

**Socio-Economic and Political Policies, and the Challenges of Governance
under Governor Theodore A. Orji of Abia State, Nigeria, 2007-2015**

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Abstract

By 2007, the people of Abia State Nigeria heralded a new government with anxiety and positivity that normally accompanies the emergence of new administration. The new executive governor of the state, Theodore Orji initiated that would enable the administration fulfill its mandates. Nonetheless, myriad of challenges surfaced and even threatened to make the governor a very unpopular figure in the politics of Abia State. Many people, both within and outside the state who may have developed some contempt for the former governor, may be following a bandwagon effect. However, it is only proper that the efforts (or lack of it) of the administration are put into proper perspective to avoid spuriousness. In the light of the foregoing, this paper adopts the eclectic research method and interpretative style of analysis to discuss aspects of governmental policies of Theodore Orji's administration within the two terms it piloted the statecraft of Abia State. The paper goes ahead to examine the factors that constituted challenges to the administration within the period. Findings are made on some aspects of Governor T. A. Orji's policies. His economic policies of public-private partnership, agricultural plan for 10years, and market development among others were rather conceived of sound economic principles. However, the implementation met a number of bottlenecks. Such was also the case of numerous political and social policies initiated by the administration. In the final analysis, Governor Orji's policies may have been well-crafted but implementation of the policies were basically hindered by numerous factors among which was the phenomenon of *godfatherism*, a trend which has impeded development in Nigeria since the inception of the Fourth Republic.

Introduction

How far has democratic governance and the attendant ideals of participatory politics bettered the life of the Nigerian on the streets? How has the Fourth Republic Nigeria answered the question of nation-building predicated on the institutions of federal system of government? How much promise of people-oriented governance, which could have easily been made possible by various state governments of Nigeria, has been fulfilled? Generally, Nigerians heralded the 1999 transition to democratic rule with optimal optimism.ⁱ Unfortunately, same may not be said of 2007, when most of the leaders that came to power at different levels of governance handed over the leadership baton. There were enormous expectations from the politicians that opened up what was expected to be sustainable democratic dispensation to Nigerians in 1999. It was expected that they basically did things differently from the military, who had established a chain of political dominance in the country for the past sixteen years. The expectations of the people are mirrored by A.C. Agajelu and C.B Ejidike in the following words:

The return to democratic government in Nigeria in 1999 precipitated a need for change management among politicians and the teams charged with governance at all levels in the country. This is because it was expected that there would be a marked difference between the previous military dictatorships characterised by acts of impunity, and a supposedly responsible civilian government, hence the popular Nigerian cliché “from *khaki* to *agbada*.”ⁱⁱ

The 2007 elections in Nigeria may have awoken the people to the reality that they should not expect considerable changes from the Fourth Republic politicians. The elections were roundly criticized both within the country and in the international community.ⁱⁱⁱ The irregularities and criticisms that trailed the 2007 general elections in Nigeria notwithstanding, the federal and state governments that were newly elected went ahead to execute their mandates of providing democratic governance to the people through governmental policies. Theodore Orji was elected into the office of the executive governor of Abia State, Nigeria in the 2007 elections under the flagship of the Peoples Democratic Party. He went ahead to formulate policies which he envisaged would serve the purpose of governance in the state at the time. Nonetheless, the administration faced daunting challenges which went far to threaten the credibility of the administration and the popularity of the governor. This paper analyses the public policy thrust of the administration and the challenges the government had to face in its efforts to fulfill its mandate. The paper is organized in sections and subsections. The first section is an explication of public policy thrust of the administration of Governor Theodore Orji. The first subsection of the section discusses the economic policies of Abia State during the two terms of Governor Orji; the second subsection dwells on the social policies during the same period; while the third subsection analyzes the political

policies. The second section of the paper examines the challenges faced by the administration in its attempts to fulfill its mandates.

Economic Policies of Abia State, 2007–2015

According to Agajelu:

Each government that assumes power in a democratic state culturally lays bare the economic blueprint of the administration which is generally geared towards economic growth and development through introduction of new policies and programmes, or strengthening the existing ones. The government would barely hope to succeed if there are no workable laid down plans to ensure adequate implementation of the proposed policies.^{iv}

Abia State under Governor Theodore Orji between 2007 and 2015 made a number of economic policies which focused on the agricultural sector, investment in new trading shops, and the relocation of old Umuahia market to a more suitable and spacious market at Ubani, among others. At the inception of Governor Theodore Orji’s administration in 2007, he stated that government had no business being in business. The reason was based on the *laissez-faire* attitude prevalent in government establishments which had adversely affected the growth of government enterprises. As a result, Governor Theodore Orji introduced the option of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) as a blueprint for direct investment in Abia State. This opened the floodgate for scores of private organizations to develop zeal in partnering with the Abia State government in developing the State. These efforts directly and indirectly contributed to the increase in the Internal Generated Revenue (IGR) of Abia State between 2007 and 2015.

