

## Democracy and Development in Rivers State of Nigeria

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### Abstract

Democracy is popularly defined as the government of the people by the people for the people. In other words, it is a peoples' government informed by the majority for the interest of the greatest number in society. Such a government must therefore aspire to improve the welfare of the greatest number in society to remain relevant. Nigerians clamoured for the return to democratic governance for a long time and that clamour was not without conflicts and injuries. However, since 1999, democracy has been in the country and currently is about 13 years old. The question is: are the expectations being realized? This work compares the pre-democratic and democratic dispensations in Rivers State using the unbalanced growth theory. The work observed that the cost of democracy in Nigeria at this time is relatively high compared to the military era. There is a need for more efficiency in governance in Nigeria now.

### 1. Background

The nascent democratic experience in Nigeria is now about 13 years (since 1999). The experiment has come along with it several challenges. These include the current Boko haram bombings, seemingly resolved militancy in the Niger Delta and intrigues or confusion arising from court verdicts sacking political office holders at short notices. For instance, the lower court ruled in favour of elongating the tenure of 5 governors in the country. However, on the 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2012, the Supreme Court ruling set aside the earlier Judgments after these governors have fully enjoyed the elongated tenures. Under such circumstances what happens? Do the Governors refund what they earned while in office beyond their legal mandates? Within the democratic era, the country has witness several strikes, yet many seem to reckon with democracy in Nigeria. In fact, on February 12, 2011 twenty Nigerians lost their lives at the Goodluck Jonathan campaign rally in Port Harcourt due to stampede at the Liberation Stadium venue of the rally (Akasike, 2011). According to the Governor of Delta State as cited in Adalaku (2011), the victims died for democracy. Is democracy in Nigeria at this stage worth dying for in this way? This is the point of departure in this discourse. People may die for a worthy cause, but does democracy in Nigeria (at this stage) pass for such a cause? Is democracy in Nigeria yielding the desired benefits in terms of Development in Nigeria?

### 2. Objective of the Study

This work attempts to evaluate the gains of democracy, more popularly referred to as dividends of democracy in Nigeria against the cost of democracy using Rivers State as its primary focus.

### 3. Method of Analysis

This work documents developmental efforts of the state from 1967-2010. However, this is further split into two, namely 1967-1999 and 1999-2010. This is because the period 1967-1999 represent an era of military governance of the state and 1999-2010 to-date coincide with the period of continuous democratic governance in the state. This affords the

opportunity to compare the gains of democracy against the military (non-democratic) era.

#### 4. Theoretical Framework

Development generally has to do with dynamics. Hence, the focus of this discourse is economic development. The meaning of economic development had really not been fixed and consistent over time. Between the 1940s and the 1960s, development was seen as synonymous with economic growth. Many theorists as Rostow (1952), Harrod and Dormar (1957), among others proposed models of development, generally identifying structural changes, savings and investments as the sources of economic development and growth. It was assumed that as the economy grows and output increases, there will be more happiness and improved welfare arising from the higher volume of resources which if well distributed would have generally improved the wellbeing of the masses. The basic assumption was that in so much as the economy grows, trickledown effect, will at least lead to improvement for everybody in the economy and standard of living would generally improve.

The 1960s was declared by the United Nations as the decade of Development. Growth targets of 5 – 7% were set and achieved in several countries. To the consternation of these theorists, sometimes referred to as high development theorists (Krugman, 1992:15), it was discovered that misery, poverty, unemployment etc., grew worse vis-à-vis economic growth. This prompted a redefinition of development to mean a growing economy in addition to even distribution of resources and reduction in poverty, unemployment, inflation among other social undesirables.

In the 1970s capacity became a key determinant in the definition of development. At this time the ability to understand nature and transform it to meet human needs became the focus of the definition. In other words, a developed economy was one that possesses a high capacity to transform nature and its inter-human environment to meet the needs of man. In fact according to Nnoli (1981),

Development defines a dialectical phenomenon in which man and society interact with their physical, biological and inter-human environments transforming them to better humanity at large and being transformed in the process.

