

NAG Calls for Accountability in Local Government Initiative

Transparency International, a Berlin-based global coalition against corruption, just released this past Wednesday the results of its worldwide Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which measures expert and business peoples' perceptions about the state of corruption in a country. The annual study is widely regarded as one of the most standardized measures of corruption used internationally, and 2004 marked Sierra Leone's debut in the CPI. Sierra Leone ranked a pitiful 118th out of the 146 countries included in the study, receiving one of the worst scores even in West Africa and placing the country in bad company with the likes of Congo and Zimbabwe. Coupled with the country's ranking at the very bottom (175 of 175) of the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), it is apparent the dire straights in which the country finds itself.

The National Accountability Group (NAG) is concerned that Sierra Leone's continued inability to properly address the issue of corruption could lead the country again into chaos, as it is generally understood that corruption was a major cause of the decade-long civil war. Of particular concern is the Local Government Act which is currently being implemented. With the inability to control corruption on the national level, how is it to be expected that local government will be any less corrupt and any more effective at bringing progress and development to the people? The lack of accountability mechanisms in place at the local level is cause for alarm, especially considering the broad mandate given to Local Councils to manage natural resources, as well as to levy and collect taxes. Thus, there is grave danger that the decentralization process could merely decentralize corruption. NAG, therefore, emphasizes the absolute need to take a stand against corruption on the local level to ensure that this does not happen.

We hereby propose the Accountability in Local Government Initiative (ALGI) as a counterbalance to the inevitable forces of corruption on the local level that will come to bear against the beleaguered citizens of Sierra Leone. This initiative would entail civil society filling the space created in Part 15 of the 2004 Local Government Act, which allows for civil society participation through the monitoring of Local Councils' activities and finances. The Act is not explicit about the form of involvement, and thus it is up to us within civil society to determine that role. For such a program to be effective, however, the cause must be embraced by all of civil society.

This is our chance to make a tangible difference in the way our government operates, and effective steps must be taken to entrench the role of the people and civil society in local government before the process is commandeered by those looking for private gain. Therefore, we in civil society must take the lead in ensuring that government fulfils its role of providing services and development to the nation. Our organization will be persistent in our efforts to hold government accountable and ensuring transparency on the local level, but we cannot do it alone.

National Accountability Group
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The full report on the 2004 Corruption Perceptions Index is available online at:

<http://www.transparency.org>

The 2004 CPI results for African countries are available online at:

<http://www.transparency.org>