

OPENING SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE COMMISSIONER FOR BUDGET AND ECONOMIC PLANNING, ON THE OCCASION OF THE NIGERIA GOVERNORS' FORUM ORGANIZED STATES PEER REVIEW MECHANISM AT THE MAIN BOWL OF ALFRED DIETTE SPIFF SPORTS COMPLEX, PORT HARCOURT ON FRIDAY, July 13, 2012

Protocols

It is a great privilege and honour for me on behalf of Government and people of the State to welcome you all to this occasion of the **States Peer Review Mechanism (SPRM)** which is one of the laudable efforts by the Nigeria Governors' Forum (NGF) to support the building of a strong, united and prosperous Nigeria and an important strategy to the development of our subnational economies.

This occasion is part of the series of events that followed from the request of the National Economic Council (NEC) to the NGF in 2007 to develop and implement States Peer Review Mechanism. The primary objective of SPRM as noted yesterday, is to assist states in improving their development performance through periodic reviews of progress and challenges in the implementation of their development policies, plans and programmes. SPRM will also enable states to learn development programmes from each other and make useful comparison for the adoption of best practices.

For us as a responsive and responsible Government, SPRM will expectedly help us have a baseline performance audit of our core service delivery sectors and a better grasp of government's implementation machinery. More so, with a clearly articulated Programme of Action (PoA) with appropriate cost estimates as the review promises, project wastages would be minimized thus more funds would be available to accommodate more developmental projects.

Remarkably, our State, in this current dispensation has made giant strides in power, education, health and road infrastructure, amongst others. However, the journey to sustainable economic development is long and difficult and some of our development challenges are unique. We therefore, need to share knowledge and experiences and think out approaches to resolving our common challenges. That is why this States Peer Review Mechanism is important.

Let me by the privilege of this Opening Remark thank most heartily the Chairman of the Nigeria Governors Forum, our dear Governor, His Excellency, Rt. Hon Rotimi Chibuike Amaechi CoN, the Director-General of NGF, Mr. Okauru and the entire NGF Secretariat for the initiative of the States Peer Review Mechanism and the enormous benefits the exercise brings to bear on the overall economy of our nation.

Permit me to thank once more His Excellency, our Governor for accepting to expose our State to the added advantage of the Review. By this acceptance Government is simply implying that governance in the State will not be business as usual as it is ready to raise the bar of good governance through greater transparency, accountability, participation and communication.

My deep appreciation goes to the Steering Committee of State Peer Review Mechanism, a select team of men and women of integrity and headed by the Former Chief Justice of the Federation, Justice Mohammed Uwais GCON. My Lord, I thank you specifically for accepting the Chairmanship of the committee with the burdensome role of assuring the credibility and integrity of the review exercise. The nation and indeed, the entire world is looking up to your team with high expectation.

Let me also thank our Development Partners, for their financial and technical supports.

Once more, I warmly welcome each and every one of us to Port Harcourt, the Garden City of Nigeria and reassure us that our City is safe and secured. I wish you all a successful event.

Thank you

Peer Reviewing Rivers State

By Bode Aiyenimelo

The Nigeria Governors' Forum Peer Review Team comprising of Consultants, Researchers and Media men led by the forum's director-general, Mr. Asishana Okauru started inspection of projects in Rivers State on Saturday 24th October, 2009 and everywhere the team went, the guides, who were either commissioners or secretary to the state government, kept stressing that the economic vision of Governor Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi stood on a tripod viz.

1. Knowledge – based economy – which simply put means a sound educational system especially with IT component
2. Oil and Gas
3. Agriculture

At the end of the tour, the team was highly impressed by the state government's massive investment in education and the other two sectors listed above. As a matter of fact, it can be rightly asserted that a huge percentage of the state's revenue is being pumped into education, which the governor in an interactive session with the NGF visiting team described as the key to eradicate poverty. Apart from the aforementioned tripod, the state government as a result of its huge allocation from the federation account by virtue of its being an oil producing state has embarked on massive infrastructural development in every sector of the state's economy. Below is a sectoral analysis of its activities starting with the top priority.

