

WELCOME REMARKS BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, NIGERIA EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE (NEITI), ORJI OGBONNAYA ORJI, PhD. ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF JOINING THE DOTS WITH POLITICALLY EXPOSED PERSONS IN NIGERIA AT THE NEITI HOUSE, ABUJA ON THE 29TH AUGUST 2023.

Protocols.

1. I feel highly honoured and privileged to give the welcome remarks at this important event which is the official launch of “Joining the Dots with Politically Exposed Persons in Nigeria”.
2. Joining the Dots-JTD is a tool that crossmatches the data on beneficial ownership (BO) and Politically Exposed Persons against oil, and gas and mining licenses in order to detect the existence of conflicts of interest. The Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), Directorio Legislativo, BudgIT Foundation and Transparency in Totality came together to develop this tool.
3. These four organisations of which NEITI is proud to be a member have two common strategic goals. These are to support the establishment of frameworks that will facilitate transparency and accountability in Nigeria’s extractive sector. Secondly, to contribute to the unfettered and public access to data on politically exposed persons (PEPs) in Nigeria.

4. The two goals are clearly in sync with the mandate given to NEITI in its establishment Act-The NEITI Act 2007 and the NEITI Strategic Plan 2022-2026.
5. NEITI has long established that Beneficial Ownership Transparency (BOT) is one of the tools that can be used for resource mobilisation, curb corruption, illicit financial flows and even terrorism financing.
6. NEITI piloted the first BO reporting in 2013 and officially launched a BO register in 2019. At the global EITI level, all implementing member countries are required to report on the BO of the country's extractive assets. Globally, over 100 countries have made commitments to implement BOT reforms.
7. The challenges and risks of anonymous beneficial owners of extractives assets in resource rich countries results in monumental corruption, tax evasion and diversion of a country's wealth into the pockets of a few privileged individuals.
8. "Joining the Dots with Politically Exposed Persons" (JTD) a web-based platform which is being launched today is a web platform created to cross-reference the various data sources on politically exposed persons and the beneficial ownership registers, identify red flags in the licenses award processes in Nigeria's oil, gas and mining sectors.

9. In the past one year, NEITI has provided the technical support to this project, backing it up with the relevant data, information and the agency's over a decade experience in BOR.
10. What we are launching today is the result of that year long behind the scenes work, linking data on PEPs to Nigeria's BO registers with the CAC and NEITI and the areas of conflicts of interests detected and the companies involved in Nigeria's extractive industries. You would be taken through the platform, present the results and discuss strategies on how to use it to drive reforms advocacy.
11. This project aligns with the principles of the EITI and reinforces NEITI's position on the agency's capacity to use credible data to curb corruption on possible conflicts of interest, corruption, or misuse of public office cases.
12. The EITI is founded on the philosophy that regular disclosures of information and data in the extractive sector will promote public debate, foster civic actions and accountability in the sector, ensuring that revenues from the sector are mobilized to create opportunities for investments, job creation and poverty reduction.
13. NEITI's mandate is to ensure transparency and accountability in the nation's oil, gas and mining sector. We have been courageous in disclosing information and data, as well as made copious recommendations in our annual industry reports.

14. The Launching of this platform today is coming at a time that NEITI was among the high ranking Nigerian delegation of member States of the Inter-Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA). GIABA is deeply concerned that money laundering and associated predicate offences undermine socio-economic and political development and regional security and convened a meeting in Accra Ghana to reaffirm their determination to safeguard the West African sub region from money laundering and other forms of financial crime.
15. The meeting in Accra was informed by the transnational nature of money laundering and associated predicate offences, and the misuse of legal persons and legal arrangements by criminals to move, hide, and transfer assets to conceal unlawful activity.
16. Connecting the Dots project therefore aligns with NEITI' commitment to deepen beneficial ownership transparency through efficient use of information and data to make it more difficult for money launderers and other criminals to conceal their identities, assets, and criminal activities through the misuse of legal entities.
17. In this regard, NEITI will work closely with partners on Connecting the Dot Project to strengthen public-private sector partnership in the implementation of beneficial ownership (BO) disclosure requirements because we firmly believe that a collaborative approach for obtaining, verifying, and holding beneficial ownership information involving all critical

stakeholders can facilitate the adoption of trusted mechanisms for determining real beneficial ownership of oil, gas and mining assets.

