

Government has once again demonstrated its resolve to beat the resource curse in the exploitation of the country's hydrocarbons, by giving expression to a key transparency provision in the Petroleum Revenue Management Law it enacted six months ago: the inauguration of the Public Interest and Accountability Committee last Thursday in Accra. The Committee, established under Section 51 of the Petroleum Revenue Management Act, 2011, Act 815 is regarded as a novelty in the management of natural resource rents globally.

It introduces an additional layer of public oversight (besides parliament) in the management of Ghana's petroleum revenues. Information reaching Public Agenda indicates that 11 of the 13 members were for inauguration, done by the Minister for Finance and Economic Planning at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MoFEP). Confirming, Cecelia Isabella Akwetey, Head of Public Relations at MOFEP, said by telephone that the two absentees were the representatives of the Federation of Muslim Councils/ Ahmadiyya Mission- and the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The 11 members who were present were representing independent policy research organisations / think tanks, civil-society based organizations, the Trade Union Congress, National House of Chiefs, Association of Queen Mothers, Association of Ghana Industries and Chamber of Commerce. The rest were Ghana Journalists Association, Ghana Bar Association, Institute of Chartered Accountants, Ghana Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative; and Christian groups, namely the National Catholic Secretariat, the Christian Council and the Ghana Pentecostal Council on a rotational basis.

Section 51 of the Act states: "A Public Interest and Accountability Committee is hereby established."

The Objects of the Accountability Committee, as spelt out in Act 815, are (a) to monitor and evaluate compliance with the Act by government and other relevant institutions of the petroleum revenues and investments as provided in the Act; (b) to provide space and platform for the public to debate whether spending prospects and management and use of revenues conform to development priorities as provided under section 21(3); and (c) to provide independent assessments on the management and use of petroleum revenues to assist Parliament and the executive in the oversight and performance of related functions respectively.

Section 21 (3) provides a list, in no order of priority, 12 priorities where oil revenues should be invested in the absence12 priorities where oil revenues should be invested in the absence. These include: agriculture and industry; physical infrastructure and service delivery in education, science and technology; potable water delivery and sanitation; telecommunication,. Road, rail and port; physical infrastructure and service delivery in health; and housing delivery.

Others are environmental protection, sustainable utilization and protection of natural resources; rural development; developing alternative energy sources; the strengthening of institutions of government concerned with governance and the maintenance of law and order; public safety and security; and provision of social welfare and the protection of the physically handicapped and disadvantaged citizens.

The PIAC will be performing two main functions, according to Act 815. "(1) To achieve its objects, the Accountability Committee shall (a) consult widely on best practice related to management and use of petroleum revenues; and (b) determine the rules of procedure under which it will operate. "(2) The Accountability Committee shall have its own secretariat that will facilitate the performance of its functions."

Source: Public Agenda