

PROJEKTA AND CITIZENS' INITIATIVE FOR PARTICIPATION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE (BINI)

Tuesday, April 10, 2018: Meetings with civil society organizations and/or, *inter alia*, private sector organizations, professional associations, academics or researchers

Topic 1: Government hiring systems and training and remuneration of government officers (Projekta, VSB, ADEK)

This topic aims at obtaining information from the civil society perspective in connection with the follow-up of the implementation of the recommendations on government hiring systems and the training and remuneration of government officials issued to Suriname during the Second Round. It includes such aspects as the following:

1. *Systems for the hiring of public officials of the different branches of government through merit-based competitions in accordance with the principles of disclosure, equity, and efficiency, as regards to government officers: how are those competitions being held, if they are the general practice or if appointments are done mostly by labor contracts. Also indicate what progress has been made, what difficulties have been identified, and are there any new developments.*

- As far as we know, there have been no changes in the system for the hiring of public officials.
- There is no real HR policy within each ministry, only personnel administration.
- Unclear what and when positions are open
- The majority of hiring is still not taking place through merit- based competitions or based on real needs.
- Political appointees are business as usual, staff members are replaced with each change of ministers, previous personnel is side tracked, but kept on pay roll.
- Ever increasing number of public servants leads to demotivation, and poor working conditions.
- The only exception is (still) the case of government-managed programs funded by external donors, for which it is mandatory that job openings are posted publicly.

2. *Training of public officials in their functions and in the principles of ethics and probity.*

- The government continues to organize its annual civil servants' training courses (Surnumerair I and II, Population Administration and Voortgezette Algemene Ambtenaren Opleiding, VAAO I and II). However, these courses are only organized in Paramaribo (with the exception of Population Administration) and are not required.
- The only incentive is a slight salary increase, now even less desirable than in previous years.
- The number of registration for these courses has been declining over the years, necessitating an extension of the enrollment period for the courses of 2017- 2018
- We do not know how Ethics/ probity is included in the design of the courses (it was a small part of the curriculum in yearst past).
- Regarding training of other branches of/ related to the public sector: there has been an increase in training of personnel of the Supreme Audit Institute (Rekenkamer) and some training of judiciary personnel.

3. *The relationship between equitable remuneration and probity in public service: whether civil society organizations, the private sector, and/ or academics or researchers have conducted any studies into the topic, and what difficulties does civil perceive in this regard.*

- As for as we know, there have not been any recent studies in the topic.
- Projekta in the process of preparing a study regarding the interaction between parliament members and ther constituency. The use of their parliamentary remuneration will be an aspect of the study. In addition, membership of parliament is not a full time job. One can be a member of parliament beside his regular means of income (usually a public sector position) The issue of multiple positions (and thus salaries) by parliament members has been a recent topic of discussion in the parliament but no details have been given and we do not expect a lot of progress in trying to solve this issue.
- Remuneration of police officers seems to be extremely poor (no hard figures, but made public through media), and thus merits a closer look into the relationship between remuneration and probity in the police force.

Topic 2: Systems for the protection of corruption whistleblowers (Projekta, VSB, Orde van Advocaten)

This topic seeks to obtain information, from the point of view of civil society, on the follow-up of the implementation of the recommendations in connection with systems for the protection of corruption whistleblowers formulated for Suriname during the Second Round, covering such aspects as the following:

1. What steps have been taken in order to adopt a comprehensive legislation for the protection of whistleblowers of acts of corruption.

- Although the Anticorruption Act was approved recently, there have been no steps taken in order to adopt comprehensive legislation for the protection of whistleblowers and acts of corruption. However, in the approved version of the Anticorruption Act, some provisions have been made for whistleblower protection. However, the case of Surinam Airways recently, gives reason to believe that there is a move to persecute whistleblowers.

2. What mechanisms of protection for private citizens and public servants that report acts of corruption have been implemented, if any, given that a law for the protection of whistleblowers of acts of corruption has not yet been adopted. New developments and challenges detected.

- There are no NEW mechanisms for protection implemented in the past years (a few existed earlier), although the recently adopted Act does provide for whistleblower protection.

3. The implementation of the recently adopted Anticorruption Act and its effects in the prevention, investigation, prosecution and sanction of acts of corruption.

- As far as we know, no steps have been taken to implement the recently adopted Anticorruption Act, there are no steps to be seen to indicate that the Anticorruption commission is being set up.
- Note: prolonged delay in implementation already results in lost of trust in the power of the legislation by the public.

Topic 3: Systems for government procurement of goods and services (Projekta, VSB, KKF, Suva)

This topic is aimed at obtaining information, from the point of view of civil society, on the follow-up of the implementation of the recommendations formulated for Suriname during the Second Round regarding its systems for the government procurement of goods and services, including such aspects as the following:

1. Processes for purchases of goods and services by the State, through competitive bidding, the exceptions that apply, and the enforcement of the applicable regulations. Practical results, progress, and challenges.

- The IADB is providing assistance to improve public procurement in Suriname

2. Functioning and professionalization of the agencies responsible for conducting and overseeing bidding processes and the remedies for filing challenges, progress and challenges.

- The financial crisis forced the government to implement measures, whereby the Minister of Finance sanctions contracts and payments, but there is no reason to believe that this has resulted in long term strengthening of the procurement system as a whole

3. Regime of sanctions for public officials or employees who fail to comply with or break the rules governing the public sector procurement system.

- There is still no level-playing field with respect to purchases of goods and services, and non transparency is rampant. The anti- corruption law should apply here, but this law is still not implemented, and implementation is unclear on how this shall impact monitoring of compliance.

4. Accountability mechanisms from the State for both suppliers and contractors and for the people or agencies charged with the supervision, oversight, and monitoring of contract execution. The dissemination given to those mechanisms.

- Suppliers and contractors are not held sufficiently accountable if goods and or services delivered are not to specification. Examples are various building projects that are halted because they were not up to standards.
- Not aware of any mechanism in place to protect the interest of the government.

5. Existence of qualified citizen oversight agencies to monitor and follow up on the precontractual phase and contract execution. Progress and challenges.

- No oversight agencies exist to date.
- The citizens' initiative does not (yet?) monitor specific contracts and execution of contracts, but is a policy monitoring system, and is looking into including budget monitoring, including research into specific project/policy interventions and how contracts are implemented and money spent.

6. What steps have been taken in order to improve public procurement in Suriname, and what remains to be done.

- No clarity on progress, rather the opinion is that there is more setback than progress. Recent case of purchase of flags through payment by a political party is an example of this.