

REPORT OF CROSS RIVER STATE CITIZENS' BUDGET CONSULTATIVE FORUM ORGANIZED BY THE CROSS RIVER STATE BUDGET OFFICE ON 16TH SEPTEMBER, 2020.

INTRODUCTION

Democratic governance has been said to be the most popular form of governance. This is so because it is the form of governance which has citizens participation as its hallmark. It is therefore little wonder that, democracy in its basic definition is said to be "*a government of the people, by the people for the people*".

After the constitution, the budget is the next most important legal document/tool that impacts the lives of majority of the citizens in any country or state. It is therefore very imperative that citizens understand what is in their budget. State actors have a responsibility to be accountable to the rights holders (citizens), and one of the ways this is achieved is through having (budget) consultative forum with her citizens. The Cross River State Government as a means of bridging the gap between her and the State's citizens as well as render accountability, organized a citizens budget consultative forum on the 16th of September, 2020. Sequel to this meeting the Department had made Radio announcements for several days on Radio Nigeria, 99.5FM and Funky Freak Friday show of Hit Fm 95.9 prior to the event, to intimate the citizens on the need to attend and make contributions.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the forum include;

1. To present the 2020 Revised Cross River State Budget to citizens
2. To enhance citizens understanding of the Revised Budget
3. To create an interface for citizens to give feedback on the State Budget so far

METHODOLOGY

The forum was held virtually at the instance of and via an internet link (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7804705987?pwd=SzdNQkdIbzlFTWmFxbE5lUDZmQS9xZz09>). The forum which started at about 4:10p.m with the national anthem had in attendance representatives from civil society organizations, student groups, a few government MDAs, Some LGA representatives and Traditional rulers. A total of 16 male and 7 female, participated.

Thereafter, Mr. Ubi B. William, a staff of the Budget Office of Cross River State who stood in as the Moderator of the meeting, told participants why the forum was holding virtually. He said it was as a result of the pandemic (COVID-19) and the need to stay safe. The Special Adviser to the Governor, Department of Budget Monitoring and Evaluation, Hon. Moses Onoh then presented the revised budget and his presentation was shared during the forum to participants.

The Special Adviser's presentation was followed by reactions in the form of questions and comments from participants. Some of the comments/questions from the participants included;

- What effort is the Budget Office making to ensure the budget is properly monitored?
- Water Board is not engaging in fixing broken pipes but is rather engaged in revenue drive. The MDA is not prioritizing fixing of broken water infrastructure in the capital city and across the State.
- What is the performance of the budget for the first two quarters of the year?
- How is the government cushioning the effect of COVID-19 on the citizens of the State? Citizens should have an idea because the government owes them that responsibility.
- It has been observed that infrastructure in the State have been in a state of dilapidation or collapsed due to non release of budgeted funds and this is bringing untold hardship to the citizens of the State.
- There should be proper monitoring and tracking of the COVID-19 funds that were released to some MDAs to cushion the negative effect of the pandemic on citizens of the State.

OBSERVATIONS


The following are some of the observation made during the forum;


1. The quality of the video of the slides shared was not very clear
2. The audio quality was also challenging at some point
3. Citizens without internet or access to android devices could not be part of the forum
4. There was very low representation from government MDAs and this affected the question and answers session.

CONCLUSION

The Department of Budget, Monitoring and Evaluation, appreciated the participants for finding time to attend the virtual meeting despite their tight schedules. The Special Adviser further promised the Civil Society Organizations that there shall be included in the Budget Monitoring Exercise, which had not been carried out since the year due to the global pandemic.

Signed :


Permanent Secretary, BMED
8/09/2020

KINDREY EWOZO
(BTAN) Budget Transparency &
Accountability Initiative Nigeria
Signed :  18/09/2020

Civil Society Organization