Table 3.1: The Abia State Internal Generated Revenue (IGR)2007-2015

2	0	0	7	5,600,000,000
2	0	0	8	3,344,023,900
2	0	0	9	6,762,993,750
2	0	1	0	9,388,729,200
2	0	1	1	10,491,120,400
2	0	1	2	10,885,966,258
2	0	1	3	12,512,103,712
2	0	1	4	22,581,755,224
2	0	1	5	25,459,433,342

Source: Approved Estimates of Abia State of Nigeria (Official Document)

In 2008, the Abia State government came up with a ten year agricultural plan for the State covering between 2008 and 2018. The State government within

this period mapped out agricultural areas of comparative advantage for cassava, rice, vegetable, yam farming and oil palm. This move helped in securing the Federal Government and development partner's collaborative work with the State. Through massive investment and the introduction of Public-Private Partnership model in agriculture, the Abia State government under Theodore Orji made effort to tap the huge potential in the sector for the development of the State. With prompt payment of counterpart fund for the following programme that have foreign donors components; International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Community Based Natural Resources Management Project and FADAMA III, it was easy for the Abia State government to increase the capacity building of 25,262 number of farmers (14,490 males and 10,772 females) on crop, live stocks, fish production practices and technologies as well as processing, marketing and income generation activities.^v Also 181 youths were trained and provided with starter packs of relevant materials such as vulcanizing machine, drilling machines, hair dressing equipment, generating sets, sewing machine and freezers.^{vi}

In the area of Cocoa production, Abia State government under Governor Theodore Orji provided one million improved Cocoa seedlings free to Cocoa farmers. The State government also established fifteen (15) field schools for farmers in collaboration with the Sustainable Tree Crop Programme (STCP) of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), in Cocoa producing community in the State. Thus, three hundred and thirty seven (337) Cocoa farmers were trained in modern techniques of Cocoa production in Abia State.^{vii} Chief David Onyenweaku was a beneficiary of this effort as he was named number one cocoa farmer in Nigeria during the National Cocoa Event hosted by the Abia State government in 2009. In addition, the Abia State government procured sufficient Cocoa chemicals for Abia State farmers.^{viii} Also, in an effort to revitalize the agro-based companies in Abia State, the State government privatized Abia Rubber Company Limited, Abia Palm Nigeria Limited, Nkporo Oil Palm estate and Cocoa Estate. Agricultural loans totaling one billion naira were granted to farmers in Abia State between 2007 and 2015.^{ix} The Abia State government also raised two hundred thousand 200,000 oil palm seedlings to replace the wild palm grove and collaborated with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD) to raise ninety two thousand (92,000) oil palm seedlings for free distribution to farmers. The Abia State government also entered into agreement with a foreign firm to manage and resuscitate the oil palm plantation in Ukwa, which was renamed Shanid-Abia Oil Palm Limited.^x In addition, Abia State government between 2007 and 2015, keyed into the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) of the Federal Government and inaugurated the State Implementation Committee and other sub-committee of the ATA. The State is now participating in the cassava, cocoa, oil palm, cashew, goat poultry and sheep value chains.^{xi}

Then again, Abia State government in 2013 relocated the old Umuahia market to a new ultra-modern market complex at Ubani, Ibeku which has appreciable number of shop. The State government's decision to relocate the market to a spacious site at Ubani neighborhood was in order to save residents of Umuahia from the nightmare of having to cluster daily at Isi-gate.^{xiii} Although the new market was located at Umuahia, yet the Unionist in the market opposed its relocation.^{xiii} The State government also partnered with Shoprite to construct new Abia Shopping Mall at Umuahia. Aba shopping Mall was also constructed at Osisioma to decongest the Ariaria International Market now overcrowded and with overstressed facilities. The State government also relocated what was the Old Timber Market from Afara to a modern expansive New Timber and Allied Market built along Umudike road. Also relocated were all the mechanic workshops in the State capital to Ohiya Mechanic Village. The State government also moved all the bus motor parks in the hub of the State capital to the new bus terminal at Ohiya which was constructed by Abia State government.^{xiv} With the emergence of Aba shopping Mall and other privately sponsored markets, commercial activities became organized and an effective tax system was adopted which ensured that regular and equitable taxes were paid by Abia citizens and residents to support the State government. Consequently, the Abia State government's Internal Generated Revenue was significantly increased in 2014.^{xv}

