

## **2005 Oil Bid Round...What has that got to do with civil society?**

By Uche Igwe.

Let me congratulate the speaker for a very erudite presentation. I have listened to this speaker on several occasions. I always had problems speaking or worse still discussing the paper presented by people like this.

My simple reason is that they would have exhausted eloquence and any other thing you need to do or say to keep your audience awake.

However one interesting thing that made me accept the invitation amidst this phobia is that I attended the oil bid round at the Sheraton Hotel in Abuja from the 25<sup>th</sup> -26<sup>th</sup> August 2005.

The 2005 oil bid round by my own evaluation was in every way a symbolic and positive sign to all of us Nigerians. It marked the beginning of an end of an era of discretionary oil block allocation in Nigeria. As all of us are aware, before now, ladies and gentlemen oil blocks were an exclusive right of the privileged. The few, who are brothers, sisters, concubines, friends and relations of "the powers that be" get oil blocks whether they know what to do with them or not. But with the 2005 Bid round, the story is no longer the same. That this can happen in my lifetime makes me very confident that another Nigeria is possible no matter the depth of the decay.

Another thing that struck me was that beyond the open and transparent the method adopted by the Department for Petroleum Resources (DPR) was IT compliant. This obvious departure from what used to be attracted instant commendation from both domestic and foreign stakeholders especially those present. Many prospective investors were confident to join and even many traditional companies did not bid, paving way for entirely new ones.

However, this is not to say that the bidding was a perfect one. The use of multiple criteria is a window for manipulation and the bidding went till the wee hours of the night. Another opportunity to precipitate mischief.

### **What possible implication will this have on civil society?**

My thinking is that this development provides civil society an opportunity to applaud government when they do what is right. Why is it that it is simpler to carry around bad news in Nigeria. The kind of publicity and attention that Alamieyeseigha is enjoying today in the media for instance, if we

communicate the reforms in the extractive sector with that same energy and enthusiasm, then there will be no need for the NEITI communication strategy.

Another implication of the bid round is that it is an opportunity for knowledge acquisition by civil society. We often hide under the assumption that the oil sector is technology intensive, but let me quickly add that it is not rocket science.

One civil society representative who was at the bid round with me told me she learnt only that day of what an oil block is.? We need to build the requisite capacity to remain at the leading edge of information.

I want to conclude by alluding to what Dr Humphrey Asobie told us in Kaduna that as civil society we may sometimes we need to seize the space for inclusion and partnership even when it is not offered to us. Whether this space is seized or willingly offered, let our engagement be based on knowledge. This is no more an era of “gboza’ and placard carrying activism. It is time for constructive policy engagement in a manner that will move our only nation, Nigeria forward.

**I thank you all.**