

We Must Enhance Accountability

By NSIMA U. EKERE, KJW

I am delighted to welcome you all to this very important ceremony. Within the past nine days, this Conference Room has borne witness to the signing of three Memoranda of Understanding with different development agencies. Each has addressed – and promises – far-reaching collaborative strategies designed, with professional attention and due diligence, to help the Commission in our commitment to facilitate the sustainable development of the Niger Delta region.

This is the fourth in a series of these partnerships.

When this Governing Board and Management took over on November 4, 2017, we had unveiled the 4-R Initiative whose over-arching objective is to deliver high impact social welfare programmes and physical infrastructure projects that will touch the people and help change the prevalent negative narrative. As we enunciated at the time, this initiative would help restructure the Commission's balance sheet, reform the governance systems, restore the Commission's core Mandate, as well as reaffirm, in all that we do, our commitment to doing what is right and proper at all times.

Due to the enormity of the developmental and institutional challenges before us and this Commission, it was imperative, therefore, to go into clearly conceived and robustly articulated partnerships built on shared vision and responsibility. Since the last quarter of 2016, we have engaged in constant conversations with agencies and partners, interested in working with the Commission, to bring development to our people and improve their living conditions. The result – and this is

by no means the end of such collaborations – are the MoUs which we have signed with the Facility for Oil Sector Transparency and Reform in Nigeria (FOSTER), Market Development Project in Niger Delta (MADE) and the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND).

Today we will append our signature, as well as our commitment, to the letters and spirit of this MoU, determined to strengthen our systems, enthrone greater clarity and transparency to our processes, and to begin to build the Commission as an institution that is well-equipped to realise its Mandate, in line with the vision of Government and the expectations of our people. And we enter into this understanding with an organisation well-equipped, as well, to add great and enduring value to this vision.

BudgIT is a civic organization which applies technology to intersect citizen engagement with institutional improvement, to facilitate societal change. It aims to redefine participatory governance by presenting government data in engaging formats, through simple tweets, interactions and infographic displays. This is driven by the conviction that, in a democracy, citizens have the right to know how their taxes are expended in the delivery of public infrastructure and services. BudgIT, as this Governing Board does, believes that for effective policies, citizens need data to make informed decisions on what will impact them. BudgIT offers mobile, online and offline solutions to trigger discussions around budgets and take budgeting beyond being a news item to becoming a focal point of debate among Nigerians. This is what we are determined to achieve, an openness that attracts interrogation and communal and stakeholder support and input.

To make this work, the Commission will:

- i) Collaboratively identify key public issues within its focus areas and ensure that they communicate same effectively to communities and stakeholders in the Niger Delta Region using both traditional and online media tools;
- ii) Provide public data on receipts to the Commission, as well as detailed approved budgets, to enable the generation of in-depth research and analysis for citizen engagement;
- iii) Identify relevant initiatives and channels (such as media programs, policy dialogues and briefs, interactive websites, etc.);
- iv) To engage policymakers, private sector actors and the general public about initiatives of the Commission, particularly with regards to increased transparency and accountability;
- v) Provide access to identified data on budgets, procurement, disbursements, revenue and audited statements or relevant data regarding use of public funds and also provide feedback to citizens;
- vi) To provide project level data for project tracking to civil society organizations and citizens;
- vii) Partner with BudgIT to develop and execute relevant engagement programs; and
- viii) Ensure citizen engagement and participation in all our activities.

Indeed, NDDC is determined, in this new regime and spirit of transparency, probity and accountability, to provide access to public records, answers to enquiries and information about the activities of the Commission. This will grant citizens the ability to “follow the money,” from the budget, and all stages of procurement, implementation and audit. The Governing Board and Management, in

implementing this MoU, is determined to enhance accountability, by publicly declaring outflow and inflow into the Commission's account on a quarterly basis. Information will be proactively disseminated through the open budget platform, to give the public comprehensive understanding of NDDC's financial activities.

Indeed, for this Commission to fully realise its Mandate, we must learn, and be equipped, to operate the principle of full disclosure, providing, for instance, information in the media at quarterly intervals, on all contracts prior to award and during project implementation. We must implement reforms that create a transparent, accessible and responsible system, which is autonomous, funded and runs on strong technical capacity.

This is important for us, both as officers of this Commission and stakeholders of this great region. We must run an organisation that is open in its operations and sincere in all its purposes. To make this region great is a task before us, to which we must continually dedicate our best commitments. As I have always said, we owe each other no less, for to make this region great is to make ourselves, our families, our communities and our people great. And to fulfil the letters and spirit of the Mandate before this partnership and this Commission is to actualise our collective dreams, and rebuild hope in all.

Once more, I welcome all of you to this auspicious occasion. Thank you.