EDUCATION

No sooner did Governor Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi accede to power than he moved to actualise his vision for education in Rivers State which is "to provide free and qualitative education to the entire population of Rivers State." This he did by organizing an education summit to collate the views of the stakeholders on the way forward.

The summit took off on the 29th of January, 2008 and came out after exhaustive deliberations with a comprehensive report on how to transform the sector and restore standards. As a result of the gloomy picture painted in the report, the governor declared a state of emergency in the sector and resolved to commit a great proportion of the state government's budget to the realization of the task ahead. This, of course, reflected in the magnificent

structures observed in all the educational institutions inspected – especially primary and secondary in the state.

As at the time of the visit, 350 model primary schools were under construction across the state at a cost of N26 billion. Take Elekahia Model Primary School commissioned by Governor Amaechi on 22nd October, 2009 as an example. It is a replica of all the others with facilities like large auditorium, sick bay, conducive classrooms, computer room, library, sports facilities and demonstration farm. Each of such primary schools which had perimental fencing went for N56m. 750 of them are planned to cover the state effectively. In terms of welfare, each pupil is entitled to one free meal a day, free books as well as free uniforms and sandals. Above all, the teacher to pupils ratio is a maximum of 1 to 25 to 30 per class which should be one of the best if not the best in the country. Stakeholders comprising of community leaders, government officials, school authorities are to ensure maintenance of facilities and standards which is of the essence especially in post-Amaechi era. “Education for all is the responsibility of all” said Education Commissioner, Dame Alice Lawrence Nemi.

Also, because of irregular payment of teachers’ salaries over the years, the state government has taken over the payment of primary school teachers’ wage bill which has hiked the state’s wage bill by about N1.5 billion per month as the former arrangement whereby the bill was being footed irregularly by the local governments was acting as a disincentive to teachers thereby defeating the whole purpose of the state’s investment on education. In the course of inspecting Elekahia Primary School, the team interviewed King (Professor) T.J.T. Princewill, the Amayanabo of Kalabari and King Sir Samuel Oluka, the Ejire of Eleme who expressed their happiness with the educational programme of the state. (The team’s visit coincided with the second anniversary celebration of Governor Chibuike Rotimi’s accession to power and the royal fathers were around at the state capital).

At the secondary level, the state government has embarked on a grand effort to revamp education by planning 1 (one) college with ultra-modern facilities in each of the 23 local government areas of the state. The condition imposed is that each community where such a school is to be sited has to set aside at least 21 hectares of land for the purpose. In addition to the state providing all the facilities as in the primary schools, they are also to be equipped with laboratories, workshops and other facilities. Above all, all students must be boarders with the students and teachers living within the premises of the

school. Each school is supposed to be an integrated community with 2 students per room with toilet and bathroom private to them and teachers to pupil's ratio of not more than 1 to 25. Apart from auditorium for debates and other public engagements as well as sporting facilities, there is perimeter fencing around the schools to check truancy among pupils and students. Rivers is one of the few states in the country with such facilities. According to the governor, this compulsory boarding is with a view to controlling the behaviour of the students.

Another innovation of Rivers government to provide the best education to the state's indigenes is the introduction of competitive examinations to sift out the best brains to be sent abroad every year to read ICT, medicine, engineering etc. Under the scheme, about 300 were sent abroad in 2008. Same number in 2009. There are also plans to reintroduce the old City and Guides curriculum and examinations towards the improvement of the skills of artisans and technicians.

Moves are also on to establish a French village in collaboration with the Alliance Française of Paris. The best students, of course, are to be sent to France. The idea is to encourage more Rivers indigenes to speak French.

There has been a challenge over the years of the influx of examination cheats into Rivers from neighbouring states, but the government has moved against them by appointing examination marshals who descend into examination halls and flush them out. This has stemmed the influx.

At the tertiary level, there are plans to build a new Rivers State University of Science and Technology to house 60,000 students, where the emphasis should be on science and technology.

Although there have been some criticism of the investment of N56m on every primary school as an over-investment as there is need for an industrial base for sustenance, the whole Rivers State educational model is a Best Practice that every state in the country has a thing or to learn from. The standard if maintained in the near future will produce primary and secondary school graduands who will be able to hold their own against their counterparts anywhere in the world.

