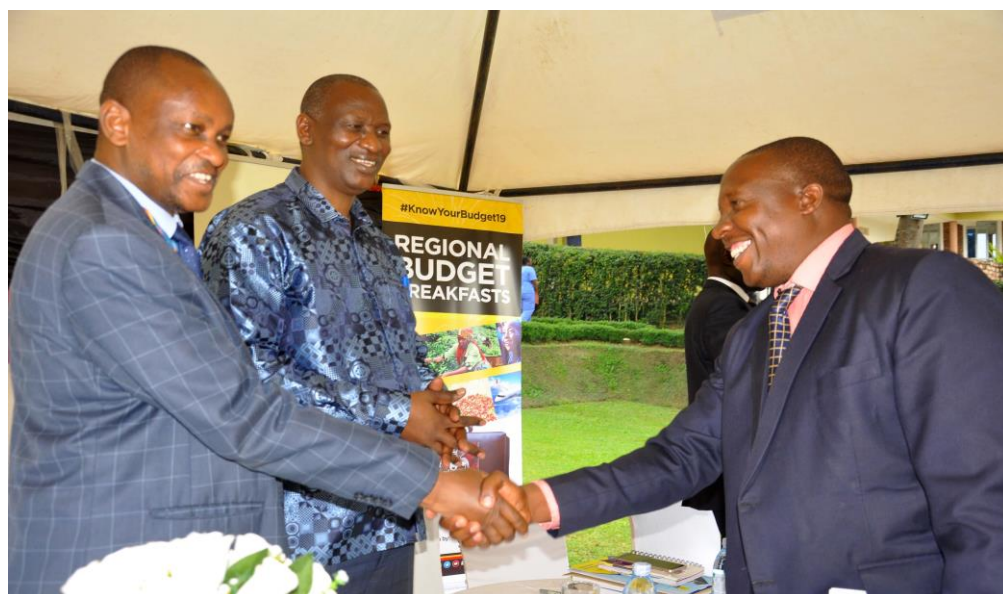


CSOs, URA and Ministry of Finance hold post budget regional meetings



Executive Director Kick Corruption Out of Uganda (KICK-U) (L) shakes hands with Ministry of Finance's Commissioner Budget Policy, Godwin Kakama while URA's Commissioner Internal Audit and Compliance, Dr. Protazio Bemugisa looks on during the Kabale Regional Budget meeting at Cephass Inn earlier today. | @CSBAG 2019

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For the first time in the history of Uganda, Civil Society Organizations under their umbrella the Civil Society Budget Advocacy Group (CSBAG) have joined hands with Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) and the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED) to take budget issues to regional level.

Previously, post budget issues have been discussed at central level but this time, citizens at district level have been brought on board. The Finance Minister Matia Kasaija read out the UGX40.9 trillion budget for FY2019/2020 to the nation which drew mixed reactions and the debate has continued to be

exemplified at regional levels. The regional budget meetings held under the theme: "Industrialization for job creation and shared prosperity," attracted hundreds at Cephass Inn in Kabale district earlier today. Other regional budget meetings took place in Hoima, Soroti, Lira and Arua.

CSO Concerns

Robert Kakuru, the Executive Director of Kick Corruption out of Uganda (KICK-U), who represented CSOs informed guests that the Civil Society concern is to ensure there is value for money in social services. He however pointed out that contracts have normally been abused which results into shoddy work.

He also said that decentralization has been affected as district leaders cannot implement their programs following interference from the central government. Kakuru further emphasized the need for independence of Local Governments to execute their programmes and to provide efficient and effective service delivery.

Technology based tax measures

Dr. Protazio Bemugisa, who represented the URA Commissioner General Doris Akol, informed guests that the tax body has introduced a raft of measures to curb smuggling in order to increase revenue. Among such measures is the use of satellite and drones along borders. Bemugisa said the tight measures which are based on modern technology are intended to minimize human interaction in tax administration which are prone to manipulation and temptation.

He said in order to generate more domestic revenue, the tax agency has decided to increase taxes on imported goods from 25% to 60%. According to him, this is meant to encourage local producers to produce in large quantity hence raise domestic revenue. He said therefore, 69% of the tax collector activities will largely be based on technology.

"The technology system is meant to minimize human interaction and to remove discretion and be able to build tax compliance," Dr. Bemugisa told hundreds of guests in attendance. He also emphasized the need to popularize tax education for the tax payer to appreciate the need to pay taxes.

Assistant Commissioner Domestic Taxes at URA, Robinah Nakakawa, explained to the audience that domestic tax reforms are to be implemented by July 1, 2019 which is the beginning of the financial year 2019/2020. Nakakawa also informed the audience of new changes in Income Tax among them exemptions in industrial parks, agro processing, manufacture of furniture and household appliances, education materials and others for a period of 10 years.

She said this will only happen on condition that a local investor injects a minimum of USD\$10m while a foreigner is expected to plow USD\$50 million. She emphasized that provided these investments create employment so that government is able to tax the employed.

In his remarks, the State Minister of Finance, David Bahati informed participants about key priority interventions for the FY 2019/2020 budget which are human capital development, increasing infrastructure access and reliability and enhancing key primary growth sectors, as well as maintaining peace, security and good governance. The Minister's speech was presented by Kabale District Chairperson, Patrick Besigye.

Citizens speak out

Harriet Nankoma, a member of Civil Society from Kibuku district asked the tax agency officials why government was revamping Mulago Hospital with specialized services while majority of health centers lack the basic needs like beds.

Other issues of concern raised by citizens include local monopoly, government officials chasing away farmers who grow sweet potatoes in swamps to enhance production, and creating more town councils which are underfunded among others. Commissioner Godwin Kakama hailed Civil Society for championing budget issues and urged them to continue sensitizing citizens.