

INTERROGATING THE PROBLEMS OF INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Infrastructural development in any society cannot be glossed over. Infrastructure such as airports, seaports, electricity, roads, water facility, hospitals, bridges, schools, and telecommunication are very important elements that characterize and sustain the general wellbeing or development of modern States. However, the inadequate presence of these development artifacts in Bayelsa State since creation on October 1, 1996, has become a great source of worry. Consequent upon the above, this work aims at interrogating the problems of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State and makes attempt at providing certain recommendations that will aid to avert the present scenario. With the use of survey research design, we analyzed data gotten from both primary and secondary sources. The theoretical model adopted in this work is system theory. The paper in its findings shows that, the problem of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State among others include difficult topography for development, political and bureaucratic corruption, budgetary template that negates capital expenditure and favours recurrent expenditure. As a result of these findings, the paper finally recommends that, since conviction could not serve as deterrent, public officers who have been convicted of corruption charges should not enjoy pardon either at the state or national levels. We equally recommend that a scientific approach should be adopted in dealing with the difficult topography of Bayelsa State. This should be in conformity with global best practice.

Keywords: Interrogations, Problems, Infrastructural Development, Bayelsa State.

INTRODUCTION

The need for development cannot be overemphasized in the life of man and its social existence. This need has informed every responsible government must especially democratic regimes as in the case of Nigeria, to strive in providing infrastructural development. To say the less, the primary responsibility of any government is to address or provide the basic socio-economic welfare needs of its citizens and equally protect their lives and properties. Justifying the above position, Gilbert, Amos and Anthony (2015), holds the view that, the essence of governance is the deliberate attempt of improving the quality of lives of its citizens through the provision of basic life supporting infrastructure. The forgoing shows the centrality of

government in the provision of infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, good road network, electricity supply, employment opportunities, uplifting people out of poverty and bridging the inequality gap among the few rich and the mass of the people.

In Bayelsa State, successive governments have made efforts and attempts to lift the people out of underdevelopment by providing basic welfare needs since creation in 1996. However, social indicators still show that the young State is trapped with a high level of unemployment, environmental despoliation occasioned by oil and gas transnational companies. A good number of people in Bayelsa State are still living in darkness as they are not connected to the national grid. Both the health and educational facilities of the State are rated poorly. Even though Bayelsa State is commonly characterized by water, there is non-availability of drinkable water. Though the State has a ministry of public utility which shows that government is aware of the usefulness of water, for health, domestic and industrial uses, government is not interested in supplying water to the people. The situation is not peculiar to Bayelsa State alone, as there is a deficit in other social and economic infrastructure all over the country. Akinwale (2010), vividly captures the nation's situation as follows:

Nigeria is replete with several cases of inadequate infrastructure. These include irregular supply of electricity, shortage of piped water, fuel scarcity, unreliable health care services, unstable educational institutions, bad roads, malfunctioning ports, and erratic telecommunication services.

In the same line of thought, Abati (2019) has described the situation of the country Nigeria as follows:

In the Nigeria that I knew, every civil servant could afford to buy newspaper every morning. Food was in excess supply in the country. Today, Nigeria is the poverty capital of the world, (P.64).

The point to note in this paper is that, like every other state in Nigeria, Bayelsa State is desirous to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of its citizens, which is the hallmark of development. There is an interface between the political ruling class and infrastructural development. Note that the capacity of the political class to pursue public good is a fundamental requirement for rapid socio-economic/infrastructural development. However, the mobilization of public funds by the government to address squarely the problem of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State is still very low. Our view on the above is informed by empirical evidence from the appropriation laws of Bayelsa State 2012, 2014 and 2018. Particularly, that of 2018 has 57% as recurrent expenditure while 43% went for capital expenditure. Such indicates low budgetary allocation for infrastructural development. Frankly speaking, this is not in line with the desire of the people as they are in serious need of life supporting infrastructure.

Statement of the Problem

Underdevelopment as a concept is of common use in describing the socio-economic lives of the Niger Delta people and Bayelsa State in particular. This view is premised by the inaccessibility of the basic life supporting infrastructure, poverty and environmental injustice suffered by the people of the area. The State creation in 1996 brought hope of a more meaningful life to the people, as state creation in Nigeria federal structure is popularly explained as a strategy for rapid infrastructural development. Accompanying infrastructures

like government houses, pipe born water, electricity, hospitals, roads, bridges, and telecommunication services are usually concentrated at the new capital and its environs. Ayo cited in Amos (2022), subscribed to this line of thinking when it reported that “the basic motivation in the demand for new states in Nigeria was rapid socio-economic and infrastructural development and that all other reasons were rationalizations to achieve the basic purpose of development.

