

**MINUTES AND REPORT OF THE BENUE STATE 2022 PUBLIC CONSULTATION TOWNHALL MEETING AND CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT FOR THE PREPARATION OF 2023 BUDGET HELD AT THE PRECIOUS CONFERENCE EVENT CENTRE, OPPOSITE BENUE HOTEL, OLD GRA, MAKURDI ON THURSDAY, 27<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2022.**

**1.0 Attendance:**

The 2022 public consultation town hall meeting/citizens' engagement for the preparation of 2023 Budget began with the arrival, registration of participants and subsequently the introduction of dignitaries of the day by the Master of Ceremony (MC) Mark Iorpuu of Radio Benue. The public consultation meeting was attended by representatives from the persons with disability, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Trade groups, youth groups, Local Government Council chairmen, faith based organizations, traditional leaders, market women and business community, union and professional associations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), spoke persons from all the senatorial zones, representatives of other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and members of State House of Assembly. The Executive Governor of Benue State was represented at the occasion by the Director General of the Benue State Planning Commission, Sam Unom.

**1.1 Commencement:**

The 2022 public consultation town hall meeting for the preparation of 2023 budget commenced at 10:39 am with an opening prayer by the Focal Person SFTAS, Rev. Peter Chughul who thanked and appreciated God Almighty for the opportunity given to those in attendance to participate during the 2022 citizen's engagement town hall.

**1.2 Welcome Address by the Permanent Secretary, Benue State Planning Commission (BSPC):**

The Permanent Secretary of the commission Mr. Stephen Abagi welcomed participants to the public consultation meeting upholding that the objective of the 2022 consultation was to create enabling environment for council chairmen/chairpersons who were representatives of people at the grass roots, Benue citizens and Civil Society's Organizations (CSOs) to direct inputs into the 2023 budget of the state which had already commenced with

Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to defend their proposed estimates at the State House of Assembly soonest.

Thereafter, the PS informed all participants that a budget document contained detailed on how government planned to spend the common wealth – the taxpayers' money. For this reason, the Federal, State and Local governments all have appropriate laws. Subsequently, the PS maintained that every responsible citizen is duty bound to interrogate how the common wealth as contained in the appropriation passed by the House of Assembly is being expended in the delivery of infrastructure and other services.

Additionally, the PS uphold that the Benue State Government through the Benue State Planning Commission in conjunction with state SFTAS sterling committee usually sought inputs from citizens particularly CSOs and representatives of Local Governments before annual budgets were passed and signed into law.

On the importance of public consultation town hall meetings and citizens' engagements, the PS noted that town hall meetings foster greater understanding between government and the governed guiding how public funds are utilized. The process guaranteed increasingly accountability how government managed public funds and enabled citizens embrace good understanding of how budget directly affects their daily lives and needs.

The PS finally expressed gratitude to the Executive Governor of Benue State for always approving and directing the release of funds for public consultation town hall meetings requested all participants to contribute thoughtfully.

### **1.3 Remark by Director General, Benue State Planning Commission:**

In a remark, the Director General and Chief Executive Officer (DG/CEO) of the Benue State Planning Commission (BSPC), Sam Unom, welcomed the representatives of the Traditional Rulers, the Clergy and other participants. The DG also appreciated the turn-up as well as the quality of representation at the event even at short notice given to them. He pleaded for their continuous support at any other state function.

In continuation, the DG said, annual budget document contained contractual agreement between government and her people so that goods for a specific amount of money in a given period could be provided. As a contract between

the government and the governed, the DG maintained, it was vital for the citizens to have inputs in the contract. He informed, the commission had avenues where citizens' priority inputs are taken care of before the budget document must pass and the responsibility of the budget department of the commission was to collect inputs, harmonize and prioritize into a current budget.

The DG informed the meeting that some budget line items were completed within the last budget cycle and three priority projects per council ward were already submitted by local government chairmen. He submitted that if project number one is incorporated into 2023 budget, others could be contained in the budget of subsequent years depending on the availability of funds. Furthermore, he confirmed that the gathering was an opportunity to appraise the lists earlier submitted and reviewed priority needs as what was a priority last year could not be the same this year. The DG continued that the public consultation was a very important process to gather inputs not only for the 2023 budget but also years ahead.

Informing further, the DG said the state commission shall soon introduce a medium term expenditure strategy for every sector which is a plan that goes beyond one year. It is a three (3) year plan where priorities are clearly spelt out and would form the basis to draw a Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). The DG concluded that the inputs from the 2022 town hall meeting would assist the commission to design a 3-year medium term expenditure framework plan.