Development therefore connotes a high ability to exploit nature for the greatest good of the greatest number in society. In recent times intergenerational consideration has become part of that definition with the introduction of the adjective 'sustainable' to development. Sustainable development defines development of today (the present) that does not compromise the development of tomorrow (the next generation). Development connotes a higher capacity of a people to meet their needs. This work is based on the *Unbalanced growth theory*. According to the Theory as given by Hirschmann, cited in Jhingan (2007), a developing country should concentrate its resources in the provision of the necessary infrastructures or key investments in selected sectors capable of promoting rapid development. According to Hirschmann Social Overheads provide a key example of such sectors which is needed in developing countries. He advocated the need for a state to invest in basic social infrastructure referred to as Social Overheads. The essence in this work is to assess the availability of Social Overheads and other facilities that would promote social welfare in Rivers state. This is more so, because a key essence of governance is the judicious utilization of resources towards meeting the needs of the greatest number in society. Relative to the pre democracy era, has the new democratic governments done enough to justify the clamour for the rebirth of democracy in Rivers State?

#### 5. Demography of the State

Rivers state occupies a land mass of twelve thousand, two hundred and forty (12,240) square kilometers. Table 1 shows the landmass and population of Local Government Areas in Rivers State

**Table 1:** Population and Landmass of Rivers State, 1991 – 2006

Local Govt. Areas	Area sq.km	1991	1996	1997	1998	1999	2003	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Abua/Odual	1074	134,470	15,935	163,95	163,395	168,711	188,415	282,410	290,882	299,609	308,597	317,855
Ahoada East	533	90,621	107,247	107,482	110,573	113,764	167,711	166,324	171,313	176,453	181,747	187,199
Ahoada west	319	91,163	107,924	108,113	111,222	114,451	127,796	249,232	256,709	264,410	272,342	280,513
Akuki- Toru	1410	102,169	120,914	212,152	124,636	128,233	143,209	161,103	165,936	170,914	176,041	181,323
Andoni	307	177,547	210,121	247,217	252,161	257,204	287,243	217,924	224,461	231,196	238,131	245,275
Asari-Toru	128	166,788	197,388	197,777	203,465	209,336	233,785	219,787	226,381	233,172	240,167	247,372
Bonny	781	76,124	90,090	90,268	92,864	95,545	106,702	214,983	217,414	223,937	230,655	237,575
Degema	994	95,889	113,482	113,705	116,973	120,350	134,405	249,467	256,951	264,660	272,560	280,777

Ekeme	270	74,631	88,321	88,495	91,040	93,667	104,607	190,194	195,899	201,777	207,830	214,065
Emohua	523	184,923	183,347	188,708	194,991	194,444	217,154	201,057	207,068	213,280	219,679	226,269
Etche	953	197,561	233,808	234,268	241,005	247,959	276,918	249,939	257,437	265,160	273,115	281,308
Gokana	175	159,461	188,717	189,089	194,527	200,140	223,515	233,813	240,827	248,052	255,494	263,159
Ikwerre	1099	125,385	148,389	148,682	162,957	157,371	175,515	188,930	194,578	200,436	206,449	212,642
Khana	620	207,111	245,110	246,592	262,655	269,945	301,472	292,924	301,712	310,763	320,086	329,689
Obio/Akpor	392	363,017	311,886	311,886	330,113	320,854	330,113	462,350	476,221	490,507	505,222	520,378
Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni	1216	190,751	225,748	226,193	231,692	230,412	267,373	283,294	291,793	300,547	309,563	318,850
Ogu/Bolo	125	43,673	61,686	61,789	63,277	54,814	61,215	75,282	77,540	79,867	82,262	84,731
Okrika	307	157,673	186,607	186,976	192,351	197,802	220,903	222,285	228,953	235,822	242,897	250,184
Omuma	179	44,755	52,943	53,047	54,572	56,802	220,903	100,388	103,400	106,502	109,697	112,988
Opobo/Nkoro	104	51,928	61,455	61,576	63,347	65,175	72,789	152,833	157,418	162,141	167,005	172,015
Oyigbo	312	85,318	100,972	107,170	104,079	107,083	119,589	125,331	129,091	132,964	136,953	141,061
Port Harcourt	272	440,399	522,199	522,226	537,226	552,746	617,302	538,558	554,715	571,356	588,497	606,152
Tai	147	56,542	66,916	67,050	68,978	70,968	79,266	120,308	123,917	127,635	131,464	135,408
Total	12,240	3,187,864	3,802,736	3,780,170	3,888,876	4,001,090	4,468,387	5,198,716	5,354,627	5,515,318	5,680,777	5,851,201

**Source:** National Population Commission various years (2006 – 2010 Projection Mine)

The state is divided into mainland and riverine communities (and local government areas). The riverine areas define those local governments whose access is exclusively by river, streams or other water sources and their economic activities are largely aqua related. The bulk of the terrains in these areas are swamps, creeks, rivulets and a limited fragile or marshy habitable land space.