Social Policies of Abia State, 2007-2015

The social policies of the Abia State government under Theodore Orji were basically on sports and the return of Abia State to God-worship. The State government's policy on sports under Theodore Orji sought to identify, train and motivate Abia citizens and residents on living healthy lives through sports and engaging in competitive professional sports activities. The Abia State government in 2012 started and completed work on international standard two sports halls at the Umuahia Township stadium. The stadium underwent reconstruction and re-grassing in 2012 and 2013. The State government also carried out a general facelift of the Enyimba stadium at Aba and the re-fixing of the seventeen thousand (17,000) seats as well as the sinking of new boreholes in the stadium. In 2012, a world class wrestling and boxing ring was acquired.^{xvi}

Another social policy of Abia State under Theodore Orji was the effort to establish in the state what many stake-holders in the administration referred to as "God-worship". Some believe that Theodore Orji inherited a tradition whereby governance was influenced by "Idol worship" and irreligious activities. In fact, Theodore Orji in his first tenure as Abia State Governor was alleged to have sworn an oath of allegiance at Ogwugwu shrine in Okija at the instance of his political godfather.^{xvii} This shows the extent to which certain behaviours and activities have adversely affected the faith of Abia citizens and

residents. In the early part of Theodore Orji's first tenure, he publicly declared his government's rejection of anything fetish. He condemned idol worship and the tradition of public office holders being compelled to swear to idols to be loyal.^{xviii} Consequently, Theodore Orji appointed his officials without any strings attached, without any pre-conditions and without any reference to gods of any type.^{xix} Even though religious prayers may hardly be regarded as tangible government policy, the administration of T. A. Orji is credited with the intensification and consolidation of the Monday Morning Prayers at the Unity Chapel of Government House. He used that medium to invite preachers/men of God from various denominations to preach the Gospel and re-direct Abia citizens and residents at top leadership positions to God. Theodore Orji's wife also mounted and sustained a regular Wednesday morning prayer and fasting session. She used the medium to teach Abia women the principles and practice of right spiritual living.^{xx} Through these approaches by both the Governor and his wife, the leadership of the State became re-orientated while the rest of the State was positively influenced. This formed a basis for the social policy of Abia State between 2007 and 2015.

The Political Blueprint of Abia State, 2007-2015

Abia State's political system originated from the Abia State Charter of Equity which was formulated on August 2, 1981 by the founding fathers of Abia State and was signed by dozens of Abia Leaders of Thought, which included the leaders of Abia State Movement, Ndi Eze, Chiefs, Elders, and representatives of the people of Aba and Umuahia Senatorial Zones, and Isuikwuato District. This Charter contained the blueprint for the creation of Abia State and the structural background and political system for the proposed new State.

Among the basic principles of this Charter and its basis of administration are the rotation principle and the principle of strict equality in the distribution of key political posts. This principle also stated several combination of public offices that should not be held at one and the same time by persons of the same Senatorial Zone/District, among which are: Governor and Deputy Governor, Governor and Speaker of House of Assembly, Governor and Secretary to the Government, Chairman Civil Service Commission and Head of Service, Chief Judge and the Attorney-General, Chairman Local Government Service Commission and Chairman Electoral Commission, Head of Service and Secretary to the Government. The Abia State Charter of Equity also stated that a very special note and consideration of the principle of rotation should be taken by registered political parties within the State in the nomination of their candidates for the elective public offices and combination of the key political posts.^{xxi}

According to Mkpa Agu Mkpa, Theodore Orji implemented the Abia State Charter of Equity during his administration to ensure stability, peace and

security. Mkpá Agu Mkpá stated that Orji Uzor Kalu who led Abia State as Governor for eight years came from Abia North and he handed over to Theodore Orji from Abia Central. He went further to state that regardless of the fear by many Abia citizens and residents for Theodore Orji not to choose a successor from Ukwa-Ngwa extraction because Ngwa people are perceived as vicious and aggressive, yet he adhered to the Abia State Charter of Equity's principle of rotation by handing over to Okezie Ikpeazu, an Ngwa man from Abia South.^{xxii} Abia State under Governor Theodore Orji was bedeviled with kidnapping and he feared that if he did not hand over to someone from Ukwa-Ngwa, Abia South, the State would be ungovernable, and it would be a breach of the provisions of the Abia State Charter of Equity which the Abia State founding fathers crafted to ensure peace and stability in Abia State.