Despite the efforts made by successive governments and the huge yearly financial appropriations, Bayelsa State infrastructure is yet to reflect reality as global indicators of development are abysmally low. In Bayelsa State, there are several infrastructural challenges such as bad roads, poor and inadequate health care facilities, poverty, illiteracy, non-availability of drinkable water, unemployment, insecurity, militancy, environmental despoliation, and unpatriotic political class.

The quest to combat the identified problems in Bayelsa State is what has informed this scholarly work. In particular solving the problem of infrastructure should be an important objective for both academics and the political ruling class not only in Bayelsa State but in Nigeria at large. It is on this note that we will examine the major challenges to infrastructural development in Bayelsa State.

Objectives on the Study

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the problem of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State. However, the specific objectives of the study are stated as follows:

- To find out the state of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State
- To find out the main challenges of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State. To suggest ways of addressing the identified problems of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State.

Theoretical Explications

Over time, social scientists have relied so much on already established theoretical frameworks to serve as a scientific guide in their research expedition. This trend aids objective academic exercise that could be taken to what it says it offers. Consequently, this work relied heavily on systems theory. The systems theory was derived from Bertalanffy's General Systems Theory (GST) and was given interdisciplinary approach by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson. The theory crystallizes the need for an organization/institution to depend on the stakeholders who depend on it. In this paper, the Bayelsa State government and its agencies are viewed through the eye of the systems theory. It is of great importance for the government to establish a favorable relationship by way of providing / addressing the possible infrastructural gap in the State. The government must invest heavily and take responsibility of providing the basic welfare needs of the people. This will create not just a picture of inclusivity but will elicit civil obedience and patriotism on the part of the masses. Therefore, in the words of Amos and Ubani (2023) A government that is proactive to its duties is more likely to enjoy the goodwill of the people and all the various group therein. Be that as it may, the theory is very apt in interrogating the relationship between the Bayelsa State government and infrastructural deficit as it were. This theoretical perspective on the other hand, gives credence to mutual

interdependence in the quest of combating the problems of infrastructural development and therein lies its relevance to this academic endeavour.

Conceptual Issues

It is important we explicate the meaning of the key concepts (Development and infrastructure) in the title of this paper. A grasp of these concepts will enhance our understanding of what they are, and the roadblocks associated with their attainment especially as it borders on our area of study.

Meaning of Development

Most scholars have agreed that the term “development” has endured countless attempts at its definition. The definition of development varies widely as there exist different schools as well as scholars in the field of development study. Irrespective of its definitional difference, there has still been some areas of convergence among scholars as to what constitutes development. Olaolu as cited in Amos and Nein (2018), state that:

Development implies a change for better, the ordering of society and social and economic processes in such a way as to lead to the eradication of gross poverty, ill-health, and illiteracy and to raising standards of living and increased material comfort for all.

Ogai also cited Montgomery and Siffin (1996) to have conceived the term development as an aspect of change that is desirable, broadly predicated or planned and administered or at least influenced by government action. The concept depicts the increase and provision of infrastructure for massive production and equitable distribution of goods and services to the citizens of a state in order to improve their standard of living. This increase and provision require a collective effort both on the part of the people and the political ruling class. Development in a layman’s perspective means a state where things are improving.

Drawing from the above, Osuji (2015), sees development from the socio-economic point of view as the improvement of people’s lifestyle through improved education, income, skills development, and employment. This implies a process of economic and social transformation based on cultural and environmental factors. He argues that a qualitative change in the way the society shapes itself and carries out its activities is social development. What the above portends is that social development is the various processes that results in the transformation of social institutions in a manner which improves the capability of the society to fulfill its aspiration. From the economic perspective Osuji (2015) holds the view that, it is the qualitative change in the economic wealth of a state for the general wellbeing of her people. In this regard, the political, economic, and social wellbeing of the citizens stands out in times of consideration.

Given the poor indicators pointing towards the political, economic, and social wellbeing of nations particularly in Nigeria, Willson (2022) citing seer asserted that:

The questions to ask about a country’s development are therefore: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of

these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result development even if per-capita income doubled. P8.

What the above implies is that no society can claim development when these three key indicators of development (poverty, unemployment, and inequality) are profoundly missing or inadequate, even though the income per head in such society triples. This approach gives a new definition to development which takes into consideration a whole lot of issues, particularly the elimination of poverty, unemployment, and inequality within the confine of a growing economy. This is what currently informed scholars such as Todaro (1992), Rodney (2013) and Akpakpan (2011) to hold the view that development must be conceived as a multidimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes, and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty.

