proposing Oral Questions to Members of Parliament in order to provide the June 2023 session of the Budget Review with all necessary information.

B. RESULTS

- ***Update of members of the CSO-Parliamentary network platform:***

The participants expressed their continued commitment to the fight against illicit financial flows and agreed to work together to achieve the network's objectives at both national and continental level.

- ***Strengthening of the legal framework setting out the procedures for organising the Budget Orientation Debate:***

The poor conduct of the DOB in 2022 allowed the offices of the parliamentary chambers to sign decrees on the organisation of the DOB. Thanks to CSO analysis of the limitations of the legal framework and the risks of consequences, recommendations were formulated and adopted for an inclusive, effective and efficient DOB. As a result, the public witnessed a DOB, held on time and effectively animated, in June 2023.

- ***Improving parliamentary democracy:***

The participation of civil society in the Budget Orientation debate has helped to strengthen parliamentary democracy. By including the voices and perspectives of civil society, parliamentarians have been able to take more informed, evidence-based positions and better represent the interests of the people. This partnership has fostered an open and constructive dialogue between parliamentarians and the government, strengthening the trust between elected representatives and citizens, as well as the legitimacy of the democratic process.

- ***Transparent management of public resources, particularly in the extractive sector:***

Thanks to their active participation in the DOB, the APNIFFT Cameroon Caucus has formulated guidelines for the government to monitor financial flows, fight corruption and promote the transparent use of revenues from the extractive sector, not forgetting the emerging issue of Cameroon's energy transition.



The growing involvement of civil society in the Budget Orientation debate represents a significant step towards transparent management of public resources. By contributing their expertise and diverse perspectives, civil society players are helping to make more informed decisions and better allocate resources. This constructive partnership between civil society and political decision-makers helps to strengthen democracy and respond more adequately to the needs of the population. It is therefore essential to continue to encourage and support the active participation of civil society in the Budget Orientation debate.

C. SOME REPLIES FROM THE EXECUTIVE (MINISTER OF FINANCE) TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

CONCERNING THE PRESENTATION AND ORGANISATION OF THE DOB

"With a view to achieving the desired objectives, Parliament and the Government will have to reflect on the most appropriate formula for improving its effectiveness"

ON THE CLARIFICATION OF THE GLENCCORE AFFAIR

"At MINFI level (a member of the EITI), we have referred the matter to SONARA and SNH... An audit has been carried out and instructions are still awaited"

ABOUT THE BENEFICIAL OWNER

"Cameroon has adhered to this international standard. The Government is participating in this work and an application text has been submitted to the Prime Minister"

MONITORING CAMEROON WITH REGARD TO MONEY LAUNDERING

"Cameroon is under scrutiny due to delays in the publication and application of texts on the beneficial owner"