Over the years, the Abia State Charter of Equity has been criticized and labeled undemocratic. According to Chijioke Okpara, the Charter of Equity sometimes enthrones mediocrity. He went further to state that excellent rulers might come from the north and the Charter might deny them the opportunity due to the principle of rotation. According to him, when you have two evils, wisdom advises that you choose a lesser evil. A lesser evil is that there would be peace by choosing someone who may not be wonderful but if that person is intelligent enough, he can take wise men from the south and appoint them as commissioners to assist him in running the government.^{xxiii}

Basically, the political system in Abia State between 2007 and 2015 was a rotatory political administration which was strongly and legitimately backed by the Abia State Charter of Equity, crafted in 1981 by the founding fathers of Abia State. This system ensures that the top and sensitive political appointments and offices are not held at a time by people from a particular zone while also, ensuring that some of those positions rotate to other zones after a period of time. It is widely believed that this very principle has brought peace and security to Abia State. In the period under review, between 2007 and 2015, the principle of rotation enshrined in the Abia State Charter of Equity to an extent could be said to be responsible for the peace that existed in Abia State. In the words of Nkwachukwu Agomuo, "the Abia State Charter of Equity which was implemented by Governor Theodore Orji during his administration brought about peace, security and tranquility to Abia State".^{xxiv}

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE T. A. ORJI ADMINISTRATION, 2007-2015

Security Challenges

Security of lives and properties has always been a primary role of governments around the globe. Nevertheless, it remains a very challenging role to play and most time it appears impossible to safeguard the lives and properties of all

citizens. In 2005, a commercial bank situated along Bank road at Umuahia was robbed and millions of naira was carted away.^{xxv} The irony of it was that the bank was a stone throw to Abia State Government House where the office of the Governor, who is also the Chief Security Officer of Abia State was located. It therefore, means that if a bank opposite the government house was successfully robbed in the broad day light, then even the government house and the rest of the properties of Abia citizens and residents were not safe.

In a speech to commemorate the 100 Days of his “New” administration, which coincided with the 20th anniversary celebrations of Abia State in 2007, Theodore Orji outlined his priority vision as follows:

We have embarked on the creation of more secured and sustainable environment for the economic growth, investment, and promotion of the ingenious entrepreneurship of our people, and where the protection of ours citizens’ lives and property is dominant. We have created synergy with the Military Barrack in ohafia and the Naval Base in Owerrinta to provide logistic support to enable these forces to back the preservation of security and combat crime in our State. This is because we believe that development can only thrive in the atmosphere of peace and tranquility.^{xxvi}

This puts in bold relief the centrality of security as the key governance challenge of the Abia State government. For several months in 2009 and 2010, armed bandits literary turned Abia State into a Hobbesian state of nature where life was short, nasty and brutish. Aba, the once bustling commercial capital of the State that attracted merchants and buyers from across West Africa became a ghost of itself as its new image as den of kidnappers and robbers repelled visitors and forced its rich residents to relocate to safer places.^{xxvii} This deplorable situation in Abia State went largely unnoticed by most Nigerians apart from the residents of the Abia State and other neighbouring South-South and South-East States who occasionally visited or travelled through Abia State. For many years the nation’s attention had largely concentrated on the core States of the Niger Delta where insurgents had virtually crippled Nigeria’s oil industry, which guaranteed the fiscal integrity of the Nigerian federation. The successful take-off of the presidential amnesty programme for Niger Delta militants in October 2009 was expected to give the nation a breather from shocks, losses and pains associated with countless numbers of hostage-taking and attacks on oil infrastructure. During this period, the Nigerian government apparently appeared reluctant to be drawn into fighting criminals in Abia State and some neighbouring South-East States as it reckoned the security threat could be easily handled by the local police.^{xxviii}

Nevertheless, the Federal Government was forced to intervene when it became clear to all Nigerians that the matter was beyond the capacity of the police. The

insecurity in Abia State escalated to a point where it became a national security concern deserving the attention of the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces when it was reported that kidnappers had taken hostage a bus load of school children, and a contingent of Nigerian journalists travelling back to their base after attending a National Executive Council Meeting of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) at Uyo.^{xxxix} The abduction of the school children expectedly generated a lot of condemnation by United Nations Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), other international bodies and concerned Nigerians.^{xxx} Sampson and Amodu reported that the representative of UNICEF in Nigeria, Dr. Suomi Sakai strongly condemned it; "under no circumstance would children be the target of violence...kidnapping children for financial gain is simply heinous".^{xxxii} Also the editorial comment of the Daily Sun of October 4, 2010 stated that:

The kidnap of primary school students is not only pathetic but also shameful and deplorable, it shows that the Nigerian society has degenerated and descended so low that pupils can be seized without any compunction. That school children are kidnapped shows the bleak security situation in a 21st century Nigeria. The act is highly reprehensible and presents a heinous crime against humanity, childhood and innocence. It is indeed a crime against children who are the future hope of the nation. Those that indulge in this inhuman act are indirectly mortgaging the future of this country.^{xxxii}

Also in its Editorial of Friday, October 1, 2010, The Nation lamented thus:

