

COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE END OF A ONE DAY SPP II TOWN HALL MEETING, ORGANISED BY THE NIGER DELTA BUDGET MONITORING GROUP WITH SUPPORT FROM OXFAM IN NIGERIA ON FRIDAY, 2ND OF FEBRUARY, 2018 AT PRE-EMINENCE HOTEL, ELELENWO, OBIO/AKPOR, LGA OF RIVERS STATE, AS PART OF OXFAM'S FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT'S PROJECT, PHASE II.

PREAMBLES:

A One Day Town Hall Meeting on shadow budgeting and community needs assessment was organised by Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group (NDEBUMOG) with support from Oxfam in Nigeria on Friday, 2nd of February, 2018 at Elelenwo in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. Participants were drawn from communities and CBOs around Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt City Local Government Areas. The meeting was formally declared open by the Paramount Ruler of Elelenwo Clan, His Royal Highness, Amb Sunny Weli.

The Town Hall Meeting is a communally centered platform used for the mobilization of community stakeholders, particularly, women, opinion moulders, chiefs, youth leaders, aged-group leaders, leaders of communities' association and development committees/clusters, faith-based groups, community development officers and planners within the Local Government Areas around the (THM) cluster to the gathering, among others. Among the event's specific objectives were:

- Serve as a capacity stimulant for community dwellers, opinion moulders, women and youth leaders to provide the basis for constructive engagement of government on pro-poor expenditure mechanics, which directly and indirectly affects the poor and vulnerable segments of society.
- Share knowledge about the budget circle and how communities can participate in public finance expenditure processes, including; on how they can participate in the budget making through their communally developed strategic/action plans and understanding of shadow budget, which they can use to attract development programs/projects to their clusters or as electoral accountability gauge that is essential for demand-side actors.
- Identify challenges and strategic actions that are needed to tilt fiscal structure of the government at all levels for the benefit of communities and seek ways to encourage and synergize with officials at the Federal, States and Local Government system for effective delivery of governmental and communal development blueprints for urban/rural dwellers.
- Use the (TH) meeting to improve leadership and lobbying skills, which will enable chairmen of CDCs, CDAs, CBAs, CBOs, WGs, PWDs, among others, to collaborate, mobilize and engage actors in government constructively in pro-poor legislative lobbying against shrinking civic space, and therefore, consolidate opportunities for the enhancement of Nigeria's democracy.

Deliberations at this Town Hall Meeting centred on budgeting, community needs assessments, and community action plans through shadow budgeting approaches.

OBSERVATIONS/CONCERNS:

After robust presentations, deliberations and discussions, the participants observed and expressed concerns as follows:

That there is general lack of interest by communities in participation towards the budgeting process, due mainly to lack of awareness by the government;

That budget documents are still being treated as top secret by government actors, as the documents are not accessible to the public;

That budgeting and fiscal processes lack community inputs and proper needs assessments;

That government budgets hardly tackle community needs at all levels of government;

That communities in the Niger Delta has remained mostly under developed in spite of huge resources from the region, largely; due to corruption and fiscal indiscipline.

RESOLUTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

From the fore going, the participants resolved and recommended as follows:

That government at all levels should make the budget processes more open and transparent to ensure and encourage citizens participation;

Government at all level should make budget documents and other financial information open and accessible to the public and should further avoid politicising budgets;

That there should be proper community needs assessments as part of budgeting process to ensure the real needs of communities are incorporated in the budgets;

That there is need for massive mobilisation and sensitisation of the citizens for effective participation in budgeting;

Citizens are encouraged not to continue shying away from participation in the budget circle and governance, as it is a collective communal responsibility to demand accountability and hold government accountable for implementation and deliveries of capital projects and programs in their localities;

NDEBUMOG and other CSOs should embark on advocacy to relevant government agencies, with the view to encourage them advocate for open governance from the budget to audits, monitoring and evaluation;

CONCLUSION:

It is the considered opinion of this town hall meeting that there exists a huge gap between governments budget and citizens' needs. The government and communities should therefore; adopt the resolutions of this Town Hall Meeting to ensure that budgets reflect the needs of citizenry.

Signed:

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Gift Amadi

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