## 6. Administration of the State: 1967 - 1999

The state had been administered by several governors between 1967 when it was created to date including civilians and military administrators especially before 1999. Table 2 presents a list of those who administered the state between 1967-1999

**Table 2:** Governors of Rivers State: 1967 - 1999

s/n	Duration of Governance	Name of Governor	Type of Governance
1	July 1967 – July 1975	Commander A.I. Diете-Spiff	Military
2	July 1975 – October 1978	Colonel Zamani Lekwot	Military
3	October 1978 – September 1979	Navy Comm. Suleiman Saidu	Military
4	October 1979 – December 1983	Chief Melford Okilo	Civilian
5	January 1984 – August 1986	Police Comm. Filelis Oyakhilome	Military
6	August 1986 – August 1988	Col. Anthony B.I. Ukpo	Military
7	August 1988 – August 1990	Group Capt. Ernest Adeleye	Military
8	September 1990 – January 1992	Col. Godwin Osagie Abbe	Military
9	January 1992 – December 1993	Chief Rufus Ada George	Civilian
10	December 1992 – August 1996	Lt. Col. Dauda Musa Komo	Military
11	August 1996 – June 1998	Col. Musa Shiekh Shehu	Military
12	June 1998 – May 1999	Group Captain Sam Ewang	Military

**Source:** Various

All except for Chief Okilo and Rufus Ada George were military officers. Also apart from Commander Spiff, Chief Ada George and Chief Melford Okilo, others were non-natives of the state. Even Commander Spiff and Chief Okilo hail from the present Bayelsa State. Therefore, only Rufus George is an indigene of the state.

However, these administrators or governors as they were variously referred to did a lot to transform the state especially Port Harcourt. While Commander Spiff is generally seen as the best governor who had ever ruled the state especially when considering infrastructural development in Port Harcourt, Chief Okilo is believed to have focused on rural development. He made concerted efforts to extend development beyond Port Harcourt and break the one-city syndrome of Rivers state. It is difficult to say if he was successful in spite of the number of infrastructural facilities, he and other

governors sited in the rural areas because to date, Rivers state is still one-city state.

As at 1999, the state had two (2) petroleum refineries owned by the Federal Government; the first in 1962 and the second in 1978. There were two seaports; one at Onne and the other at Port Harcourt. The state also had two airports, one with an International status at Omagwa and the other at Port Harcourt town.

The state had several educational institutions as follows:

2,805 primary schools

243 secondary schools

2 Universities, one Federal and one State Owned

1 School of Health Technology

1 Rivers State Polytechnic in Bori

1 Rivers State College of Arts and Science in Port Harcourt

2 Colleges of Education; one owned by the Federal Government located at Omoku and one owned by the state which is to be transformed into a university.

### 6.1 Health Centres

The state also has about 190 Health care facilities as far back as 1980 in the then 7 Local Government Areas currently constituting Rivers State: These include

Ahoada	-	31
Bori	-	18
Degema	-	13
Ikwerre/Etche	-	41
Okrika/Tai/Elemo	-	15
Port Harcourt	-	21

The state has a well-developed transport infrastructure which include network of roads, rail lines and water ways which is a key means of transportation in the state. A functional Rivers State Transport Corporation complements these infrastructures. In all, the state was one of the most advanced in the committee of states in Nigeria with over 90 industrial concerns including Shell Petroleum, Agip, Texaco, Elf, Nigerian Petroleum and Refining Company, Michelin, West African Glass Industry, Alcan Aluminium, Metaloplastic, RISONPALM, Nafcon, Pabod Breweries, United African Company (UAC) agencies as Pan Africa, UAC Property, and a host of others. The State also has two industrial layouts; one in Port Harcourt and a second one at Ahoada. Ahoada Industrial Estate has not fully taken off but the Trans Amadi Industrial layout had been in existence since 1970s.

Amini-Phillip (2005) has documented the contribution of each governor in the provision of social overheads. However, beyond social overheads and industrial infrastructures, the state has peace and security. Incidents of security breaches were occasional. In the rural areas, people could easily and freely engage in all forms of social activities anytime of the day and even at nights especially up until the advent of Social Democratic Party and National Republican Convention (NPC) and the subsequent elections that followed. The oil related disturbances are exceptions because they were driven by special circumstances. In any case even those oil related disturbances were increasingly noticed after the 1994 wage deregulation policy took effect.