Having made the above explications, we will define development for the purpose of this paper as a process of improvement in various aspects of the life of the society, commonly observed in the manifestation of desirable changes such as:

- i. an improvement in the quality of life as measure by access to global indicators of development, example adequate and quality health care services
- ii. a rise in not just the level of political and social consciousness by with active participation
- iii. a reduction in the level of absolute poverty
- iv. a reduction in the level of unemployment
- v. an increase in real output of goods and services
- vi. a reduction in the level of economic and social inequalities

The above view as expressed or adopted is predicated on the fact that, it encompasses the various scholarly views conversed about development. The view also provides us with contemporary global indicators of development which could be used for comparative analysis or measurement. Akpakpan (2011) amplified this viewpoint when he stated as follows:

Economists regard the changes outlined above as components or indicators of development. They use these indicators to assess the performance of a country over time and where necessary, compare the performance of countries. And it is from the assessments and comparisons that countries are classified as more developed or less developed, developing or backward and other such descriptions. Countries also assess themselves from time to time in order to establish facts about their development performance and based on the facts, choose instruments and design programmes and projects to move the country forward and change its status.

Finally, the definition or our standpoint counts on the improvement of the whole lot of society, life, and basic infrastructure inclusive. It does not address just section or an aspect of the society alone.

General Explanation of Infrastructure

In the view of Hornby cited in Pullah (2015), infrastructure refers to the basic structures and facilities necessary for a society, state, or organization to function effectively. For a country to

achieve socio-economic and technological development, infrastructural facilities must be well developed and made not only available but assessable in all nooks and cranny of the country. The provision of infrastructure by the political ruling class to a greater degree, elicits popular political participation and civil obedience on the part of the greater mass of the people. Infrastructure is broadly classified into two components: the physical-economic and social components. The later component constitutes education, training, and health while the former (physical/economic) component can be said to include transportation, power, water, and telecommunication. The identified infrastructures are important and necessary for the socio-economic and political growth and development of a country and so need to be well developed.

Arising from the expressed notion of infrastructure we will define infrastructural development for the purpose of this paper as the deliberate and purposeful attempt/effort of any society's ruling class to provide basic physical and social structures necessary for economic growth, aesthetic beauty, and life's general wellbeing of a county. Some examples of the artifacts are roads, schools, hospitals, airports, seaports, water facilities, housing and a whole lot that provides the greatest happiness to the mass of society. It is thus imperative for the definition of development or infrastructural development to be explicit. Development literature stresses that there are certain global indicators necessary for the measurement or analysis of development.

Methodology

Methodology is simply a plan that specifies how data should be collected and analyzed. In this perspective, data is not just mere information, it is information gathered by investigations with the aid of their instrument, techniques, and the means. This information are clearly identifiable ones collected under conditions that are precisely specific and they have meaning only in relation to the particular problem being investigated. This study, therefore, employs a survey method by way of collection of quantitative and qualitative data to answer specific research questions. The significance of this method lies in its discovery of meaning in data collected so that facts and events can be better interpreted, explained, and understood. In this study, we made use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The use of primary data is predicated on ensuring that results from respondents are reliable and bias-free as expected while the secondary data could be gotten quickly and cheap compared. For secondary data include articles, journals, newspapers, books etc.

Location of the Study

According to Osundu cited in Onuegbu (2019), location or area of study refers to the geographical location covered by the study which is usually stated in terms of the country, state education, political or administrative zone, local government area etc. We therefore made use of Bayelsa State as suitable location for this study.

Discussion of Findings

The state of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State

In an attempt to provide answers to this question as it is sampled, a whole lot of persons (our respondents) believed that infrastructural development in the area of study has improved significantly when compared to what it was prior to State creation in 1996. This argument is

predicated on certain infrastructural artifacts that dots around the State capital. For example, the government house, the Samson Siasia Sports complex, dualization of Okilo road formally called Mbiama-Yenagoa road, modern living houses for individuals, the State secretariat complex etc. In the area of road construction, educational and health Nein (2015) tends to support the advanced position as he notes that, Bayelsa State government is opening up the rural communities through the construction of the three senatorial roads. He further argued that before 1996, when the state was created, there was no single higher institution of learning, while at present, three state owned universities exist. Nein, was quick to point towards the provision of health care as the Bayelsa State government have not built hospitals such as Diete-Koki Memorial Hospital, the Niger Delta University Teaching Hospital at Okolobiri and many others alone but has designed a health insurance scheme that covers both civil servants and other strata of persons living within the state.

Inspite of the claims put above, there are discordant tunes concerning the state of infrastructure in Bayelsa State. Data gotten from one of our personal interviews shows that, the people of the state are still in lack of basic infrastructure. The above corroborates the findings of Christine (2020) who noted that despite Bayelsa State being one of the largest oil producing states with the smallest number of local government areas in the country, she still lacks adequate socio-economic infrastructures like good roads, drinkable water, power supply and a mass of unemployed youths. The schools in Bayelsa State according to Christine (2020) are poorly staffed with poor learning conditions.