It is so rampant that banks close down for days in order to avoid being helpless targets for rampaging robbers. Markets and fast-food outlets are deserted because the patrons know that they could easily be seized by kidnappers if they appear in such places in the wake of these kidnapping, private schools are being shot down as well. Investment and commercial activities have plummeted as businessmen, professionals and other citizens withdraw from the State's urban areas to safer places.^{xxxiii}

Corporate and financial institutions, especially banks, in order to avert armed robbery attacks, beefed up security around their premises, even to the discomfort of their customers, who were subjected to serious scrutiny before being allowed into the bank halls to access banking services. In some banks, they even moved bulk money by helicopter when bullion vans became the targets of the hoodlums. It was so disturbing that military task force on internal security operating in Abia State took up the additional responsibility of providing additional security to banks transferring money from Abia and neighboring States.^{xxxiv} More worrisome is the fact that those criminals operated with impunity as they comfortably sent threat letters to their would-be victims

to inform them of the date and time they were coming to strike. The Human Rights Justice and Peace Foundation (HRJPF) lamented in a press release on June 9, 2010 that:

As an indication that Abia has degenerated to a failed State in Nigeria, armed robbers and kidnappers now give NOTICE before they strike, as vividly shown by the invasion of First Bank Plc. and Fidelity Bank Plc., both in Port Harcourt Road, Aba on Wednesday, June 2, 2010. Recall that they had written to inform them of their intention to rob them and eventually did, to chagrin of all. And while the people of Enyimba City, as Aba is fondly called, were still writhing in the pains inflicted on them by last Wednesday's robbery attack, which culminated in the closure of banks and other financial institutions in Aba; no fewer than eighteen persons were kidnapped along Aba-Ikot-Ekepen Road, Ogbor Hill, Aba yesterday, June 8, 2010.^{xxxv}

They always kept to their promise whenever they wrote letters to their victims. They always came at the exact time and succeed, leaving the security agents to be hapless. In their brazen fashion they did even write letters to all the markets asking people to contribute certain amount of money for them. Most of the markets did and these monies were given to the hoodlums.^{xxxvi} As a result of this soaring criminality and insecurity in Abia, most residents left and relocated to safer places. In most cases, people who refused pretended to be either mad or were stricken with strange disease.^{xxxvii}

According to Kelechi Darrah, the security challenges during Theodore Orji's administration were as a result of high rate of unemployment and high level of corruption.^{xxxviii} He stated that:

All the major players in the society have left town, houses are padlocked, offices closed, banking activities scaled down, hospitals closed. As we write no single new building is being developed in the entire city. All prominent doctors are gone, all major lawyers are gone, all prominent importers are gone, all prominent industrialists are gone, all major entrepreneurs are gone, and all foreign technical factory experts are gone. No sane person allows any of his or her family members to be posted to Aba anymore. Non-indigenes are leaving in droves.^{xxxix}

Unemployment was a contributing factor to criminality and destitution in the State. He also further stated that high level of corruption led to the decay of moral values thereby creating a hospitable social environment for criminality.^{xl} The culture of materialism where the end of wealth justifies the means of getting wealthy, have led to a situation where people are willing to defraud, maim and

kill in order to become wealthy. This culture has also encouraged crime as society offers rewards and recognitions to people of questionable character and suspicious sources of wealth. The governance underpinnings of the security challenges were further exposed when some of the kidnappers claimed they resorted to the criminal act because officials of Abia State Government had allegedly misappropriated the amnesty funds disbursed for militants from the State. Although this allegation has not been established, the concentration of the kidnap gangs mostly from the oil producing LGAs of the State suggests that grievance of being left out of benefits from the amnesty programme may have been a mobilizing factor.^{xli}

According to Ugochukwu Ogbonna, the security challenges facing Abia State were also negatively impacting on governance regimes.^{xlii} He further stated that the pervasive insecurity in the State in 2010 led to capital flight, and aggravated the unemployment situation.^{xliii} This complex interaction between governance and security in the State is captured in the following statement by Governor Theodore Orji:

Recalling from the recent experiences of my own State of Abia, when factors beyond economic imperatives threatened to completely shut down the economic nerve centers of our State, I fell concerned that our discussion of the Economies of the South-East Region may not have paid enough attention to the adverse role of violence and conflicts, and how these are capable of truncating our economic potentials and dreams, by challenging our future cooperative and collective strategy to survive as a Region. While I am not unmindful of the fact that the deplorable state of our economy and other infrastructural challenges have themselves, in the first place encouraged some level of violence and conflict activities in our Region, I still believe that it is time for us to begin to highlight these as a serious challenges inhibiting our economic potentials.^{xliv}