HEALTH

Health is another sector where the Rivers State government has acquitted itself credibly well. All the health are anchored by the state Ministry of Health which is charged with formulating health policies, plans and programmes as well as implementing them.

Eventually, the vision of the government is provision of quality and standard health facilities as well as efficient, effective and affordable health services to the citizens and make available well qualified and motivated staff at all health facilities.

In order to implement the vision of government, the state held a health summit for all stakeholders in health sector on February 5th and 6th, 2008. The Governor also held meeting with doctors in the state on the way forward while a health insurance conference to determine the best option in its implementation held on 27th and 28th of May, 2008. As a result of these measures, budgetary allocation to the health sector has met the World Health Organisation standard for the first time in the history of the state.

As usual, health facilities are divided into 3 segments viz; primary, secondary and tertiary with excellent referral system from primary to secondary and ultimately to tertiary.

Before the advent of Governor Amaechi's administration, most of the primary healthcare centres in the state were dilapidated, but in view of the importance which he attaches to the health centres as the foundation for healthcare, the state government immediately resolved to embark on the construction of 160 new primary health centres across the state to replace the old ones and rebuild the entire health system. So far, 29 of them have been completed by the major contractor – Brunel Engineering Construction Company – which is handling 105 of them while the others are at various stages of completion.


The Peer Review Team visited among others Mbudukwu Primary Health Centre in Port Harcourt to see the working of a typical PHC where it was found that treatment was cheap and drugs available and cheap. Registration card for pregnant women cost N500 – only, while N2,500 – was demanded after delivery.

It must be noted that the PHCs were constructed not without wrangles between LGs and the state with reference to the constitution which allocated PHC to state with participation by the LGs. The healthcare worker in addition to other tasks compiles data about families – births, deaths, pregnancies etc. In the state government's pursuit of excellence in primary healthcare, it had presented an Executive Bill on the establishment of Primary Healthcare Development Agency to the House of Assembly.

As the commissioner for Health, Dr. Sampson Parker, stressed, during an interactive session with the Peer Review Team, a primary healthcare without referral system is incomplete. That state believes that one of the major reasons for the failure of the Professor Olikoye Ransome-Kuti's Primary Healthcare Model was the non-availability of proper referral system and centres. In order to avoid the same pitfalls, arrangements have commenced to ensure massive renovation and/or complete rebuilding and re-equipping of the state's general hospitals which are secondary health centres. Niger Hospital (now Prof. Kelsey Harrison's Hospital) and the Dental Hospital have been completely rebuilt.

The Braithwaite Memorial Specialist Hospital (BMSH) is undergoing massive renovation with a view to preparing it to be the nucleus of Rivers State Teaching Hospital from which the state's medical school will emerge. The Justice Adolphus Karibi-Whyte Hospital is an ultra-specialist hospital that will take care of the cases now sent abroad for treatment.

Rivers state healthcare system is clearly benchmarkable with some of its innovations. The Primary Healthcare component is considered the bedrock of the health system in Rivers, according to the commissioner, Dr. Sampson Parker and the community healthcare worker the motivating force. Densely-populated centres attract Primary Health Centres. The government tries to make them as accessible as possible, not more than 30 minutes' walking distance for every prospective patient. The idea is that ultimately, every resident of Rivers must have access to free healthcare.

The government is also determined to foster attitudinal change amongst medical staff or health workers for efficient performance of their duties and training and  restraining of staff is planned towards this end. Community participation is also encouraged for safekeeping of drugs and efficient running.

There are of course some challenges. For example, there is the manpower challenge with 8 doctors covering 350 healthcare centres when Governor Amaechi came to power and there was an embargo on employment which he lifted. There was also the power challenge hampering the use of equipment in the PHCs. Another is the inadequate number of ambulances to service emergency cases. Consequently, the decision has been taken meanwhile that no hospital will own ambulance but all PHCs are ambulance bases and at Braithwaite Memorial Hospital, there is a central control tower and by dialing the emergency number 112, an ambulance will be made available for any emergency.

There are also manpower training programmes in the health sector to groom doctors to produce 60 consultants in 6 years, 150 nurses per annum as well as midwives, radiologists, and other ancillary staff.

