

BAYELSA STATE GOVERNMENT OF NIGERIA

A REPORT OF CITIZENSHIP PARTICIPATORY MEETING FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE 2021 BUDGET

21 SEPTEMBER, 2020

EXECUTIVE SESSION

A citizenship participatory budget programme was held on the 21st of September, 2020 at Harold Dappa-Biriye Conference center, Onopa with the participation of critical stakeholders. The Government was represented by his Deputy, His Excellency Sen. Lawrence Ewrhudjakpor. The conference objective was disclosed as an institutional requirement in section 22[2] of the fiscal responsibility law 2009 [as amended] and as instrument of corporate governance obligations predicated by transparency, accountability, reliability and credibility.

The focus of the conference was to express government intention in clearer terms to the people; improve service delivery in the State; servicing as a guide for the preparation of the 2021 budget; identifying the government areas of interest to the people for possible adjustment and build a synergy with the citizens on decision making and developmental activities. The emphasis of the proposed budget was on security, education, health and agriculture.

After series of deliberations, the following resolutions were made;

- 1. Road infrastructures should be created to ensure interconnectivity of communities across the State in order to take advantage of the socio-economic and political-cultural values of the people.*
- 2. Agricultural activities should be considerably planned and executed. More so, loans and grants secured for famers should be specifically channeled to the real farmers.*
- 3. Educational infrastructures should be properly harnessed. Staffing-gaps should be adequately addressed and filled with the teachers of requisite qualification.*
- 4. The power sector should be improved upon. The State government should reactivate its gas turbine stations state-wide to boost economic and social activities of the State.*

5. *Entrepreneurial developments and SMEs activities should be properly integrated into the business map of the State.*
6. *Internal revenue base of the State should be expanded in the State in a less cost-effective manner, so as to bring more returns to the state.*
7. *Local government chairmen should also conduct same programmes in their jurisdictions and ensure that the outcomes form part in the State planning activities*

INTRODUCTION

The Bayelsa State Government organized a citizenship budget participatory programme for its 2021 budget inputs. The programme was participated by key critical stakeholders from different works of life and their contributions were key for the budget proposal.

The programme tagged “Critical Stakeholders Public Interactive Session for the Preparation of 2021 Citizens/Annual Budget” was held on 21st September, 2020 by 10:00 AM at Harold Dappa-Biriye Conference Centre, Onopa Villa, Yenagoa-Bayelsa State and was presided by His Excellency, Sen. Douye Diri, the Governor of Bayelsa State and was duely represented by his Deputy Governor, His Excellency Sen. 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]. He further averred that the law puts a responsibility on the executive to direct and conduct a citizens’ participatory conference and cause the outcomes of the said conference to form integral part of the Budget Proposal and ensure that the views expressed be published on the state website which is purposely designed to ensure accountability and strong collaboration by all stakeholders in stewarding the revered communal resources. Furthermore, he said, the participation of stakeholders in the budget preparatory process helps and guarantees the efficient apportionment of scarce resources sensibly and in accordance with the shared vision and values with a view of helping all Bayelsans to thrive in a prosperous and sustainable Bayelsa. According to him, the Budget instrument is a planning tool and the input from stakeholders will in no small measure help the State Government formulate a better and valuable budget.

PRINCIPAL FOCUS OF THE BUDGET PROGRAMME

The State Government reiterated that the programme will positively impact on the budget objectively on the following dimensions:

1. Expressing government's intentions, 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 modification
4. Serving as a guide for the preparation of the 2021 budget.
5. Building a synergy with the citizens on decision making and developmental activities annually.

More so, the Deputy Governor urged local government Chairmen in conjunction with Commissioners of the three Senatorial Districts to conduct a similar citizenship participatory budget session in their respective jurisdiction on the subject of Agriculture and the outcome of the report should be sent to the Secretary to the State Government for onward delivery to the State Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning for appropriate action.