#### **1.4 Address by the Chief Host and the Governor of Benue State:**

The Chief Host and the Governor of Benue State was represented by the DG, BSPC Mr. Sam Unom. The Governor welcomed participants and appreciated the Benue citizens for their diligence at the challenging times they would continue to count on the support of Benue citizens in dealing with all challenges. The Governor maintained that his administration had faced exceptional trials that no administration in the state in the past had faced. He held, for the seven and half years of the administration, there had been two economic recessions, a pandemic that had not been witnessed before for the past 22 years.

The representative of the Governor also maintained that the administration had been in opposition with the federal government which had serious

consequences for the state in terms of the support ought to have been received from the federal government. He also said, the administration was dealing with external terrorist siege as 21 out of the 23 LGAs had been attacked by terrorist herdsmen with about 2 million persons already in Internally Displaced Camps (IDPs). The situation he said, has triggered disillusionment, despair in government and among the citizenry. The Governor was particularly grateful he had a resilient and dedicated partner - the citizenry who also support the administration in difficult trying and challenging times. He said, he was able to triumph principally because of the synergy and support the administration received from the citizens.

The Governor informed that Benue state was among the 10 business friendly states in the North-central region of the country in terms of skills and technical expertise of its workforce. The had created enabling investment climate in such a manner that investors found easier to do business in the state despite their unwillingness to come into the country for business. Illustrating further, the representative of the Governor said, already three foreign investors had arrived Makurdi and Katsina-Ala for cassava, and in Ukum for a starch business. Also, Investors have positively responding to measures put in place by his present government in strengthening the security, infrastructure required for safety of citizens and their business.

The Governor was satisfied with the record of his administration in providing infrastructure for education and health institutions ensuring that all schools in Benue were fully accredited and have been graduating students. The renovation of thousands of classrooms across the State with provision of furniture for the schools and ensuring that educational institutions functioned effectively were additional examples. The governor also said, he provided transport infrastructure -growing network of roads across the state; urban, arterial and other categories of road infrastructure which could not have been possible without the conscientious and dedicated support he received from the citizens of the state.

The Governor informed the participants that this was going to be his last address at public consultation town hall meeting and citizens' engagement for the preparation of budget. He was conscious of transiting to another government and the 2023 budget would consolidate his achievements and also lay a foundation for the in-coming administration. He urged participants

to continue with his reforms as his administration had made the most important laws in the history of the State. These laws implemented had impact on security, public financial management i.e. transparency and accountability. The laws are also open in public domain for verification. The Governor maintained.

The Governor expected that the inputs from the town hall meeting would contribute to the process of responsive and accountable public financial management because inputs received at the end of the day would be used for the preparation of the 2023 Budget. The governor reminded participants that this was not the end of the budget process as there were other avenues like face-to-face discussion where citizens can make inputs into the budget. Also, citizens could write to the appropriate agencies and request that their projects be considered as this would be forwarded to the Benue State Planning Commission and Ministry of Finance-agencies responsible for the preparation of budget. Other avenues mentioned by the representative of the Governor for citizen's inputs were phone calls, visiting the websites of agencies, radio phone-in programs. His Excellency said citizens could engage their councilors, house members for inputs when considering any state budget.

In conclusion, the Governor emphasized that citizens are stakeholders in the management of public finances and urged them to be diligent in reviewing the reports of expenditure and where they identify issues, they should not hesitate to bring up for scrutiny. He advised them to feel free to submit their inputs to the government and other agencies responsible for expenditure controls including the House of Assembly to review. Lastly, the Governor said, the tasks of citizens never ended at making inputs into the budget but extended to how these inputs could be integrated and implemented. On that note, the governor launched the 2022 public consultation and citizens' engagement for the preparation of 2023 budget.

## **2.0 Inputs by the representative of the Open Government Partnership**

### **(OGP):**

The representative of Civil Society Organization (CSO), Dr. John Chen appreciated the opportunity provided by the Benue State Planning Commission for citizens to engage state officials and provide inputs in the budget process and reiterated the presence of members of the third of

government as 90% of the population reside at the grassroots. He maintained that the SCO are mindful of implementation of budget at the grassroots than other tiers. He emphasized the need for independence of the local government system which is the third tier of government. The representative of the CSO decried members of the Benue state legislature for voting against local government autonomy which to him was an act of sabotage for development of government at the grassroots.