Then again, the poor capacity of security agencies and poor relations between security agencies and the public were considered security challenges in Abia State. The training and equipment of security agencies, especially the police were considered inadequate. The enormity of this challenge is better appreciated when it is considered that by 2008, there were only 22 police stations and 32 police posts in the State. Moreover, there were 5,385 policemen in the same year.^{xlv} When this figure is juxtaposed with the population of the State, it means that one police officer was responsible for protecting 528 persons. Consequently, the police are overstressed and cannot cope with the challenges of law enforcement. Rural areas are particularly not well protected and manned by the security agencies, with negative implications for law

enforcement. Also, the security agents in Abia State are not on ground in rural and remote areas from where most of those criminal activities usually originate from. Those security agents at the end find it difficult to gather necessary information to tackle the insecurity in the State.^{xlvi}

According to Ukandu Maxwell, a wide range of causative factors are responsible for kidnapping and other violent crimes in Abia State, and they include moral and spiritual bankruptcy, cultism and ‘oda-eshi’ phenomenon, unemployment and poverty, governmental insincerity and development, proliferation of small and medium arms, and a share from the amnesty grant to the Niger-Deltan youths.^{xlvii} Against this backdrop, the insecurity scourge became so bad that there was no other option than to tackle it decisively and bring it to the barest minimum for the good and progressive growth of Abia State. The twin problem of kidnapping and armed robbery was brought under control after Abia State government had mobilized and equipped the Naval School of Logistics Owerrenta, the 14 Brigade Nigerian Army, Ohafia, the Nigerian Police and Director State Security Services to combat the criminals in 2010. Abia State government also secured the intervention of the Federal Government to send 2,000 troops to Abia State to help fight the kidnapers and also, granted amnesty to repentant criminals.^{xlviii} Also, Governor Theodore Orji through an Executive bill to the State House of Assembly introduced a proposed bill seeking to make kidnapping a capital offence. The bill was passed by the State and signed into law, and it took effect in December 2008.^{xlvi} Abia State was the first to introduce that law. Although the level of criminality in Abia State between 2009 and 2010 was the worst of its kind in the history of Abia State but it was not the first time that Abia State had been held hostage by criminals. In the early 2000s, upsurge in incidents of armed robbery virtually crippled commercial activities in Aba until residents took the initiative by creating Bakassi Boys, a vigilante group that neutralized the gangs of robbers. The sour experience of the State with crime has led commentators to argue that Abia fondly known as “God’s Own State” has transformed into the “Devil’s Own State”.¹

Political Challenges

Politics is a game that is not devoid of intricacies, distractions and challenges. To some people, it is a do-or-die affair; while to some others, it is a means to achieve an end. Between 2007 and 2015, Abia State witnessed political uncertainties which dictated the political tempo as well as the socio-economic growth of that State. Among those political issues that had a major effect on the socio-economic development of Abia State were: the election tribunal case against the Governorship of Theodore Orji which reached a fearsome crescendo on Monday, the 25th of February 2008, when the election petitions tribunal sitting in Abia State threw the State into confusion by nullifying the election

that produced Theodore Orji as Abia State Governor, and declared Onyema Ugochukwu the winner of the 2007 governorship election; also the cancerous threat of godfatherism and the overbearing actions of the Progressive People's Alliance (PPA) National Executive which prompted Theodore Orji to decamp to All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) and later to People's Democratic Party (PDP) in a space of one month; also the political clash between Orji Uzor Kalu and President Olusegun Obasanjo which made the latter not to include Abia in the list of other 35 States of Nigeria whose foreign debts were written off, and as a result Abia State was forced to be servicing a 28 million dollars debt incurred by the old Imo State.

The April 19, 2007 gubernatorial election in Abia State was strongly contested by Theodore Orji's PPA and PDP's Onyema Ugochukwu in which Orji won. Subsequently, Onyema Ugochukwu filed a petition against Theodore Orji at the Election Petitions Tribunal stating that the election was marred by a number of irregularities, and that Theodore Orji and his deputy, Chris Akomas did not resign their appointments before contesting the election. Onyema Ugochukwu's petition also stated that Theodore Orji was a member of Ogwugwu Akpu Shrine otherwise known as Okija Shrine, and as such, he was unfit to contest for the gubernatorial election according to the 1999 constitution.^{li} After a prolonged battle at the Election Petitions Tribunal, the Tribunal of five members headed by Justice Yusuf Abdullahi on Monday 25th of February, 2008, nullified the election of Governor Theodore Orji and his deputy, Chris Akomas, not because of electoral malpractices but because they did not resign from their posts 30 days before the election as specified in the 1999 Constitution. The Tribunal also ruled that the governor and his deputy were members of a secret society, the Okija Shrine. In a Judgment that lasted for about two hours, forty-five minutes, the Tribunal of five members, chaired by Justice Yusuf Abdullahi unanimously held that Governor Theodore Orji, *ab initio*, was never qualified to stand for the election that gave him the post on the platform of the Progressive People's Alliance (PPA).^{lii} Subsequently, Theodore Orji filed for Appeal at the Court of Appeal in Rivers State.^{liii}

