

MINUTES OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON CITIZENS ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT ON 2021 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS/REPORT OF AKWA IBOM STATE HELD ON 28TH SEPTEMBER, 2022 AT THE ICT HALL OF ACCOUNTANT GENERAL-UYO

Arrival and Registration: Participants and other invited guests were registered at the registration desk. A total of 144 (One Hundred and Forty-Four) participants from various walks of life attended the public consultation. This included dignitaries, Royal Fathers, Women, Youth, Students, Clergymen, Academics, Professional Bodies (ICAN, ANAN, etc) Labour Unions represented by Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Civil society groups including Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), the Media, Civil Servants, Policy Alert, CSO's amongst others.

Dignitaries who graced the event included the State Governor, Mr. Udom Gabriel Emmanuel who was represented by the Commissioner of Finance, Dr. Linus Nkan (FCA), the State Accountant-General, Pastor Uwem Andrew-Essien and the Chairman, Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly Public Accounts Committee, Dr. Charity Ido. Also present were the Chairman, Audit Service Commission, Pastor Bassey Umo, Commissioner for Information represented by his Permanent Secretary- Akparawa James Edet, Permanent Secretary- Ministry of Finance, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Economic Development, Head of Budget Office and Mr. Edward Nnakee of USAID State to State activity.

Opening: The Public consultation started with an opening prayer by Elder Emmanuel Eduongo at about 11:10 am and was followed by the National Anthem and Akwa Ibom State Anthem.

Welcome Address by the State Auditor-General: In his welcome address, the State Auditor-General, Elder Isaiah R. Ntekim (FCA) welcomed dignitaries and other participants to the event. He noted that the event was the second edition of Citizens' Accountability Report (CAR) consultation in the State, the maiden edition having been undertaken in September, 2021. He appreciated the Governor, His Excellency, Mr. Udom Emmanuel for facilitating public sector finance reforms through enabling laws.

The State Auditor-General maintained that the entire finance sector of the State under the able leadership of the Hon. Commissioner of Finance, Dr. Nsikan Linus Nkan had made the public consultation possible. He stressed that the essence of the gathering was to ensure the citizens participate in the financial management processes of the

State which are aimed at improving service delivery and development of the State. He expressed his gratitude to the Almighty God for making the public consultation a reality and urged everyone to make useful contribution.

Governor's Address: His Excellency – Mr. Udom Emmanuel, represented by the Honourable Commissioner of Finance, Dr. Linus Nkan expressed gratitude to God for making the Public Consultation a reality. He thanked the financial management team of the State including the Budget Office, the Accountant-General's Office and the State Auditor-General's Office as well as other stakeholders who have worked assiduously to ensure that citizens are furnished with yearly accounts and report of the State every year. He mentioned that Akwa Ibom State Government has adopted the World Bank's Public Sector Finance best practices which allows citizens to actively participate in governance. The Governor's representative instructed that the presentation of audited financial statements by the State Auditor-General to the citizens was part of the government's commitment to ensure transparency and accountability to the people.

The Honorable Commissioner thanked His Excellency, Governor Udom Emmanuel whom he described as a pragmatic manager that has taken Akwa Ibom State to enviable heights in the country, noting that he should be celebrated and appreciated by all. He called on those who choose to insult the Governor on social media and other media to dissuade from such act, but rather make their contributions towards improving the governance of the state through constructive criticism, where necessary.

Goodwill Messages: Goodwill messages were presented by the following:

- **Accountant-General:** The State Accountant-General, Pastor Uwem Andrew-Essien in his goodwill message expressed his appreciation to the Office of the State Auditor-General for the thorough review of the financial statements prepared by his office. He maintained that the public consultation is an opportunity for the citizens to make their inputs into the financial management of the State and urged everyone to take advantage of the forum to present their suggestions.
- **Public Accounts Committee:** The Chairman, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the State House of Assembly, Dr. Charity Ido acknowledged that the Public Accounts Committee received the 2021 audited financial statements and subjected them to thorough scrutiny. She revealed that officers who were queried were invited and monies were recovered in some cases. She noted that members of the press could affirm her report since they witnessed most of the Committee's sittings. The PAC

Chairman affirmed that the audited financial statements of the State showed a true and fair view of the State's financial affairs for the relevant year.

- **Audit Service Commission:** The Chairman, Audit Service Commission, Pastor Basse Umo commended the offices of the Accountant-General and Auditor-General for their diligence. Using biblical illustrations, he demonstrated that accountability was one of the attributes of God. He asked citizens to pay attention to the presentation and avoid fake news and rumours.

