**BAYELSA STATE GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA**

**A REPORT OF CITIZENS PARTICIPATORY MEETING FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE 2022 BUDGET**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

A Citizens’ Public Interactive session for the preparation of the 2022 Budget was held on Thursday 9th September, 2021 at about 10.00 am at Harold Dappa-Biriye Conference Centre, Onopa, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. More than three hundred critical stakeholders were in attendance. The Governor was represented by his Deputy, His Excellency Sen. Lawrence Ewrhudjakpo.

The objective of the conference was to fulfil institutional requirement in accordance with section 22(2) of the Fiscal Responsibility Law 2009 (as amended), as well as a requirement of the SFTAS program to ensure transparency, accountability and citizens participation in public governance and fulfilment of moral demands and commitment towards stewardship.

The focus of the conference was to encourage citizens participation in line with the present administration’s bottom-top approach budget preparation. Government identified and presented its priority areas to the people for broader input and build a synergy with the citizens on decision making that engenders remarkable infrastructural development. The Government priorities on the proposed budget are on Education, Health, Agriculture, Security and Environmental protection. The parameters inputs were captioned in order to meet the yearnings and expectation of the citizens through implementation of programmes and policies of government.

After series of deliberations, the following resolutions were made;

1. Educational infrastructure should be properly harnessed to usher in the desired development. To this end, Construction/Rehabilitation of dilapidated school buildings will be given a priority, as well as addressing the existing staffing-gap.
2. Entrepreneurial development and MSEs activities should be given a boost by properly integrating them into the business map of the state.
3. Road infrastructure should be upgraded to ensure inter-connectivity of communities across the state to encourage rapid socio-economic development.
4. Agricultural activities should be boosted through government aggressive intervention in all Agro-allied business for which the state has a comparative advantage.
5. Conscious efforts be made to increase the internal revenue base of the state by expanding the tax dragnet, as well as the use of cost- effective means of tax drive.
6. Government should get more involved in the oil and gas sector to open up other horizons of revenue inflows through intervention schemes.
7. The power sector should be improved upon. The state government should reactivate its abandoned gas turbine stations across the state to boost socio-economic activities.
8. The eight Local Government chairmen should also replicate this public interaction session in their various jurisdictions and ensure that the outcomes form part in the state planning activities.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Bayelsa State Government organized a citizens budget participatory programme as input for the preparation of the 2022 budget. The interactive programme was attended by more than three hundred key stakeholders, including financial experts, traditional rulers, traders, physically challenged persons, women groups, representatives of the civil society organizations, Hon. Commissioners and their Permanent Secretaries.

The programme tagged ‘’Critical Stakeholders Public Interactive Session for the preparation of the 2022 Citizens/ Annual Budget’’ was held on Thursday, 9th September, 2021 by 10.00am at the Harold Dappa-Biriye Conference Centre, Onopa, Yenagoa-Bayelsa State. The Governor, His Excellency, Senator Douye Diri, was ably represented by his Deputy, His Excellency, Senator Lawrence Ewrhudjakpo.

According to the Deputy Governor, the programme is in compliance with section 22(2) of The Fiscal Responsibility Law of 2009 (as amended), as well complying with the requirement of SIFTAS to ensure accountability, transparency and citizens participation in the budget process. He further averred that the law puts a responsibility on the executive to direct and coordinate a citizens participatory conference and cause the outcomes of the said conference to form integral part of the budget proposal and ensure the views expressed be published on the State’s website.

The Deputy Governor further stated that the state would limit itself to availability of funds in the preparation and implementation of the 2022 budget, insisting that budgetary allocations are only estimates, while actual revenue inflow is the reality that determines the execution of programmes , projects and policies. He reiterates the administration’s commitment to judicious utilization of available resources for the development of the state through effective implementation of programmes, policies and projects. He called on participants to make useful suggestions to enrich the budget preparation process, assuring that government would continue to invest only on people centered programmes and projects. According to him, the budget instrument is a planning tool and the inputs from stakeholders will in no small measure help the state government formulate citizens centered budget.

**MAIN FOCUS OF THE BUDGET PROGRAMME**

The followings are the main focus of the budget programme;

1. Expression of government’s intention in clearer terms to the people.
2. Improving service delivery in the state.
3. Identifying government’s areas of interest and relating same to the people for possible input and subsequent modification.
4. Serving as a guide for the preparing the 2022 budget.
5. Building synergy with the citizens on decision making annually.

In order to build reliable value chain creation, the Deputy Governor urged Local Government Chairmen in conjunction with Commissioners of the three Senatorial Districts to replicate this session in their respective domains so as to involve their citizens in the budget preparation. The outcomes, he said should be sent to the Secretary of the State Government for onward delivery to the Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning for inclusion in the proposed budget. His Excellency further stated that the budget proposal will lay more emphasis on the following critical areas;

**EDUCATION**

According to the Deputy Governor, investment in education is pivotal to the overall economic and social development of the state. He said, appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure the construction of more modern primary and secondary schools, as well as rehabilitation of dilapidated ones. Equipping of schools, Staff welfare, recruitment of more teachers, training and retraining of teachers shall be vigorously pursued.