It is believed that the AIDS prevalence rate of Rivers State is about 7.4 percent and as such, the state government gives free treatment to AIDS patients. Towards combating it effectively, an auto disabled syringe factory which will also manufacture intravenous fluids has been completed and commissioned with technical partnership from Pan African Health Foundation. The factory will be expanded in the next few years to serve the total syringe needs of the country and the West African sub-region. Current capacity is 160 million.

Malaria, as it is well known, is a scourge of the tropics. Thus the state has embarked on roll back malaria programme by means of drugs and preventive measures such as the purchase of one million customized long lasting insecticide treated bed nets which have been distributed in the state.

HOUSING

Like in other parts of Nigeria, there is a dearth of adequate and affordable houses in Rivers State. Under the present administration, the Ministry of Housing was established in 2008 out of the defunct Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development and its mission in line with the state's objectives is to increase the housing stock of the state in line with population growth by ensuring efficient and effective delivery coupled with the provision of adequate and affordable housing for the inhabitants of the state. Towards the attainment of these objectives, the state has embarked on various housing projects under PPP arrangement.

One of them which members of the Peer Review Team visited is the New Rainbow Town, a multibillion naira estate which comprises of several types

of houses to meet the needs of the citizenry. It was ongoing while office complex for school to Land Authority at Rummuodumanya and Iriebe satellite town comprising of 40 units of junior terrace, 100 units of senior terrace have been completed and 9 blocks of 3-bedroom flats out of the Iriebe project were still under construction.

The Ministry of Housing has also moved to regulate building of houses by forbidding erection without approvals by the authorities. The national building code is also to be domesticated and sent to the house for passing. There is in effect a state Building Code.

It should be noted that the New Rainbow Town Housing Estate which is a PPP is expected to cost about N100 billion and the state government is not investing a kobo in it. It is expected to feature 2 iconic towers with lots of accommodation for different purposes. A shanty town was demolished to accommodate this. This is clearly benchmarkable.

ROADS

Apart from water transportation, there is need to provide all-season roads to link the various towns, villages and hamlets in River State. As such, the state government's mission statement is to provide, rehabilitate and maintain roads in the state at minimum cost, high efficiency and maximum speed. So far, over the past two years, some 600 kilometres of roads have been constructed, that is more than all the past governments put together. In the same vein, contracts for 700km of roads, 30 bridges, 4 flyover bridges and one rural road in every local government area have been awarded.

The most gigantic of the roads is the Andoni project which is a 48km stretch across 12 bridges through swampy terrain to link isolated and hitherto inaccessible communities to the capital, Port Harcourt. Three of the LGs along that route have never seen any vehicles around the place. The total contract sum is N30b. So far, 6km of the road has been completed and N11b paid to the contractors.

Another major road under construction with drains and walkways on both sides over one bridge is the Eastern-By-Pass-Amadiama-Abuloma-Oginigba road, a 6.82km stretch going for N2.8bn. Minimum of N100bn invested yearly on roads/bridges/infrastructure since the advent of Governor Amaechi's administration and 16 roads duly completed.

CHALLENGES

Although there have been challenges from those who claim that some of the projects pass through their ancestral land and won't allow it. According to Governor Amaechi, there was such a scenario on a road along the airport and the people were picked up and detained for two weeks and they begged for leniency. Nothing, he said, should slow down government projects and non-enforcement of laws is the problem as most Nigerian lawbreakers are cowards.

Great Port Harcourt City

Rivers State government's vision is to transform the Great Port Harcourt area into a world-class city, internationally recognised for excellence and the preferred destination for investors and tourists. Pursuant to this, its mission is to build a well-planned city, through the implementation and enforcement of policies that will ensure the provision of first-rate infrastructure and delivery of quality services to enhance the standard of living and well-being of the people.

The aforementioned vision it seeks to realize through the establishment of the Great Port Harcourt City Development Authority (GPHCDA) which derives its mandate from "the Great Port Harcourt City Development Authority Law No. 2 of 2009." The new city is to cover an area of approximately 1,900 square kilometres (40,000 hectares of land) which spans eight local government areas with a projected population of two million people. Members of the Peer Review Team attended the traditional groundbreaking ceremony on Saturday 24th of October, 2009.

