

Report of the Ouagadougou meeting, 29 and 30 April 2010

« Translate the MDGs into a model bill on poverty reduction »

Organised jointly by the SPONG (Secrétariat Permanent des ONG), the Parliament of Burkina Faso and the International Cooperation Ethics Advisory Agency – ACECI, this sensitisation, mobilisation and advocacy meeting has taken place in Ouagadougou on 29 and 30 April in the Sembene Ousmane conference room of Azalaï Hotel, on the theme « **Translate the millennium development goals into a model bill on poverty reduction** ».

The tune of the meeting was set by the Vice-speaker, Ms Gisèle Mariam GUIGMA, representing His Excellency Mr Roch Marc Christian KABORE, speaker of the National Assembly.

She has saluted the choice of her country for holding the meeting as well as ACECI's innovative initiative, before insisting on the necessity of a law to inspire States to do much more for their most vulnerable people. Talking about her country, she has stressed the challenge to continue the fight against poverty and to strengthen committed good governance, with the support of development partners.

The present report summarizes the key moments of the meeting, the lessons learnt, as well as the major conclusions.

For more information, please consult the full report written by our rapporteur Ms Paule Elise Henry, the news paper clippings, the pictures as well as the list of participants on the website www.aceci.org.

Our heartfelt thanks are addressed to Burkina Faso's National Assembly, which took in charge all logistics and has facilitated massive participation of parliamentarians, to UNFPA-Niger who have sent a team, to UNFPA and UNDP in Burkina Faso, for their technical support.

On behalf of ACECI's board of directors, all my gratitude goes to UNESCO Paris for its contribution to the organisation of the meeting. Civil society organisations, women's movements in particular, remain key actors in this campaign. This has been the case in Brussels at the consortium meeting, in Niger and in Benin. A vibrant tribute goes to the Burkinabes who have not belied this commitment in spite of minimal material conditions.

Ms Ginette Karirekinyana

I. Key moments of the meeting

Normative and legal framework for the notions of poverty and human rights

In addition to the rationale (Hon. Mahama Sawadogo) and the answers to frequently asked questions since the launch of the process by ACECI (Ms Ginette Karirekinyana), participants have been reminded of the existence of national and international provisions allowing to adopt an anti-poverty law. The relevance of a legislative approach to accompany the current economic development strategies has been stressed.

The human rights approach is being privileged more and more by international organisations as normative framework for the fight against poverty. In this sense, the new initiative aiming to translate the Millennium Development Goals into a model bill on poverty reduction deserves to be encouraged, according to UNDP-Burkina Faso's William AMADEU. He recalled UNESCO's work since 2002 on "Freedom from poverty as a human right". Moreover, the model bill on reproductive health constitutes a major antecedent.

To retain :

Not only the MDGs form a consensual basis, the normative framework underlying an anti-poverty model bill are equally subject of a consensus. Contributors have cited amongst others the universal declaration on human rights, the United Nations Pacts on political, social, economic and cultural rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women etc, without forgetting the national instruments at different levels. The absence of the direction responsible for the implementation of poverty reduction policies has not allowed to deepen the question in the Burkinabe context. However, the director, Ms Eugénie MALGOURI, has enlightened the audience a lot the next day on the history of the national poverty reduction policies as well as on the Accelerated Growth for Sustainable Development Strategy.

Process and major principles of the poverty reduction law – involvement of international actors

Participants have been able to share their views on the draft model bill, distributed in session. Gaps and complements have been noted. It was proposed that the scientific committee, in concert with the different actors, reformulates the model bill, taking into account the workshop outputs and the civil society consultations. Together with the parliamentarians, they have insisted a lot on the missing aspects in the MDGs: issues related to young people, employment, agriculture, natural resource management etc.

While the relevance and necessity to legislate on poverty reduction are subject of a consensus, scepticism regarding the financing and implementation of an anti-poverty bill remains palpable. As long as such law is not imposed upon international actors, it contains the risk of being just

one more constraint for poor countries, it was said. Several issues were raised about the internal and external mechanisms of impoverishment. In addition to national responsibilities, the ultraliberal context of the global system has been blamed too.

