



**OPENING REMARKS BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NIGER DELTA BUDGET MONITORING GROUP, GEORGE-HILL ANTHONY, TO KAIMA CLUSTER STAKEHOLDERS, DURING AN INCLUSIVE BUDGET TOWN HALL MEETING FOR STAKEHOLDERS IN THE KAIMA AXIS OF BAYELSA STATE ON TUESDAY, 21<sup>ST</sup> APRIL, 2015.**

***THEME: ... MAKING THE RESOURCES OF THE REGION WORK FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE REGION, THEREBY DEEPENING NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY***

**Protocols:**

On behalf of all of us at the **Regional Accountability Centre** of the **Niger Delta Budget Monitoring Group**, let me convey our appreciation and congratulations to all of you, **Kaima** stakeholders, by being the first location that our organization is holding its 2015 Inclusive Budget Town Hall Meeting in the Niger Delta region, out of the several already drawn for the region.

**Kaima** is a unique town and the people of **Kaima** are equally unique. Your town is equally famous historically, being a regional emancipation nucleus and among key focal locations of heroes of our Niger Delta. Therefore, development needs must equally be pursued for **Kaima**, just like for the entire region. But frankly, for our **Kaima**, history does not have a different ink to record lateness, hence **Kaima** should jog fast, since yours is a location every son and daughter of the Niger Delta could wish to pay generational homage from time to time. **Kaima** must be transformed as a pride of every Niger Deltan.

***Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and comrades in the struggle***, we are here for a serious business. We are here to share information about **Kaima** and the surrounding (clustering) towns and villages, basically as it concerns budgetary realities affecting your area in the Federal Government Appropriation 2013. We would also share some information about the Niger Delta Development Commission's projects for your area, including projects in the Bayelsa State Government Budget for (FY) 2013.

We are not here to incite people against the government, but to empower you with information and place you strategically to see yourself as partners in progress with the government, which is within your democratic right, as budget documents are not confidential

documents, rather they are public documents. Furthermore, rolling out information about budget figures, which affects people's daily lives or projects, which may not have been implemented, does not mean the money seen in the budget document must have been stolen out rightly. No! Budget processes have technicalities and are interwoven with procurement complications that link the template of public finance expenditure mechanics.

Therefore, before a community can measure the failure or lack of implementation of any capital project located in their neighborhood, such a community or people must strive to access other fiscal materials of government, together with the budget of government. In addition, following up on the bidding processes for their projects and demanding budget implementation report from all tiers of government, along with other documents, such as audit reports of the tiers of government, inflow-outflow accounts, can help communities follow their money.

Notwithstanding the seeming complexities, as a way of by-passing the apparent technicalities, communities can access the budget of government and immediately look out for *Prequalification* adverts or *Request for Expression of Interest* from contractors, suppliers or consultants, which is normal for projects and figures already encapsulated in the fiscal budget for each Financial Year. However, it must be noted that, at some instances, such award can be segmented, awarded in Lot(s) or spread to run for more than one fiscal year under the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF).

This means, where government cannot meet up with costs of a particular project in a given year, it can roll over the cost (for that single project or projects) into other fiscal years, which supposedly, should not be more than 3 years in the case of Federal Government (though the Federal Government later tried programming MTEF into 4 years, which from an observatory point of view, did not work). For some State Governments which sampled MTEF, it was mostly under 2 year's fiscal circle.

What the above is trying to explain is that, we must all pay attention to budget matters. We all must realize that ***budget is life***, and life is about ***budgeting to live*** or ***budgeting to die***, hence the way government handles it (budget) on our behalf should be fundamentally important to all of us.

Importantly, I cannot end this my *Opening Remarks* without letting you know that we are all guilty for our collective societal budgetary misfortunes. It may interest stakeholders to know that there are some persons who are in government and are passionately committed to empower and transform communities, but can only rely upon themselves; they are lone voices swallowed by bureaucratic landmines, since the communities, largely, do not demand accountability from government officials, as a supplement to fortify the wishes (and efforts) of

these persons within government, who want to do the right thing for the sake of the suffering communities.

I would therefore implore all **Kaima** Cluster stakeholders to buy into the disposition of the current Governor of Bayelsa State, His Excellency, Honourable Seriake Dickson, who happens to also be a stakeholder in this axis of Bayelsa State, and who has been disclosing figures of allocations coming into the state, including his government's blueprints concerning spending Bayelsan's money; promising transparency and accountability. That is a big leap from the past and all Bayelsans should key into it for democratic-accountability and inclusion.

Please give us your attention, as we go into the technical sessions.

As Niger Deltans, we are all a people with common destiny!

We thank you once again.

Onuaooooo!