

COMMUNIQUÉ:

COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE END OF THE FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT'S TOWN HALL MEETING HELD AT PORT HARCOURT BY THE NIGER DELTA BUDGET MONITORING GROUP ON THURSDAY, MARCH 30TH 2017, WITH SUPPORT FROM OXFAM IN NIGERIA

A Town Hall Meeting on influencing, through the use of a fiscal fact sheet as a tool was organised in Port Harcourt by NDEBUMOG on Thursday, March 30, 2017.

Participants were mostly women (99%) drawn from different communities across the Local Government Areas in Rivers State. The meeting was aimed at stimulating discussions on issues of inclusive budget, lobbying and influencing as a tool for empowerment of women in the grassroots through the fiscal process, which would engender the usefulness of women through basic economic literacy.

During this meeting, participants expressed concern about communities' participation in budgetary process and lamented about lack of inclusiveness of women in all the governance processes across Nigeria. **They further observed and noted:**

* That the processes of budgeting in Nigeria have continued to be shrouded in secrecy, making it very hard for communities and women to participate;

*That communities are neither consulted, nor are needs assessments done during budget preparations, thereby; making it unlikely for budget to address the real needs of the communities or needs of the women;

*That although budget is public documents, access for the public for the document and other fiscal materials are difficult, which often, leave the communities without knowledge of the fiscal process and without information on how to embark on budget tracking;

*That although women constitute greater proportion of the population, their participation in governance and decision makings at all levels is nothing to write home about;

*That several projects contained in previous budget estimates are largely unimplemented or abandoned without completion nor audit information for the citizens' to track the figures;

This meeting, therefore, make the following demands:

*Participants hereby call on governments at all levels to make the budget processes open and participatory for all stakeholders, particularly, women;

*We demand that a bottom - up approach should be adopted in budget-making at all levels of government to ensure community needs are addressed. Government officials should discontinue with the practice of staying in their offices within the cities to conceive and impose projects on communities, without bothering to find out, if such projects, are what the people really crave for. Communities should be consulted and needs assessments should be conducted as part of budget processes;

*Participants urge governments at all levels to stop hiding budget documents, as if, such are secret documents, but rather, should upload them on their websites for ease of accessibility, including, distributing the hard copies for CDCs and CBAs free. We insist that budget documents should be at public domain;

*Participants call on governments to revisit projects contained in past budget, which have been abandoned or are yet to be implemented and should carry the communities along on funds applications, virements and releases concerning these projects. We urge stakeholders, including CSOs and communities to begin to beam search lights on how budgets are implemented to ensure that such will not continue to serve as avenues of misusing/misapplication of public funds. Government should publish budget implementation reports;

*Participants charge women and communities to strive and get involved in the fiscal processes, from inception to implementation, monitoring, evaluation, tracking and audits. Governments should begin to publicize budget cycles;

Participants commended NDEBUMOG and Oxfam in Nigeria for the Town Hall Meeting, which gave us (stakeholders') insights into how a budget could be used to either, impoverish or improve the lives of communities. We, therefore, urge NDEBUMOG and Oxfam to increase the frequencies of these meetings to help create awareness of communities on how budget works.

Endorsed by the following on behalf of the meeting:

Doris Onyeneke, Women, Peace, Security Network {WPSN}

Grace Naamon; Gokana LGA

Idongesit Umoh for Kebetkache Women Development & Resources Centre

Peace Peter for Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group

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