For a better appropriation of the process, the Honorable Mahama SAWADOGO has explained the technical steps to be taken for the adoption of a national law based on the model bill.

On the international scene, once the model bill will be available, it can be shared with all national, regional as well as international parliamentary institutions. But in order to be adopted in a given country, who should be the initiator? Civil societies submitting a petition? Government filing a bill? An MP or a group of MPs working out a bill ?

To retain :

In view of the MDG failure, the anti-poverty model bill should take into account the concerns of the people and the national interests. The **Burkinabe parliamentary networks and commissions** involved in this initiative have resolved to convene again internally to deepen reflection.

As for the civil society representatives, they met in a separate workshop and have resolved to enlarge their consultations with grassroots organisations. While entrusting leadership over the anti-poverty law process to the parliament, they have requested to be consulted permanently. To make sure their voices are heard, they will put in place an action plan in the short term.

Participants have saluted this cooperation between MPs and civil societies, but have shown regrets over the absence of governmental bodies. Many have expressed hopes that the process will be continued in Burkina Faso in cooperation with ACECI and the Collective carrying the advocacy campaign at the international level.

Role of the women's movements – support of international actors

Participants have insisted a lot on the role of women's movements and their specific preoccupations. Young people have also demonstrated willingness to get involved in the process and preserve their interests. Young people are the majority, a young student has hammered repeatedly.

Besides the NDI (National Democratic Institute), who provides technical and financial support to parliaments for a better integration of gender aspects and rights of the poor in law making, UNFPA as well as UNDP have agreed to accompany national actors in this process.

To retain :

Discussions have confirmed the necessity for women to lead the process since they form a majority amongst development actors, but also to ensure

that their interests are taken into account in the formulation of a poverty reduction law.

Participants have been reassured regarding the willingness of representatives of international organisations to provide technical and financial support to the process. UNFPA-Niger has been cited as an example. This UN agency has responded favourably to ACECI's solicitations because this MDG/PRL campaign aims at improving the conditions of populations, and involves national partners – Parliaments and women's organisations in particular.

Major conclusions

- The uniqueness of the initiative to « Translate the MDGs into a model bill on poverty reduction » through a participatory and unifying human rights approach has been recognised and saluted.
- The consultation workshops have yielded elements to be taken forward by the scientific committee.
- The interest and commitment of national actors in the PRL-process are beyond doubt. The Speaker of Burkina Faso's national assembly has stressed this during the audiences granted to ACECI's general director before and after the meeting. Moreover, the parliament, who is already involved, since they have financed this meeting, will continue reflections through the concerned networks and committees.
- In view of coordination of interests, civil society appeals to parliamentarians for close cooperation. They have resolved to extend consultations with organisations that are currently not yet involved, to reflect on the model bill's content and bring in their contributions.
- United Nations systems support has been acquired, provided requests are submitted by authorised instances. However, this support is not only financial. They are ready to accompany the scientific committee in cooperation with parliaments, and to give technical support at national level before, during and after adoption of the anti-poverty bill.
- Representatives of international organisations who participated have been requested to strengthen advocacy towards other organisations.
- Successful mobilisation efforts in Niger can be taken as an example in other countries.
- Since certain aspects of MDGs reach beyond national levels, it has been recommended to involve regional organisations like ECOWAS in the process.
- The designation of the anti-poverty law is to be adjusted to its content, namely the reduction or elimination of extreme or mass poverty, the

MDGs or beyond the MDGs, aiming at economic growth etc. Once the model bill has been adjusted to a national context for adoption, it can be named differently in accordance with specificities of each country.

- Africa and other poor nations must make their voices heard at major international meetings. Given the MDG failure, especially in sub-Saharan countries, Africa must be present and speak out about new strategies at the UN Summit on MDG review in September 2010.
- Parallel to the Burkinabe process, which is due to continue after this first mobilisation phase, other activities have to be planned in the North and the South: advocacy activities, scientific committee meetings like the one held in Niamey, Niger, from 30 March to 2 April 2009, and an international meeting bringing together parliamentarians and civil society representatives of different countries, as well as international organisations.

Quebec, 31 May 2010