

July 13, 2012

## Summary of the Opening Ceremony Rivers State SPRM Initiation/Sensitization Workshop

**Present at the High Table: Justice Uwais, Chairman of the SPRM Steering Committee; Mrs. Ayo Obe, Member of the SPRM Steering Committee; Mr. A.B. Okauru, DG NGF; Alhaji LOT Shittu, ED Strategy & Research NGF; State Head of Service, State Chief of Staff, State Attorney General, State Commissioner of Budget & Economic Planning; Dr. Afeikhena Jerome, SPRM Program Coordinator**

Today marked the official launch of the SPRM process in Rivers State. The event was opened with a prayer, followed by opening remarks by the State Commissioner of Planning. He gave a recap of the Rivers State SPRM Technical Session held yesterday. He expressed that the time frame of 3 months for completion and submission of the State Self Assessment Report (SSAR) and the State Program of Action Report (SPoA) is a big feat; however he affirmed the State's commitment to meet the 3 month time frame.

The event was officially opened by Justice Uwais who requested a moment of silence for the people who lost their lives at the tanker explosion in Port Harcourt yesterday.

A keynote address was made by Mrs. Ayo Obe

This was followed by a presentation on the SPRM process made by Prof Alex Gboyega

Speeches by State Stakeholders:

Remarks made by the State Head of Economic Advisory Council: he spoke on his experience as a member of the current government. His role entails heading the Economic Advisory Council and overseeing the State Independent Electoral Commission.

Message from the Chairman of the Local Government: as part of Rivers state he is confident that the core principles and objectives of the SPRM will be fully implemented in the State. He affirmed that this is a good process and expressed their commitment to make themselves available to participate in the process.

Message from a Youth representative: States have a lot to learn from Rivers as there are a lot of good things going on in Rivers State. The strength of a nation lies in its Human Capital; the Governor has invested in capacity building throughout the state. He has personally benefited from scholarships provided by the State.

Representative of State Federal Agencies, Assistant Comptroller General of Customs: He is reminding and encouraging citizens that they have access to information on the activities of Customs. Customs has mechanized their database therefore information is readily available to the public

Representative of the Physically Challenged: Rivers State government has shown some concern towards the physically challenged by providing educational scholarships. Also the House has passed a handicapped persons welfare bill, however His Excellency has not yet approved the bill. The response of the current government to the bill will indicate if they are friendly towards the disabled. An appeal was made to the government regarding the current structures and facilities in the State, which are not accessible to the physically challenged. An appeal to the State to raise awareness on Polio, his current handicap is a result of Polio.

Representative of Traditional Rulers: This workshop will help the State identify areas they are performing well and areas that need attention. While the governor has done well, there is a need to supervise projects currently underway in the State. For example schools and roads have been under construction for a while, however they remain incomplete.

Representative of NAN Students: they have not been carried along by the government. The current insecurity is cause of great concern to the students. Although they have expressed their grievances to the state, no action has been taken. There are also issues of mobility for students and educational facilities are not well equipped.

Representative of Market Women: the government is yet to complete the new market. There is a need to empower youths and widows. There are also issues of indigenization for widows and making scholarships available to widows' children.

Suppliers' Association: several suppliers have experience issues of non-payment for procurement of materials by government departments; procedures for procurement management in the public sector remain unclear. He was asked to make his complaint to the Commissioner; however he is yet to gain an audience with the Commissioner.

Representative of Women (Women's Affairs): there are several challenges faced by women in Rivers State, for example harmful widowhood practices. She informed women present of the 2001 law passed against harmful widows' practices. There is a need for a sensitization program to inform women of the existence of the law. There also needs to be consequences for those who violate the law. There is also an issue of domestic violence in the State. A lot of women have been handicapped and killed as a result of domestic violence. She informed the audience of small scale business opportunities available to women

Address by the Governor, represented by the State Attorney General: the governor will be proud that the SPRM has been successfully launched. He addressed the scholarship issue raised by the market women's leaders. He also addressed other issues raised by speakers. He referred to a comment made yesterday about the results of the SPRM process being predetermined; he responded to the comment by stating that the government is very open and encouraged citizens to ask questions of their government.

Vote of thanks/Closing speech by the DG NGF: the DG thanked the Honourable Commissioner for a well organized event. The level of mobilization appears to be the best he has seen so far. After listening to the Head of the Economic Advisory Council, it is clear that Rivers State is ahead. The Attorney General should look into the law regarding physically challenged individuals; the DG will also mention the concerns expressed to the Governor. Polio is not just a state issue, it is a national issue.