Also, the CSO representative stressed the need to integrate local government system in revenue generation, expenditure and performance reports as there was none during the last budget defense. he was part of. Finally, as a representative of CSO who turned up to listen to contributions of other participants, he emphasized the need for synergy among the three tiers of government so that positive impact could be felt at the grassroots.

**Contributions from citizens and stakeholders:** Contributions from other participants are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Contributions from participants:**

S/N	CONTRIBUTIONS
1	The Benue state is 80-90% Recurrent Expenditure and the remaining percentage for capital expenditure. As a result, Budget IT - an International Organization that deals with budgets ranked Benue 36th out of the 36 States in the federation which showed that the State is unhealthy in terms of capital expenditure. The state was urged to improve and particularly to commit herself to capital expenditure so that people who are not in government can also benefit from the budget.
2	There was a call for farmers to access fertilizer and other farm inputs every year at subsidized rates in time to showcase Benue state as agrarian and food basket of the nation. Emphasis was laid on capital budget implementation for agricultural sector to generate more revenue for the State. The Budget office and the BSPC was charged to take note and do the needful.
3	The representative of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Benue State Jacintha Igwilo appreciated the planning commission for the town hall meeting and complained bitterly for lack of budget for PWDs. There

	was a call for an inclusive budget for all citizens of the State in 2023 with PWDs also maintaining budget line items as practiced in other states. Also, the question of who handles, disburses and how the money and spent was stressed.
4	There was a request from government to improve the health sector, provide scholarship for PWDs to enhance their education and other opportunities such as skill acquisitions.
5	The representative of women called for women empowerment in 2023 budget to setup their own businesses from the grassroots or micro level since the population of women are greater in number in Benue state.
6	The representatives of the Director, General Services and Administrations (DGSAs) of the 23 local governments Barrister Udanyi Sunday reaffirmed the importance of the public consultation and sued for inputs in the budget from bottom to the top in respect to priority projects as was practiced in the past. He added that the 2023 budget line items for purchase of vehicles to council chairmen should also accommodate for all the 23 DGSAs in the state.
7	The BSPC and Ministry of Finance were charged to continued interacting sessions with the LGAs in dealing directly with the line ministries to track records of implementation of certain projects in their domain in budget. The idea to publish implementation reports on quarterly basis to show revenue and expenditure in their percentages by the BSPC which can be assess on line and downloaded was encouraged.
8	Participants appealed to government to ensure that proper monitoring and execution of projects with specifications was pursued at the end of all projects in 2023 budget. There was also a request that the budget office of the BSPC should arrange for a journalist hangout on quarterly programme basis where activities of government could be reported and projected for the people to discern rather than to wait till annual town hall meetings.
9	The representative of council chairmen reiterated the construction and grading of existing rural roads which at the moment impassable and urged for inclusion in the 2023 budget. To be accommodated in the 2023 budget also was pipe borne water, electricity and social amenities as the bulk of the population reside at the rural areas.

**3. Closing Remarks:** In his conclusion, the focal person of State Fiscal Transparency Accountability and Sustainability (SFTAS) programme, Rev. Peter Chull, informed participants that the SFTAS programme was designed by the world bank and accepted by the Federal Government to improve the performance of budget in States in order to bring economic growth and development. Budget reliability and reporting were two key result areas to improve and increased citizens' engagement. The programme was designed to improve States with an eligibility criterion to attract rewards for states that improved in their performance/budget reporting. It was the reason they were invited to be involved in the budget process.

The focal person to develop more structured budget performance where projects are scrutinized and contractors brought to answer questions when you see deficits in the execution of projects that are sited at the Local Governments. The local government chairmen were also advised to setup committees to report to government for appropriate action.

**4. Vote of thanks:** In a vote of thanks, the Director of Budget of the Benue State Planning Commission (BSPC), Dr. Aondowase Nyam expressed appreciation for the cooperation and commitment of all participants in the 2022 town hall meeting was a huge success and hoped that the 2023 budget would be a reality for the benefit of all in the state. He specifically thanked the council chairmen, the representatives of the PWDs, CSOs, NGOs., CBOs, faith groups, trade unions, youth representatives, speakers from all the senatorial zones, representative of State House of Assembly, traditional leaders, market women and business community, union and other professional associations for their attendance to kick-start the process for preparing the 2023 budget. Finally, he assured participants that the 2023 budget would take care of their submissions. The meeting was closed at 3: 10 pm with a word of prayer by Rev. Peter Chull.



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Director of Budget  
Benue State



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