The budgetary implication for 2009 is N50bn and N100bn annually over several years. Of course, not all the money will be spent by the state government. Funding will be provided partly by Rivers State government and also by Public Private Partnership initiatives. Compensation will be paid to land owners after government verification of claim and ascertainment of ownership, and design completed by South African Firm ARCUS GIBB, the engineering consultant.

The heavy construction work that the new city will entail is expected to provide jobs for hundreds of thousands of citizens and the state government is desirous of partnering with the private sector in providing infrastructures in the following sectors: power generation and transmission; solid waste

management; water supply and reticulation; housing projects; commercial/office complexes; industries; golf courses, club house development and urban transport system. Construction work likely to last 50 years plus.

Although there has been talk of the greater Port Harcourt City project engendering rural-urban drift, it has led to some Best Practices. For example, the Rivers State government has taken some initiatives to promote PPP in the state like enacting the Public Procurement Law No. 4 of 2008 to establish a Bureau of Public Procurement as the regulatory agency responsible for monitoring and overseeing procurements; drafting an Executive Bill on Public Private Partnerships to be forwarded to the House of Assembly for policy and regulatory framework for PPP and seeking partnerships and collaborative engagement with international institutions such as the World Bank, International Finance Corporation and a local body such as the Urban Development Bank of Nigeria to ensure diligence, good coordination and planning of infrastructure and projects.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture, it must be remembered, is one of the tripods on which Governor Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi's economic vision stands. Right from the inception of the administration, the state through the Ministry of Agriculture has saddled itself with the responsibility of promoting farmer friendly agricultural policies with a view to achieving food security, eradicating poverty, developing the rural economy and protecting the environment. This it does by embarking on some measures, which include the creation of conducive macro-economic climate that stimulates greater private sector investment in agricultural and rural development, increasing budgetary allocation, improving incentives to agriculture and promoting increased application of modern technology to agricultural production.

During the first two years of the administration, the government embarked on massive production by ensuring that 60% of farmers in the 23 local government areas obtain grants/loans/farm inputs for massive food production. It also endeavoured to support 30% small holders (farmers) in the state develop oil palm estates. Risonpalm, the biggest oil palm plantation in Nigeria was comatose at the inception of the administration but efforts are on to reactivate it with the help of investors from South Africa and Europe.

Hopefully, it will generate foreign exchange for the state in the future. Jathropha, for biofuel, will do well in Rivers State and the state government is wooing investors and a US firm has asked for 10,000 hectares to cultivate it. The government is also trying to grow more cassava and establish more oil plantations and encourage private firms to establish factories to process them and save the farmers from arduous manual labour. Rivers is also interested in cultivation of rice, in which it has comparative advantage especially the swamp variety, on a large scale.

Because virtually the whole state is a riverine area, it is determined to develop fish farms in order to attain 25% in fish production. It is also developing a fish hatchery centre for fish seed multiplication. The idea is to increase fish fingerling production at 1 million per year for distribution. While the government is trying its best, there are challenges in trying to create value chain in agriculture, apart from the problems of militancy and finance.

TRANSPORT

Shortly after assumption of power, Governor Rotimi Amaechi took a look at transport situation in the state and saw that it was chaotic with decayed infrastructure. In January 2008, he convened the 1st River State Transport Summit in recognition of the unique role public transportation plays in the socio-economic life of the people. The vision of the governor was to put in motion a holistic transport sector reform, with global best practices that would produce and sustain a fast and more efficient transportation system that would be capable of supporting and stimulating the economy of the state. The Rivers Ministry of Transport was saddled with the responsibility of midwifing the reform.

In order to facilitate the movement of a large number of people from one location to the other in record time by road, the state government adopted the Public Private Partnership model and went into joint venture with Skye Bank Plc. Consequently, the Skye Bank has flooded Port Harcourt with buses and the partnership in addition introduced 200 taxis into the sector to ease transportation. It is noteworthy and benchmarkable that the government has not invested in it. All it has done is to provide infrastructure like bus shelters of which about 60 have been completed. It has also banned the operation of okada, that is motorcycle transport business which will help the business. This it did by amending the Commercial Motorcycle Operators Law No. 5 of 2001.