The major challenges to infrastructural development in Bayelsa State

Summarily, it could be said that lack of continuity in government policies, political and bureaucratic corruption, difficult terrain for development, poor budgetary template and poor or low level of internal revenue generation are the major challenges to infrastructural development in Bayelsa State. Contributing to the debate Okegbu (2016) holds the view that oil industries have contributed to the environmental challenges of the Niger-Delta region hence the issue of air, water, and land pollution. Ohamadike (2014) emphasized on the challenge of neglect of projects of previous government by new administration. For him the problem of policy change and lack of continuity has always led to high number of abandoned projects in the country. Corroborating this view most of our respondents were quick to point at the five-star hotels that have suffered abandonment in the city centre of Yenagoa. Similarly, Idoniboye-Obu and Tambou (2020, pp.10-12) reported that out of 12 projects inherited by the Sylva administration, six were totally abandoned and only two were completed by successive administrations.

A significant population of our respondents in this research blamed the problem of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State on corruption. They say corruption has held back the state from developing fast as in the thinking of its founding fathers. A good number of respondents in this school of thought are people who have not held political office / power or been in the corridors of powers. This point to why Gilbert, Amos, and Rufus, re-emphasized in their study of "corruption and utilization of 13% oil derivation fund in Bayelsa State of Nigeria" that, the political elites of the state have not been able to deploy Bayelsa State's share of the 13% oil derivation funds pragmatically and strategically for meaningful infrastructural and human capital development over the years, a situation which they blame heavily on

corruption. Findings of their study are similar to those of Cliux (2014) who equally noted that officials of the state have been marked with high level corruption. This is evident in the case of Chief D.S.P. Alamieyeseigha and Chief Timipre M. Sylva, both former governors of the State who were arraigned by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for misappropriation of funds belonging to the state. The court ruling of the former is well established and documented hence should not detain us here. The implications of corruption were summarized in the view of Okereke (2018) who stated that corruption at all levels hinders effective implementation of development policies and programmes of government. Evidence from the appropriation laws of Bayelsa State within 2012, 2014, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2022 indicates high level of budgetary allocation for recurrent spending and lesser capital expenditure. Akpanabia (2019) again, holds the view that for any government to achieve its twin object of infrastructure and human capital development, it must invest more on capital projects.

In another instance the Niger Delta topography was quickly cited as one constitutive factor to the problem of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State. This argument our respondent's holds that a typical Niger Delta environment is not supportive of fast infrastructural development. For them, a lot of resources is needed to expend before any meaningful infrastructural development could be achieved. The Bayelsa State topography is characterized with perennial flooding, marshy soil, rivers, swamps, creeks, ocean, lakes, and lagoons. This scenario they claim makes transportation of goods and personnel very expensive, the building of bridges across the numerous creeks and rivers that transverse the state, massive sand filling projects has to be undertaken to elevate the natural soil above the perennial flooding plain. This no doubt is in sync with the few of the Ibaba as cited in Amos (2022), that the cost of development is exceedingly high in the Niger Delta. For instance, the cost of providing infrastructure in this region doubles and, in some cases, triples the cost of infrastructure provision in other parts (North, West and South-East) of Nigeria. Empirically speaking, Ibaba points out that the cost of land reclamation alone can fund a particular project in other parts of the country. He demonstrated this argument by showing that, it could cost above 150 million naira to construct a kilometer of road in the Niger Delta which Bayelsa State is inclusive as against 25 million naira in other parts of the country. This position is to show how difficult and expensive the topography is, in terms of infrastructure development therefore contributing to the problem of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State.

Conclusion/ Recommendations

The study interrogates the problems of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State of Nigeria. The yet to translate into concrete reality, development efforts of the State as shown by global indicators of development was the motivating factor for this research. Summarily, the result of the findings shows that lack of continuity in government policies, political and bureaucratic corruption, difficult topography, poor budgetary template, poor internal revenue generation and oil industries activities are major contributive factors to the problem of infrastructural development in Bayelsa State. Consequently, we will make the following recommendations in other to avert the existing scenario.

- i. To achieve the desired infrastructural development in Bayelsa State, there must be synergy in project execution. As a matter of policy, no new administration should abandon

projects of previous administration. The new officials in government must strive to complete ongoing projects in the State before executing new ones. This idea is predicated on the fact that government is a continuum.

- ii. Corruption either bureaucratic or political must be addressed from a sincerer perspective. There must be no sacred cows. The anti-corruption agencies like Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) alongside the judiciary, must be prompt in prosecuting defaulting public officials who criminally loot public funds for selfish reasons. A time frame of six months to one year should be enough for investigation, prosecution, and possible determination of outcome.
- iii. Public officers who have been convicted of corruption charges should not enjoy pardon either at the State or National government, since conviction alone could not serve as deterrent.
- iv. The topography that hampers infrastructural development in Bayelsa State must be attended to with utmost seriousness. In dealing with the topography, we advocate for the adoption of scientific model which is in conformity with global practices.

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