



The Inspection Panel

THE WORLD BANK
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CSOs WORKSHOP ON THE INSPECTION PANEL REPORT

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Introduction

Conscience International (CI) and the Inspection Panel organized a CSO outreach workshop in Banjul, The Gambia on 19 April, 2015 for CSO delegates attending the 56th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. Over 40 CSO representatives from over a dozen African and European countries participated in the workshop, which was held within the concomitant NGO Forum. The aim of the workshop was to introduce the Inspection Panel to invited participants and explore strategies to engage CSOs in promoting the work of the Inspection Panel in their respective countries; share experience and encourage participants to incorporate the Inspection Panel mechanism in their work of promoting and protecting human rights; establish a stronger and continuous working relationship between the panel and Civil Society Actors, as a nucleus for a continent-wide strategic partnership for the strengthening of the work of the Inspection Panel in Africa.

The Inspection Panel is an independent complaints mechanism for people and communities who believe that they have been, or are likely to be, adversely affected by a World Bank-funded project. The Board of Executive Directors created the Inspection Panel in 1993 to ensure that people have access to an independent body to express their concerns and seek recourse.

The Panel is an impartial fact-finding body, independent from the World Bank management and staff, reporting directly to the Board. The Inspection Panel process aims to promote accountability at the World Bank, give affected people a greater voice in activities supported by the World Bank that affect their rights and interests, and foster redress when warranted. In response to complaints from project-affected people, we have a mandate to review projects funded by the World Bank, through the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and International Development Association (IDA). The Panel assesses allegations of harm to people or the environment and reviews whether the Bank followed its operational policies and procedures.

The Inspection Panel consists of three members appointed by the Board of Executive Directors for a five-year non-renewable term. Members are selected on the basis of their ability to deal thoroughly and fairly with the complaints brought to them, their integrity and independence from Bank Management, and their exposure to developmental issues and living conditions in developing countries.

The Panel has a permanent Secretariat that provides operational and administrative support. For its fact-finding and investigations, the Panel also hires independent, internationally-recognized experts to ensure objective and professional assessment of the issues under review.

Rational

The work of the Inspection Panel is very important to CSOs as it relate to their work of promoting and protecting human rights in Africa. Many African countries depends largely on World Bank financed projects for their economic growth/recovery but the citizens are not well informed as to how they can participate in the governance of these projects. Most importantly, many Civil Society Organizations

(CSOs) and communities in Africa have little or no knowledge about such a mechanism as the Inspection Panel. Since the Inspection Panel was created in 1993 up to date it has received only 94 requests, 26 of this made by African States and out of this number, West Africa represents 5 requests from 3 countries only namely; Nigeria (3), Ghana (1) and Liberia (1). This however, does not represent ineffectiveness of the Panel but points at partnership building between the Panel and CSOs who are the ears and mouth-piece of the citizenry.

Focus

Serge Selwan of the Inspection Panel made a presentation about the Panel's origins, compliance role, and investigative process. He also shared lessons learned from several recent cases which had human rights dimensions. Serge pointed that the primary users of this mechanism are local communities of at least two people or local organization, or representative, on behalf of affected people (some international NGOs have increasingly become specialized in assisting local NGOs in filing complaints). He added that in exceptional circumstances, a foreign organization can make use of this mechanism on behalf of affected people, if local representation is not available. Serge's presentation was followed by a general discussion led by Shaka Ceesay, CI Director, in which participants asked questions about various aspects of the Panel's work. Topics raised ranged from the enforceability of the Panel's recommendations and World Bank's acceptance of the Panel's role, to eligibility criteria CSOs should follow when making a request for an investigation. Also, Shaka spoke on the need for CSOs to embrace and support the work of the panel as it is very relevant to their work of promoting and protecting human rights in the communities they serve. Therefore, Shaka reiterated the importance of a long-lasting partnership between Conscience International (CI) and the Inspectional Panel through engaging more African CSOs in incorporating the Inspection Panel mechanism in their work of promoting and protecting human rights in their respective countries.

Issues raised by participants during the workshop

A number of key points were made during the discussion. First that CI and other CSOs consider the Panel's role to be quite important to CSOs in Africa as it protects human rights embedded in Bank's policies and procedures. Second, while many African countries benefit from Bank financed-projects, most citizens are unaware of how they can participate in these projects. Third, many CSOs and communities in Africa have little or no knowledge about the Inspection Panel as a venue to seek recourse when problems arise within Bank-financed projects. Most participants were united over the need for a network of CSOs using the Inspection Panel as a mechanism for their work of promoting and protecting human rights. This network, they emphasized, is crucial for promoting the work of the panel. As with all group forums, however, it was felt that participants required more time to deliberate on the discussion issues and to merge their specialized viewpoints.

List of Participants

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