- **ICAN Uyo and District Society:** The Chairman, ICAN Uyo and District Society- Mr. Godwin Owonam (*FCA*) applauded the State Government for the public consultation. He revealed that ICAN had been championing the course of accountability and transparency in the country through the ICAN ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX of public sector finance management in Nigeria. He maintained that Akwa Ibom State's participation in the ICAN Accountability Index programme has been rewarding and urged participants to take the message of accountability home.

END OF PART ONE

Vote of thanks was presented by Mr. Emmanuel James - Deputy Director (Audit) and this was followed by a group photograph of dignitaries.

Presentation of Car: The presenter Mr. Emmanuel James in his introduction observed that the public consultation program is part of the reforms by World Bank under States Fiscal Transparency Accountability and Sustainability (SFTAS) program and is designed to facilitate accountability and transparency in the management of public sector finance. He explained that Citizens' Accountability Report is meant to breakdown the audited financial statement to the citizens with pictorials, graphs and other explanatory measures adopted to ensure that citizens understand and make informed decisions from the financial statements.

He presented the CAR under the following headings or sections:

- (a) Section 1 – Budget Outturn
- (b) Section 2 – Revenue Outturn
- (c) Section 3 – Expenditure Outturn
- (d) Section 4 – Audit Findings
- (e) Section 5 – Audited Financial Statements
- (f) Section 6 – Top Sectoral Allocation
- (g) Section 7 – Top Value Capital Projects
- (h) Section 8 – Citizens Nominated Projects-Implantation Status Report

Mr. James concluded by calling on the participants to make comments, questions and contributions.

Auditor-General's Remarks: The State Auditor-General commended the presentation and noted that the CAR was going to be hosted on the State Auditor-General's Office website as soon as possible. He maintained that local languages could be accommodated in future presentations to enable citizens understand the report easily and improved their level of participation.

COMMENTS/CONSTRIBUTION

Comments and observations were received from the following participants:

- (1) **Mr. Edidiong-Obong (Civil Liberties Organization)** observed that the presentation would have been more interactive if the hardcopy of the CAR was given to all participants at the time of presentation.
- (2) **Mr. Sunny James (Chairman, Nigerian Labour Congress-Akwa Ibom State Chapter)** expressed his displeasure over the absence of the principal finance officers of government who were present at the event, but left immediately after the part-one of the event was completed. He advised the government to give more attention to the social sector rather than focus only on capital projects as the CAR showed that releases for the social sector was poor. He suggested that the remaining few months of the Udom Emmanuel administration should address critical social sector problems such as non-payment of gratuities to retired workers. He also expressed his reservations on the revenue generated by Ibom Airport Development Authority as presented in the CAR.
- (3) **Mr. Harry Udoh (Chairman-Civil Liberties Organization, CLO-Akwa Ibom State)** stressed that CLO was working in partnership with the government and not playing opposition. The CLO boss maintained that CLO will study the CAR and make useful contributions. He noted that "**Other Recurrent Expenditure**" as presented in the CAR was vague and needed a breakdown. He urged the government to sign on to the Open Government Partnership initiative as it will open the state to a variety of other sources of funds.
- (4) **Eteidung Nsikak Ikpe Ntuk III (Village Head, Ikot Ntuen Oku, Uyo)** appealed to citizens to exercise caution when criticizing the government. He noted that only constructive criticism will prevent societal ills that are

experienced in other States from reaching Akwa Ibom. He also requested that the government should not pay attention to only the Paramount Rulers and Clan Heads but also to the Village Heads. He emphasized that all stakeholders in the traditional institution should be carried along. He recommended improved salaries and welfare packages to the local chiefs who are resident with the people.

- (5) **Dr. Patience Offiong (Obong University, Obong Ntak)** observed that a note indicating negative variances on Page 28 of the report when there were none was misleading and requested for adjustment.

Responses

The following responses were offered by the State Auditor-General - Elder Isaiah Ntekim:

- (1) CAR documents will be available on the State Auditor-General website at www.akwaibomstateaudit.net
- (2) More hard copies were still being distributed
- (3) Principal finance officers of the State will be encouraged to be available during interactive sessions in subsequent events.
- (4) The observation regarding improvement of social sector funding was noted and would be communicated to appropriate authorities.
- (5) Suggestions bothering on traditional rulers and how they treated, including their welfare packages were noted and would be communicated to appropriate authorities.

Closing: The State Auditor-General gave a closing remark and Mrs. Cecilia Inyang of Audit Service Commission gave the closing prayer at about 1.40pm.



Comrade Sunny James
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Chairman, NLC, Akwa Ibom State



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