## 7. Administration of the State 1999-2010

From 1999 to date politicians had exclusively ruled the state. These include

**Table 3:** Governors of Rivers State from May 1999 – to date

s/no	Name	Tenure	Governance
1	Dr. P. Odili	29 May 1999 – 29 May 2007	Civilian
2	Sir. C. Omehia	29 May 2007 – October 2007	Civilian
3	Rt. Hon. R.C. Amaechi	October 2007 – till date	Civilian

**Source:** Personal Observation

Between 1999 and 2010, a minimum of N1, 666, 069, 245, 708.69 accrued to the State in terms of internally generated revenue and the Federation or Distributive Pool account of the Federal government (See Table 4). A total of N1, 161,788,198,133.55 accrued from the federation account which is largely dependent on oil related revenue. About N20, 000,000,000 accrued from internally generated sources.

**Table 4:** Financial Inflows to the Rivers State Government: 1999 – 2010

Year/ Month	1999 (N)	2000 (N)	2001 (N)	2002 (N)	2003 (N)	2004 (N)	2005 (N)	2006 (N)	2007 (N)	2008 (N)	2009 (N)	2010 (N)
January	N/A	467,343,025.02	2,648,888,917.5	1,511,181,404.13	3,964,843,503.93	4,713,419,564.27	9,124,009,534.03	10,074,821,640.80	10,380,168,292.15	12,509,447,069.69	11,194,792,141.34	21,810,549,120.00
February	N/A	755,810,575.88	2,610,875,030.10	1,421,127,824.08	3,530,891,683.01	4,541,821,173.38	8,629,598,060.79	11,353,462,905.86	14,401,982,579.24	26,005,002,641.95	7,517,140,314.20	13,982,759,500.19
March	N/A	1,453,616,735.71	1,170,023,187.06	2,864,866,043.69	3,611,505,293.90	4,298,571,635.33	8,159,205,430.23	11,826,855,791.63	16,902,640,011.64	29,511,910,579.07	14,032,362,975.84	8,150,058,439.97
April	N/A	1,721,012,145.51	1,375,499,882.50	2,208,059,044.77	3,291,010,920.57	4,389,453,369.66	8,196,338,177.99	12,347,961,604.87	N/A	37,813,020,672.74	10,205,255,485.44	28,046,981,406.37
May	259,840,991.25	1,308,470,392.80	1,415,565,766.18	N/A	3,499,754,735.09	4,693,279,302.60	9,379,103,973.40	10,355,696,265.50	16,176,682,925.34	20,458,429,099.21	10,306,377,295.93	13,195,044,516.92
June	254,382,102.56	2,013,650,647.70	1,185,020,278.78	3,073,937,537.47	2,547,116,281.85	4,713,562,679.27	11,086,036,958.41	23,249,973,565.18	21,211,598,478.15	101,298,709,688.45	9,510,088,587.93	N/A
July	N/A	2,139,747,808.80	1,923,308,874.55	2,756,699,699.32	3,829,957,093.06	5,183,211,482.49	9,757,348,109.90	9,692,244,335.98	18,207,584,006.30	19,745,769,522.53	N/A	N/A
August	514,967,054.99	1,354,019,028.31	1,707,911,625.64	3,158,704,057.11	2,735,115,815.72	3,924,452,511.07	10,487,281,247.15	10,569,232,346.02	15,636,112,559.64	19,815,626,764.44	9,382,998,573.27	N/A
September	N/A	1,563,262,681.31	1,827,477,986.76	N/A	3,323,004,257.31	4,449,212,142.08	8,568,897,749.21	22,610,273,839.44	15,475,120,456.90	20,206,920,586.02	9,260,160,028.86	N/A
October	560,980,839.36	2,328,355,446.92	N/A	3,311,865,733.69	3,532,243,220.31	4,474,148,213.06	10,371,184,870.25	10,269,739,182.98	23,222,228,649.60	19,626,977,602.03	9,499,415,027.23	N/A
November	545,224,098.10	2,138,767,581.82	1,589,564,446.63	3,091,655,282.13	3,893,877,591.77	7,777,388,120.11	10,859,704,726.59	11,123,093,728.00	16,514,035,053.54	14,157,207,026.39	11,599,435,784.60	N/A
December	561,421,812.16	2,808,677,272.55	1,458,618,267.13	3,168,880,555.53	4,396,347,032.28	9,204,109,410.15	10,155,667,788.01	10,034,533,849.59	14,041,059,733.64	20,677,737,035.36	10,172,195,536.57	N/A
Total	2,696,766,898.42	19,952,833,340.48	18,912,754,282.91	26,455,978,163.92	42,155,651,309.10	62,416,629,683.43	114,755,413,534.42	49,487,289,056.15	182,171,222,726.54	382,825,758,385.82	112,680,271,470.45	98,267,629,282.91
Grand Total	1,161,788,198,133.55											

Source: Federal Ministry of Finance, Abuja 2010.