In February 2009, a panel of the Court of Appeal sitting in Port Harcourt, Rivers State led by Justice Saka Ibiyeye gave a ruling upholding the election of Theodore Orji as Abia State Governor, and awarded N50,000 cost against the People's Democratic Party candidate, Onyema Ugochukwu. Justice Saka Ibiyeye in his ruling stated that it had been established that Theodore Orji was not a member of any secret cult as it could not be proved that Okija Shrine was a secret society. The court held that Okija Shrine is an arbitration shrine, not a secret cult, adding that the evidence produced against Theodore Orji was inadmissible. It also held that the Governor was not bound to resign 30 days before contesting the Governorship election since he was not a public office

holder. The Judge cited section 193 of the 1999 Constitution to buttress his point.^{liv}

Then again, the politics of godfatherism in Abia State and the overbearing attitude of PPA National Executive towards Theodore Orji constituted a political challenge to Theodore Orji as the Governor of Abia State.^{lv} In one of Theodore Orji's publication on national dailies in 2013, he stated the implications of the political challenges he faced in his first tenure between 2007 and 2011. According to him:

I have for the umpteenth time acknowledged a cancerous pain inflicted on our stewardship during the tortuous first half of our 8 year gubernatorial assignment. But for the intervention of divinity, the Abia of precarious yester-years would have remained intractable. Abia is a function of divine mercy visited on the State, leading to a sweeping liberation from insensible godfatherism which assumed a delusionary invincibility... At the expiration of our political constraints authored by god-playing gladiators, the frightening enormity of infrastructure laybacks prevalent in the State menacingly stared us in the face.^{lvi}

Similarly, what appeared to be over bearing and interfering attitude of PPA National Executive and its Chairman of Board of Trustees, Orji Uzor Kalu forced Theodore Orji to resign from PPA and joined APGA, and later to PDP in a space of one month. In 2010, Theodore Orji was alleged to owe civil servants several months' salaries. The PPA National Executive within that period summoned Theodore Orji to PPA's Headquarters in Abuja to explain why he owed State civil servants salary arrears. It also advised the Governor to fix the insecurity problem in the State.^{lvii} A copy of the letter written to Governor Theodore Orji was given to the media by the PPA National Executive, and it was published. In response to the PPA's allegations, Theodore Orji through his media aide denied owing the State civil servants and categorically stated his efforts in the fight against kidnapping and armed robbery in Abia State. The media aide to Theodore Orji stated in a press release that:

It is not like the Governor has been busy junketing while his house is on fire. His efforts predate the celebrated 140 security Jeeps donated to the police, army and the vigilante groups in the State... Again, I can probe the Governor's mind to posit without fear of contradiction that he must have become livid with anger, when the PPA National Working Committee raised the unnecessary and belated issue of teacher's salary arrears. Let alone, the blatant lie of saying that civil servants were being owed in the State.^{lviii}

The Abia State's political sphere was heated up during this period in 2010, and it was a matter of time before it reached a boiling point. On one hand, Theodore Orji was in a battle to ensure his political freedom from his godfather who happened to also be the leader and founder of the political party PPA which gave him power, and on the other hand, he was battling with the menace of armed robbery and kidnapping in Abia State, which made him to look politically weak in the eyes of PPA stakeholders. Then again, there were speculations that PPA's leadership had perfected plans to deny Theodore Orji a second term ticket.^{lix} These critical issues forced Theodore Orji out of PPA in order for him to have freedom to implement his own policies.

In addition, the political clash between Theodore Orji's predecessor Orji Uzor Kalu and President Olusegun Obasanjo made the latter not to include Abia in the list of other 35 States of Nigeria whose foreign debts were written off. As a result of this, Abia State was forced to be servicing a 28 million dollars debt incurred by the old Imo State. Also, 43 oil wells belonging to Abia State were allocated to Rivers State, and all the benefits accrued to Abia State as an oil producing State were denied to Abia State.^{lx} Similarly, the political face off between Orji Uzor Kalu and President Olusegun Obasanjo made the former to decamp from PDP to his newly founded political party PPA. Consequently, Abia State under Orji Uzor Kalu was seen as an opposition State working against the interest of the ruling party PDP, thus Abia State did not enjoy the same benefits as other States belonging to the ruling Party PDP. Theodore Orji met this political logjam in Abia State when he became the Governor in 2007. He was faced with political neglect from the Federal government until he rejoined the PDP in 2010.