Also, all rickety cars will have to go. The government is also setting up 4 mega parks in Port Harcourt. All of these transport initiatives are effected under the legal framework of the Traffic Management Authority Bill passed by the House of Assembly in October 2009 and promptly signed into law by the governor.

Marine transportation is critical to River State given its numerous waterways. It has therefore acquired 5 water vessels and deployed them to the riverine communities. The Ministry Transport is planning to send 10 skippers and 10 engineers to Portugal for training on the operations and maintenance of the water taxis.

There are of course challenges especially disobedience of traffic rules and regulations by all-comers. Apart from laws passed to combat these ills, the government plans to establish a Drivers' Training Institution to train drivers. The Rivers State Transport sector model is benchmarkable.

ENVIRONMENT

The Rivers State government through its Ministry of Environment has set its mission and vision as follows:

- To establish acceptable environmental standards, policies and programmes that will enhance and promote a green economy in a healthy and sustainable state.”
- To cause a systematic environmental remediation through ~~transport~~ pursuit of sectoral green policies, public engagement and equitable enforcement of environmental legislation.”

Towards the achievement of these objectives, the state has embarked on a number of measures after discussions with the citizens environmental challenges and how to tackle them. One of the most apparent measures is the Rivgreen initiative – a “Return to Eden Project” – which involves the greening of roadsides and roundabouts under a PPP arrangement. The idea is to return Port Harcourt to the old Garden City Status. Several houses along many roads are being brought and knocked down to make way for the planting of the greens. Hopefully, according to the Peer Review Team guide, the government is reviewing environmental legislations in the state and planning to introduce Rivgreen Marshals i.e Ecology Police with statutory backing.

The government is also encouraging the commencement of recycling systems at all achievable levels because the old practice of disposal of waste at dump sites exposes the entire aquifer in the state to grave danger. Two(2) waste-to-wealth compost plants have been paid for fabricated, imported and warehoused at a cost of N1,452,800,710.30 to convert biodegradable waste to organic manure. A scrap-to-wealth facility is also being constructed at a cost of N1,680,978,794.50 and there is scrap removal project to remove all metal scraps and abandoned vehicles and send them to the recycling yard at Kira in Tai Local Government Area.

There is also an integrated waste management scheme which includes house-to-house collection of refuse, litter control, gardening, sewage dislodgement, tree tending, fumigation and a plan to reintroduce house-to-house sanitary inspection. By the time these measures begin to bear fruits and Port Harcourt returns to its old status of the garden city, its tourism potentials are bound to be boosted.

POWER

The government of Rivers State through the agency of its Ministry of Power has as its vision to have a Rivers State where supply of electricity power is available, reliable and affordable in every nook and cranny of the state. Its mission is to ensure that Rivers State meets its energy needs through a sustainable framework that will support the state's economic growth and provide its citizens with services that meet their expectations as a fast-growing economy thus creating an enabling environment for rapid industrial and economic regeneration through quality and uninterrupted electricity supply.

Towards the attainment of these objectives, the government has intensified work on three gas-fired power stations viz. Eleme Gas Turbine, Trans-Amadi Gas Turbine project and Omoku Gas Turbine station, each of them with a capacity of not less than 100mw. The idea is to create several sources of power for the state. For Rivers State, the emphasis is on gas and not on wind, solar etc because there it has comparative advantage with several cubic feet of gas being flared in the state daily. Secondly, it is a clean source of power and environmentally-friendly. Apart from these major projects, the government supplies some rural areas with generating sets for power supply. The state's target is to generate at least 500mw of electricity by 2010 which will more than meet the state's need while the excess will be sold to neighbouring states such as Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Bayelsa and Delta.

However, the commissioner for Power, in his presentation to members of the Peer Review Team spoke of the challenges facing the state's power projects. He frowned at the FG's holding on to distribution because it was "detrimental." He wants the FG's power monopoly unbundled and seeded out. According to him, a lot of bureaucracy attends PHCN's distribution. Struggle for transformers takes a long time. Rivers has spent a fortune to strengthen the distribution network.