The Deputy Governor said the budget proposal of the State will lay more emphasis on the following critical areas;

SECURITY

In his words, efforts will be intensified to strengthen the security infrastructure of the State in order to make Bayelsa State a preferred investment destination. He further stated that the location of zonal headquarters of the Nigeria Police Force, the Federal Fire Service and the Nigerian Customs Services are added advantages to the security plan of the State and the State's intention to intensify the co-ordination of security elements will be of greater value to the State.

EDUCATION

According to the Deputy Governor, the investment in the education sector brightens the collective future of Bayelsans and is a cardinal priority of the State Government. In his words, every community in Bayelsa State will have a befitting model schools in the nearest future and the activation of the plan starts with this year's budget. He further stated that the equipping of schools with the requisite infrastructure and teachers will make the entire investment worthwhile and impact on the State positively.

HEALTH

The State Government proposed to invest in all the eight local government General Hospitals across the State by equipping the hospital to be functional and bringing health care closer to the people. This will improve the quality of health infrastructure closer to the people and resultantly advance the health and wellbeing of the people with less mortality rate and improved lifespan.

AGRICULTURE

In the words of the Deputy Governor, Agriculture is the surest way of diversifying the economy and increasing the State's internally generated revenue. According to him, the State Government has identified four critical areas of comparative advantage with substantial benefits, that is on areas of fish, rice, cassava and plantain farming. In furtherance to this, the State Government proposed holding a food summit sometime in the nearest future, to showcase its investment opportunities and also attract technical experts on farming. The Deputy Governor affirmed the three-point policy of the state government on agriculture as food security, accessibility and availability.

INTERACTIVE SESSION

In the interactive session, different questions were asked and clarifications on issues were made. Basically, all the Commissioners of the various Ministries and other Permanent Secretaries with other principal officers were present. A robust discussion and all inclusion forum was created and moderated to ensure that the thoughts of the participants were the essence of the meeting and to form part of the budget proposal.

At the end of the session, the following resolutions were made;

1. participants urged the State Government to include the central senatorial roads, the glory land road, Tombia Roundabout, construct and link bridges to Epie creek, Outer Ring road, Igeibiri-Angiama-Oporoma-Ekowe-Olugbobiri-Korokorosei-Koluama on-going road projects and the AIT, Igbogene road, Landing jetty for communities and dredging of some communities that were affected by flood in the State Budget.
2. Participants also requested Government to channel loans and grants obtained for agricultural activities to the real farmers and not to a portfolio of farmers and also ensure that the Ebedebiri Agro -ALLIED farm project should commence operation in 2021 and the reactivation of Peremabiri rice farm and the 500 acre of fish farm at Ekowe. Government was urged to liaise with communities to create and locate more farmers of varied types. More so, participant also advised State Government to tackle youth employment in the 2021 budget and invest on entrepreneurship and SMEs programs to support youths' capacity growth and revenue generation.
3. In furtherance, participants admonished the State Government to employ more staff to fill vacant positions of teaching qualifications and continually ensure that staffing gap is filled as schools without teachers are investment without returns. They further requested Government to prioritize its investments on educational infrastructure to affirm its predecessor's declaration of education sector as emergency.
4. Stakeholders demanded that the Gas turbine at Angiama should be reactivated as it will power approximately fifty communities in southern Local Government Area of the State.
5. Participants resolved that outcome of the interactive session cum the State Government initiatives should be prioritized in the 2021 budget.

6. Participants further urged the government to ensure that bottom top approach in budgeting process shall continually be used and always note that citizenship participation in budgeting process is of continuous activity.
7. Local Government Chairmen should treat as matter of urgency, the conducting of citizens Participatory Budget input for the 2021 budget of the State.
8. Finally, Participants suggested that the revenue base of the State should be expended in cost- effective manner, bringing more funds to the State. The Board of Internal Revenue Service was urged to bring in virgin revenue inflows to the State.

In summary, the government promised to ensure that irrespective of the requirements of the law, the ideas, thoughts and considerations of the citizens will continually be consulted for decision making in the State and more of these forums in different flora will be conducted.