Since Petrad’s eight-week programmes were initiated in 1991, there have been close to 900 participants from government agencies, the petroleum industry and civil society (for more information on Petrad and the eight-week programmes, see page 89 and 82). One of the participants in 2010 was Mr. Dozie Okpalaobieri from the African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET), based in Accra, Ghana. Interested to hear more about his experiences from the programme, we met with Mr. Okpalaobieri.

Mr. Okpalaobieri joined ACET in April 2009 and is working as a Legal and policy advisor in the Extractive Resources Facility. ACET provides high-quality policy analysis and advisory services, assisting African governments in achieving long-term growth and transformation of African economies. ACET has an Extractive Resources Facility whose goal is to provide technical assistance to resource-rich African countries in developing and administering mineral and petroleum regimes that promote strong financial returns, stable investment, good governance, and ensuring environmental sustainability. OfD has cooperated with ACET since 2009, and together with the Revenue Watch Institute, we have initiated a pilot project in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Many African countries are rich in natural resources such as minerals and petroleum, and have been extracting these resources for several decades, Mr. Okpalaobieri begins.

However, we still have not seen the benefits that the exploitation of these resources can provide to our countries. ACET can play a vital role in changing this. We offer support in the development of resource strategies at a national level, building strong and competent institutions, improving capacity to negotiate with private companies as well as assisting governments with creating attractive business environments.

Mr. Okpalaobieri participated in Petrad’s eight-week programme on Petroleum Policy and Resource Management in Stavanger in the fall of 2010. There were 47 participants in the course, of which 22 came from nine different African countries.

– It was a very rewarding and exciting experience, he says. The opportunity to meet others working on the same challenging issues within petroleum management in Africa as myself provided a great learning experience. The exchange of lessons and knowledge was very valuable to my everyday work. I am still in contact with several of the participants, and ask them for advice and support when I need it.

– The course facilitators provided the guidelines, while the participants had to ensure progress and take responsibility for learning, he explains. The use of role play was very interesting as the exercises were very realistic and offered practical lessons.

When asked about the key skills learned at the course, Mr. Okpalaobieri emphasizes that he has learned the importance of truly understanding the petroleum resource and which benefits it can bring, as well as keeping a clear focus on Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) issues.

– In addition, he says, I learned that having a sound policy governing the sector is crucial, as it will help to structure and guide the way forward for the sector. Also, the fiscal regimes must remain flexible so that the government can maximize its revenues. Finally, he adds, I understood the importance of managing people’s expectations through ensuring proper governance and transparency systems.

According to Mr. Okpalaobieri, the Petrad course offered the development of a personal skill set he makes good use of working for ACET in Ghana. He is certain that having petroleum resources will one day offer a great advantage to future development in developing countries, including African countries.
Dozie Okpalaobieri (number two from the left) together with a group of fellow participants
Photo: Dozie Okpalaobieri, on selftimer