

**OPENING REMARKS AT NEITI SOUTH –EAST ROAD SHOW ON THE 2005 NEITI
AUDIT REPORT BY PROF ASSISI ASOBIE, CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS
WORKING GROUP OF NEITI, AT OWERRI ON NOVEMBER 3, 2009**

The first three states that were created out of Eastern Nigeria were Rivers, South East and East Central states. Today, when we talk of the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, there should be no confusion; it simply refers to the former East Central state. The former East Central State now consists of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Of the five, the oldest is Imo, which was created out of East Central State in 1975 but split into two, as Imo and Abia in 1991.

It is not every one that knows the political and cultural significance of the South East zone in general and Imo state in particular. In political sense, we are in the birth place of some of the foremost Nigerian anti-colonialists, nationalists and Pan-Africanists: the right honourable Dr.Nnamdi Azikiwe, first Premier of Eastern Nigeria, first President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, foremost Pan-Africanist, who inspired Dr Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana to be educated in North America and to fight for the liberation of Africa ; Chief Mbonu Ojike, a formidable protagonist of African cultural identity, economic self reliance and political self-determination; Dr Akanu Ibiam, the first Governor of Eastern Nigeria, a man of unequalled integrity, and a symbol of transparency in politics, church and society. We are also in the zone that produced Dr Michael Okpara, the former Premier of Eastern Nigeria who did more than any one else to combine robust programmes of educational, infrastructural, industrial, and agricultural development in this part of the world; and of Dr Jaja Anucha Wachuku, the first Foreign Minister of Nigeria and a highly principled politician. In terms of recent history, and to come nearer home, we are in the land of Chief Samuel Onnaka Mbakwe, the first Governor of Imo state, under watch the process of rapid development of Imo state was pursued with diligence, involving systematic planning and implementation, producing among other things, the first non-federally owned airport in Nigeria. We are in the zone of Dr Alex Ekwueme, first Vice-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and prominent member of all ruling parties in the civilian ear since 1979; Chiefs Jim Nwobodo and Christian Onoh former Governors of old Anambra State; and in the zone of Chief Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the former military Governor of Eastern Nigeria, head of state of Biafra and chieftain of All People’s Grand Alliance. Above all, we are in the midst of millions of highly enterprising and industrious Nigerians, whose vote, support and consent, if properly harnessed, can transform the zone into the most developed part of the world.

Culturally, we are among a highly republican people, who value individual freedom, hard work and good family name above every thing else; a people who in times of crisis, political or economic, national or global, are able to sustain themselves, with subsistence and commercial farming and processing of agricultural products, small scale businesses and industrial establishments; a people noted for producing not only palm oil and kernels and turning them into manufactured products but also planting cotton, turning the cotton wool into yarns and the yarns into manufactured textile materials. We are among a people that believe strongly in economic self-reliance and democracy and who traditionally value family good name above material wealth. We are in the city of Owerri, host to the annual celebration of “Ahajioku”.

But we are also in the place of oil and gas and abundance of solid minerals. As a matter of fact, Abia and Imo states are among the oil and gas producing states in Nigeria. Enugu state is the home, not only of coal but also lime stones and iron. It is therefore fitting that, on the heels of the road show in Bayelsa last month, the south east should be next zone for NEITI to hold a parley with the people of Nigeria on the report of the NEITI 2005 audit report which focused on transactions in the oil and gas. In late 2006, NEITI was in Enugu for a similar event; today, we are rightly in Owerri, the capital city of Imo state.

Basically, a Road Show is a stakeholders outing carried out in the open to stimulate public evaluation of the work of an entity. Its chief purpose is to explain to the people, what the entity is established for, what its main activities are, how such activities can impact on the lives of the people, and above all to solicit external input for improvement and greater social relevance. A Road show is, ideally, robustly interactive, eminently activist, and hugely impactful in a sustainable manner. A Road show is, therefore, expected to leave behind, in its wake, not just a lasting memory of the event, but also, more importantly, a structure that will further the goal of the entity. We should ensure that in our contributions, we suggest ways of using the contents of the report of NEITI and some other information and data generated by sister agencies to improve the lives of the people of south east zone. We should suggest, too, the structure for sustaining the debate, the discussion, and the sharing of data and information. What role should NEITI play; what role should government play, and what role should civil society play.

There are things we already know, which we only need to remind ourselves of today. The Federal Ministry of Finance has told us that between June 1999 and December 2005, the Federation Accounts Committee made a total allocation to the Federal Government, the State Governments and the Local Governments, amounting to about N15.9 trillion. The

bulk of it, N10.671 trillion or 67.5% went to State and Local Governments, while N5.138 or 32.5% went to the Federal Government. We are told also that, it was the south-south zone that received the highest allocation of N1.259 trillion, while the south east zone got the least allocation of N374.5 billion. In other words, the south- south got 3.4 times what the south east got. We learn further that Delta state got the highest allocation of N321.102 billion, while Plateau state got the least allocation of N52.530 billion. Thus the allocation to Delta state was more than six times what Plateau state got, and also was fairly close to what the whole of south east zone got in that period.

NEITI will show today what its own reports reveal about the total amount derived from the oil and gas sector and the material basis of the data in terms of volume of production and governance issues involved. Incidentally, the audit reports of NEITI cover virtually the same period, 1999-2005. NEITI's report which we shall present in summary form, covers the year 2005; it will raise the questions of whether the oil companies paid to the federation all that they were supposed to pay; whether government agencies recorded correctly and accurately what they received; whether the regulatory agencies assessed correctly and accurately all those who should pay taxes, royalties ,penalties, etc to Nigeria; whether all that federal agencies collected on behalf of the country were swept into the federation account or invested wisely; whether we in fact know in precise and accurate terms exactly how much oil and gas are taken out of the wells by the oil and gas companies. All these are important questions and we should discuss them. However, even more important to us are the questions about accountability, because they touch directly on the issue of human welfare. Governors of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states, we are here to encourage the people of these states, and members of the state House Assembly to form a habit of asking you and your local government chairmen and councilors to account for what ever little you have received; tell them and us what you did with what you got, and look all of us in the face and tell us whether you have embezzled some or nothing of what you received on our behalf or whether you have prudently used the revenue accruing to you to maximize the welfare of the people of the zone. We are also here to encourage the governors and state houses of assembly to stand up and demand their rights; you should insist that the federal government also accounts to the national assembly and to the states how much it produced as oil and gas and how much revenue it derived from the products and the formula for sharing that revenue. It is interesting and significant that it is a public agency, like NEITI, funded by government that is here to encourage you to ask and answer such provocative questions. This is the ultimate value of NEITI. We want you to raise the questions now and always; therefore,

we must create the space, and establish some forums and structures to ensure that the questions are raised in peaceful and orderly manner and that answers are provided to the satisfaction of all concerned. This is what NEITI is about; this is the essence of the NEITI Road show.

We should bear in mind that EITI, of which NEITI is a subset, has as its ultimate goal the eradication of poverty, within the context of a programme of sustainable development. The key instrument for achieving this goal is a framework of transparency and accountability. NEITI employs a number of methods to put EITI principles into practice in our country. These are contained in the NEITI Act, 2007. I encourage you to get a copy of the Act immediately from the Secretariat staff, study it carefully. Then partner with NEITI to promote transparency and accountability in the extractive industries sector. Together, we shall eliminate all corrupt practices in the sector. Together, we can eradicate poverty from our zone and our nation.

“Never underestimate the power of a few committed individuals; they can transform the world”. These are the words of Margaret Mead. I agree with her. Let us be committed on positive change; and let us work together as a team. Then Nigeria will be transformed.

THANK YOU

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