**HEALTH**

Equipping of existing hospitals and health centers across the eight local government areas will be a top priority. This he said will greatly improve the health status of the citizenry that will contribute to the socio-economic development of the state.

**SECURITY**

The Deputy Governor reiterated that security of lives and properties is a panacea for development in any modern society. In his word, “efforts will be intensified to strengthen the existing security architecture in the state”. He raised concern at the current waves of violent crimes in the state, particularly kidnapping and armed robbery, and urged traditional rulers to collaborate with the existing security platforms in their jurisdiction to avert the trend. He said, this is the only way to gain the trust of prospective investors in the state.

**AGRICULTURE**

In the words of the Deputy Governor, agriculture is the surest means of economic diversification and food security. According to him, the state government has identified four critical areas of comparative advantage in agriculture that will be of substantial benefit. These are; fish farming, rice farming, cassava and plantain farming. He further stated that the state government had already partly develop on these four areas across the three senatorial districts in the state. Adding that, very soon the impact will be felt in the state. The Deputy Governor also use the opportunity to re-affirmed the three-point policy of the state government on agriculture as food security, accessibility and availability.

**OIL AND GAS**

The Deputy Governor also noted that Bayelsa State also has a comparative advantage in the area of oil and gas. He said, desperate measures will be taken to align the state to the oil and gas business. This he said will create more jobs that will step up economic development in the state. To this end, he affirmed government’s commitment to introduce various intervention schemes to get citizens involved in the oil and gas sector as well as reactivate the acquired oil well and to establish modular refineries

**CITIZENS INTERACTIVE SESSION**

In the interactive session, different questions and concerns were raised, and clarifications on issues were made. It was worthy to note that all Commissioners, Permanent Secretaries and principal officers were present. A robust and all-inclusive forum was held and moderated to ensure that the thoughts and contributions of participants were the essence of the meeting, which was to form part of the budget proposal. At the end of the session, the following resolutions were made;

1. In the area of Oil Gas, participants urged the government to establish at least three modular refineries, each in the three senatorial districts to ensure citizens inclusion in the oil and gas business. This, they said will create more jobs and increase the IGR of the state, drastically reduce illegal bunkering and ensure environmental sustainability.
2. Participants still requested government to channel loans and grants obtained for agricultural purposes to the real farmers, and not to portfolio farmers. They insisted that the Ebedebiri Agro-Allied farm project should not be abandoned but should be given a face lift in the 2022 budget. They also called for the reactivation of the Peremabiri rice farm and the 500 acre of fish farm at Ekowe. In addition, participants urged the State Government to liaise with communities to locate more real farmers engaged in various forms of agriculture in order to assist them.
3. The youths are vulnerable to all forms of crime due to the high rate of unemployment. To this end, participants advised the government to tackle youth unemployment seriously through the 2022 budget, by investing on entrepreneurship and SMEs programmes to support them.
4. Participant also pleaded with the state government to include the Central Senatorial road, the Glory drive, Outer ring road, construction of a link bridge across the Epie creek, Igeibiri-Oporoma-Ekowe-Olugbobiri-Korokorosei-Koluama on-going road project, as well as the AIT-Igbogene as priorities in the 2022 budget.
5. In order to address the problem of under-staffing in the primary and secondary schools in the state, participants suggested that that the government should recruit more teachers to fill the existing staffing gap. They also insisted that government should prioritize its investment on educational infrastructure.
6. Also, participant demanded that the state-owned gas turbine at Angiama in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area be reactivated to boast power supply to most of the communities in the LGA. This they said will improve socio-economic activities in the area.
7. Participants resolved that the outcome of the public interactive session with government should form part of the 2022 budget proposal, and that the bottom-up approach in budgeting should continually be used in budget preparations.
8. Local Government Chairmen should treat as a matter of urgency the conducting of their citizens participatory session and forward their inputs to the state government for inclusion in the 2022 budget proposal.
9. Finally, participants suggested that the revenue base of the state be improved by bringing in more funds. They also advised the state government to stand with the Rivers State government in the on-going litigation on VAT collection. The Board of Internal Revenue Services was urged to be more creative by the use of more cost- effective means in revenue collection to increase the IGR of the state.

**CONCLUSION**

In summary, the government promised to always consult the citizens in every area of decision making, as their views, ideas, thoughts and considerations are very vital to the successful implementation of programmes, policies and projects that touches their lives. The meeting came to a close after projects nomination forms duly entered and signed by participants were collected from them. Citizens were assured that though not all their nominated projects will be included in the 2022 budget, a considerable number of them will be included, while others shall be deferred till 2023.