He also announced that approval had been given for the acquisition of several transformers to meet demand; submarine cables planned for inaccessible riverine communities while contracts have been awarded for street lights to lessen the darkness in Port Harcourt, the state capital. Above all, he assured that like roads, all communities would be linked soonest to the grid either through gas turbines or standby generating sets.

Obviously, the Rivers IPP projects are benchmarkable and should be studied by other states especially the gas producing ones.

ENERGY

The mission of the state government through its Energy Ministry is to facilitate the intense and active participation of Rivers people in hydrocarbon activities not just in the state but in the country as a whole. The state's vision is a state whose indigenes receive empowerment from resources available from oil and gas sector. In order to achieve these objectives, the state has entered into agreements with local investors to partner and collaborate with government in some projects.

1. A 200,000bdp modular refinery to be sited in Ndoni Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government areas at a cost of N3.8bn. Authority to construct (ATC) already obtained and on commencement of work, should be delivered in 9 months.
2. A 35,000mt storage/terminal facility at a cost of N1.242bn to be sited at Abuloma Jetty.
3. The expansion and rehabilitation of the natural gas supply lines from Trans-Amadi to other parts of the state.

It is expected that when these projects are completed they will apart from boosting government revenue, provide employment for residents of the state.

It must not be forgotten however that oil and gas are under the exclusive list and so there is need to look at federal laws and ensure that they are not infringed.

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

Rivers' vision is one of a state that is one of the dominant industrial competitive economies in Nigeria, based on her natural endowments with industries co-located using industrial ecology concepts and operating zero tolerance to industrial pollution. Its mission is to diversify the economy of Rivers State from dependency on oil and gas taking advantage of the natural resources endowment of the state and using strategies that will give the state industrial competitiveness.

The vision and mission of the state is based on its awareness of the importance of industrialisation while also recognising the fact that governments are not good at running business. So the state is thinking of providing infrastructures like security, power etc and leaving it to the private sector. It only facilitates while also looking at the multiplicity of taxes that discourage industrialisation and streamlining them.

Rivers attaches a lot of importance to PPP arrangements for major projects which is clearly benchmarkable. An example of a PPP arrangement that is working is the Silver Bird Gallery which fetches revenue of about N30m per month.

JUSTICE

Because of the titanic struggle that Governor Rotimi Amaechi put up to get justice and become governor of Rivers State, he does everything to ensure that his government complies with the rule of law. The state's Ministry of Justice has 13 departments of which 8 are legal.

The state goes all out to respect human rights to the extent of paying defendants' lawyers where they can't afford it and where it is discovered that there is no need for prosecution, none. The government through the ministry deals with issues arising from PPP and tries to ensure that civil cases don't linger more than necessary. There are conscious efforts to decongest prisons while compliance with court judgments is a must. Some with settlement of judgment debts.

While in 2007, more than 4 laws were presented to the House of Assembly, 8 bills were passed into law in 2008 including public procurement law. Fiscal Responsibility Bill also passed and assented to by the governor.

SPECIAL DUTIES

The Rivers State government in its bid to address emergencies and provide succour to the victims created a Ministry of Special Duties whose mission is to provide leadership in the development of risk reduction measures and disaster management in the state.

Its policy objectives are: To bring about relief to distressed people and situation; to extend fire service facilities to the grassroot and to have safer, sustainable and resilient society. Towards the achievement of these objectives, the ministry has sent some bills to the House of Assembly. They are the Emergency/ Disaster Management Bill; Safety/Security Bills and Rivers State Fire Code.

In addition, it has purchased 4 fire engines to combat fire 24 hours a day. The government also tries to sensitise the populace in order to ensure safety of lives and property.

INFORMATION

The state Ministry of Information is charged with actualising the information policies of the government. Its vision is an informed and educated citizenry that are responsibly involved in their governance and total well-being. Its mission is to inform, educate and mobilize the citizenry on the policies and programmes of the government in order to elicit their active participation in governance and attain self-actualisation.

The commissioner for information wants her ministry to be a one-stop shop where MDAs can send all their information to the media but she questions the culture of secrecy that pervades some government departments. She also spoke of the cutthroat competition in the media and wonders how government media can compete with private.