Socio-Economic Challenges

Abia State Government between 2007 and 2015 encountered several issues that can be considered as socio-economic challenges. Among those issues are the exclusion of Abia State in the list of other 35 States whose foreign debts were forgiven, and as a result Abia State was forced to be servicing the debt that was incurred by the old Imo State; the leakages experienced in the collection of internal revenue the State government; and finally the crises in the Niger Delta region coupled with the global fall in oil prices, had a negative effects on the federal allocation of the State governments in Nigeria.

The indebtedness of Abia State both to the Paris Club and local financial institutions affected the financial capacity of the Abia State government to meet up with its statutory obligations.^{lxi} On one hand, the Federal government deducted some money from the statutory Federal allocation to Abia State for the purpose of offsetting the foreign debts of Abia State, while on the other

hand, Abia State budgeted yearly allocation to offset its domestic debts. The implication of this was that, the State government was left with insufficient fund to pay worker's salaries and also develop the State infrastructures. The State government on several occasions made a case to the federal government for financial aid in form of a bail out especially during the insecurity crises of 2009 and 2010, but financial intervention was not forthcoming.^{lxii} Also, the leakages experienced by the State government in the generation of her internal revenue greatly affected her resources. The Abia State Government between 2011 and 2012 observed that unscrupulous government officers in charge of taxes and other government levy diverted government funds. The State government also observed that touts printed fake receipts and illegally collected government revenues. In order to address this, the Abia State government adopted new innovations to restructure and intensify its revenue generating capabilities.^{lxiii} The Abia State government discontinued the collection of her revenue through cash payment and then adopted the strategy of direct bank lodgment. This electronic collection system through the banks captured and confirmed payments made to the State government.^{lxiv}

Finally between 2014 and 2015, Abia State faced a stiff challenge in the area of receipts from statutory allocation from the Federal government. The Federal allocation to Abia State in 2015 consistently declined thereby impacting negatively on the performance index of Abia State. This was as a result of the fall in the price of oil which was less than \$50 per barrel, while the production target was to be met at that time due to pipeline vandalization and oil theft. These facts portrayed a serious economic challenge to Abia State and the implementation of its programmes. Nevertheless, Abia State government in 2015 developed a contingency plan which focused on the cutting down of public expenditure, especially those that did not have direct bearing on governance, and then increased the IGR of Abia State.^{lxv}

Conclusion

Having examined the various policies and challenges that dictated the pace of governance in Abia State under Governor Theodore Orji between 2007 and 2015, this study observed that some of the PPP projects in Abia State did not kick start due to lackluster attitude of those private organization involved in those projects, although Abia people thought that they would materialize before the expiration of Theodore Orji's administration. With regard to the political system in Abia State, the Abia Charter of Equity proved to be efficient, and a peace advocate mechanism. Also, the godfatherism that was visible between 2007 and 2011 proved to be a herculean challenge for Theodore Orji's administration. This problem forced Theodore Orji to decamp to APGA, and later to PDP; and the situation during that period caused a lot of uncertainties.

Democratic governance was interrupted and the interference of godfathers in the affairs of Abia State allowed government bureaucracy to be sacrificed on the altar of mediocrity.

In the area of security, it was established that the insecurity in Abia State which was highly pronounced in 2009 and 2010 had a devastating effect on the socio-economic activities in Abia State. It almost brought business activities in Abia State to a halt. Thus, the insecurity crises in the Abia State between 2009 and 2010 cannot be over emphasized. In the area of education, the free education policy of the Abia State government encouraged low income earners to enroll their children and wards into public schools, and thus, enrolment figures rose by 20% in 2014. In the area of labour, the Abia State government in 2011 disengaged more than 3,000 non-indigenes in the Abia civil service, and this was done without proper consultations with the Abia State labour union. Furthermore, in the health sector, Abia citizens and residents definitely witnessed the development of several health infrastructures but they never knew that the State government spent below its budget on health, aside from the fact that the State government in its 2015 budget allocated just 4% to the health sector, thus proving that the health sub-sector was not given a top priority. Also, the State government could have done more to ensure that fake drugs did not infiltrate the markets in Abia State as well as ensuring that an effective & efficient health insurance scheme was introduced.

Finally, having made an assessment of Theodore Orji's policies and programmes between 2007 and 2015 especially in the areas of health, labour, education, agriculture, youth empowerment and security, while taking into consideration the federal allocation and the internal generated revenue available to the Abia State government, and the several political, economic and security challenges that faced the State government, this study establishes that Governor Theodore Orji's administration performed averagely; although Abia citizens and residents had so much hope for a better performance. The development index showed that Abia State was below the pace of development when compared to other States in the South East in the period under review.

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