## 8. Dividends in these Administrations

In essence, these sums including other sums which were not identified in course of this research were applied by these three Governors, especially Dr. Odili who ruled the state for eight years and to a lesser extent, Rt. Hon. Ameachi who has been on the saddle for more than four years now. These governments seem to have different administrative directions. While the Odili administration tended to favour the financial empowerment of his supporters and generously donated different sums to different sections of society, whenever the need arose, the Chibuike Amaechi administration seem to favour reconstruction of social overhead facilities. His government is associated with pulling down buildings and other property in designated areas marked for reconstruction. The pulling down, removal or destruction has hardly been discriminative. Government properties and infrastructure new or old had been affected, private properties including houses of indigenes, non-indigenes and those of highly placed people have as well been affected. For instance, the former General Hospital in Port Harcourt, which was later converted to the Uniport Teaching Hospital was brought to ruins in spite of the very modern and recently built infrastructure there. That place is still in ruins. The Obi Wali Cultural Centre is another example.

Celestine Omehia was in office for about five months and these months were actually more difficult of times as he faced a huge problem of insecurity which started during the administration of Dr. Odili. His Urban renewal programme for the water front settlements also met stiff opposition by a section of the state, and this opposition continued till the court judgment that removed him from office.

Within the period under reference, Governor Ameachi infrastructural development strides are far more visible. His model primary schools and Health Services seem to dwarf the efforts of even neighbouring state Governors of his time. These schools dot strategic places all over the state. His infrastructural projects include:

1. 350 Model Primary Schools
2. 24 Model Boarding Secondary Schools (in-progress)
3. 160 Primary Health Centres
4. N60 billion Monorail Project (in-progress)
5. Mass Transit Vehicles
6. Expansion of Roads to international standard (in-progress)

There is also relative peace compared to the Omehia era and the later part of the Odili Administration, when villages were sacked and burnt up especially for politically motivated differences.

## 9. Conclusion

Summarily, there have been massive development projects in the state within the period under review especially since 2007, but one sore point is the greater Port Harcourt Project which is ongoing. It is feared that administrators of the project intend acquiring lands from owners including lands which were bought from natives (by non-natives) at tokens. These lands will thereafter be repackaged and sold to 'the people'. Given the level of corruption in the public sector, the original owners may lose out except the government gives the opportunity of first choice to these displaced people before selling to others. This is not likely if there is no specific directive by government.

The government also needs to review the situation in the state's tertiary institutions which had been on strike for sometime. These institutions train mainly indigenes of the state. So, the state and these students will lose out if these strikes continue. The effect of the strike in the long run will be negative to the state.

More than anything else, peace is a priceless asset everybody that every community craves for. From 1999 to date peace has been elusive in the state. In many communities, the fear of kidnapping or other violent crimes is real. Before 2007, reports of entire communities being sacked on account of minor differences were common. Places like Abua, Okrika, Etche provide good examples of such situations. Something needs to be done to return the state to its pre 1999 tranquility; a state free of kidnapping and low in other crimes. There is also a high rate of unemployment and poverty in the state. With the traditional sources of livelihood negatively affected by the activities of the oil companies, many people in the rural areas are actually in despair. Government should rise to the occasion.

It is also true that the volume of resource inflow to the state in the Ameachi era is massive. This may explain the number of projects he has initiated but many of these projects especially roads need to be better supervised. Many of these roads are still uncompleted and constitute a source of traffic congestion in the state capital. More so, it appears the planning process was defective especially with respect to the critical path analysis of road projects. These projects are not enough to warrant the loss of lives. It appears the number of deaths in the civilian era surpass the coup related deaths in the military era. Yet the tranquility, and volume of social services in the military era far outweigh what politicians have put in place. Moreover, merit was a major factor in appointments up to the Babangida era. Politicians need to do more to justify their being in power.

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