18. Therefore, under the global extractive industries transparency initiative, NEITI is determined to push the boundaries of implementation of international standards on beneficial ownership transparency, including adoption of BO transparency reforms, assessment of risk of misuse of legal entities, and implementing progressively best practice in beneficial ownership transparency relying on access to data to me made available by Connecting the Dots project.

19. Furthermore, NEITI will work closely with our partners on Connecting the Dots to ensure timely and efficient access to beneficial ownership information. To this end, NEITI as a lead agency on Beneficial Ownership Data in the extractive industry remain open to multi-pronged approaches to obtaining and maintaining beneficial ownership information consistent with the revised Financial Action Task Force Standard as a member agency of Inter-Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA).

20. What Connecting the Dot is offering to NEITI's Beneficial Ownership program is strengthening our capacity to guarantee data accuracy, data efficiency, availability and easy access to assist relevant competent authorities and the private sector, including financial institutions and designated non-financial

institutions (DNFBPs) in their efforts to combat money laundering and associated predicate offenses.

21. Ladies and gentlemen, Beneficial Ownership disclosure is at the heart of the global EITI and has enormous benefits for implementing countries like Nigeria. It has been identified as a tool for curbing corruption, illicit financial flows, money laundering, tax evasion and terrorism financing.

22. It has also been deployed as a tool to boost resource mobilisation, business confidence, attract foreign direct investments and ensure the good governance of natural resources in resource-rich countries like Nigeria.

23. In 2015, Nigeria was selected as one of twelve (12) EITI Implementing countries to pilot Beneficial Ownership disclosure in the extractive sector.

24. Nigeria amended its Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) in 2020, joining the league of countries with a legal framework for the implementation of beneficial ownership transparency. We are collaborating with CAC on strengthening Beneficial Ownership reporting, and not reinventing the wheel. Our BO Portal will remain because it is sector specific and developed with specifications and guidelines from the global EITI.

25. The Act required the mandatory disclosure of persons with significant control of a company in a register of beneficial owners. Also, the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) 2021 requires the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum

Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) to keep a public register of beneficial ownership of licenses, leases, permits etc.

26. Nigeria's implementation of BO disclosures drew global acclaim with the country winning the first-place award at the Open Government Partnership awards that took place in Seoul in 2021.

27. A few months after my assumption as the Executive Secretary of NEITI, Nigeria was admitted as a member of the Opening Extractives network alongside eight other countries. The Countries are Argentina, Ghana, Indonesia, Liberia, Mexico, Mongolia, Senegal, Armenia, Philippines, and Zambia.

28. NEITI has set up an inter-agency network for Opening Extractives. Members of that committee include the Mining Cadastre Office (MCO), Ministry of Mines and Steel Development (MMSD), Nigeria Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC), (NMDPRA), Ministry of Petroleum Resources (MoP), Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), Ministry of Finance (MoF), Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU), Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

29. NEITI has expanded and widened the scope of our reports and specifically deepened the disclosures of beneficial ownership of Nigeria's extractive assets.

30. Through our partnership with Open Extractive, we developed a robust and inclusive workplan in partnership with our sister agencies in the Open Extractive Network and participated in the Peer learning events.
31. NEITI in 2021 commenced its transition to an automated/digital data gathering process through its NEITI Audit Management System (NAMS). NAMS will ensure timely and efficient disclosure of industry data including ownership assets in Nigeria's extractive sector.
32. However, establishing a publicly accessible register of beneficial owners and linking the information to PEPs cannot on their own drive reforms or change the status quo on ownership secrecy. There must be constant interrogation of the data and information on the platform, update the register and use the data and information contained in these registers to demand accountability.
33. This demand for accountability lies squarely on the shoulders of Civil Society and the media who are the intermediaries between the citizens and the state and whose interest is the accountability of the state and the private sector actors in the development process.
34. Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to express my profound gratitude to our partners BudgIt Foundation, Directorio Legislativo and Transparency in Totality for their sterling contributions, resourcefulness and commitment to

this project in Nigeria. It was not an easy task given our complicated data sets, but the end justifies the means.

35.I urge you to make effective use of “Joining the Dot” Tool in getting information as you work towards delivering your responsibilities in the management of the extractive sector for the benefit of our citizens.

36.On this note, I wish to thank you all for participating in this important event and for your listening attention.