

## THE DYNAMICS OF DEVELOPMENT IN OWERRI CAPITAL TERRITORY: A STUDY OF THE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATIONS OF IMO STATE, 1976-2020

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### **Abstract**

*Imo State of South-eastern Nigeria has witnessed both Military and Civilian administrations, under the period of study, 1976-2020. The dynamics of the state history is captured in the process of urbanization and the ideological dialectics of the socio-economic and political engagements of its governors. This work undertakes a comparative study and the historical perspectives of various administrations in Imo State since its creation in a sequential Milicivilian periodization. Literatures abound on developments on the state capital Territory, but none has put the events in a systematic comparative chronology, which this work intends to do. It is the dynamism of change that ignites development, however the study shows that the development of Owerri was rather slow considering its age. To determine the reason(s) for the slow pace of development informed this study. Oral interviews, observations and relevant literature were used as sources of data collection. The method adopted was historical narrative, with thematic and analytic approach. The study recommends that government should pay more attention to the people's prioritized needs like creating employment, building good intra-state roads, industries, and the even spread of development, which would have accelerated development more.*

**Keywords:** Owerri, Capital Territory, Urbanization, Development, Administration.

### **Introduction:**

The evolution of Owerri can be broadly divided into three phases. Phase one dates back to about the 14th century (600 years ago), when Owerri was founded. This phase was marked by the history that a certain man named Ekwema Arugo founded Owerre Nchi Ise, the core villages of the municipality as was made available by oral historical account, the phase lasted till the end of the Nigeria-Biafra War in 1970. This was the evolutionary stage which also saw Owerri under the British colonial administration from 1902 till 1960 when Nigeria got her independence. The growth of modern Owerri dates from 1902 when British expeditionary forces established a small military administrative post and with the coming of Shell D'Archy in the 1946 to Owerri, the area was gradually being prepared to assume the status of a modern city. The colonial army establishment a military garrison in Owerri in 1902 under the leadership of Major Henry L. Gallway, who had returned from a military expedition in Arochuchukwu. Shortly after in the same year, fourteen military constables were placed in Owerri to start a police command in order to maintain British presence in the area as a conquered area and as a semi administrative unit, waiting to be formally declared full administrative centre. Consequently in May 1902, the Consul-General, Sir Ralph Moore in pursuant to the Order-in-council, visited Owerri and proclaimed it a district headquarters and appointed Harold Monday Douglas, who was formerly at Akwete, the District Commissioner (DC) of Owerri District. In 1912, Owerri was made the headquarters of Owerri Province, which included parts of modern Imo, Abia, Rivers and Bayelsa States under the leadership of J.D. Maxwell.<sup>1</sup>

By 1964, the geography of Owerri was altered and expanded to include the county council area of Ikeduru, Mbaise, Mabitoli, Ngor Okpala, Oguta, Ohaji, Oratta, Owerri and Oguta Urban County areas. The Owerri Division by 1999, comprised of Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ezinihite Mbaise, Ikeduru, Mbaitoli, Ngor Okpala, Oguta, Ohaji/Egbema, Owerri North, Owerri West and Owerri Municipal.<sup>2</sup> However, the core Owerri area were later divided into three local government areas, of Owerri North, Owerri West and Owerri Municipal.

The Second Phase of evolution began from 1970 at the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war till the creation of Imo State. During this period the most popular roads in Owerri were Douglas and Mbaise roads. The other roads radiating from Owerri were Aba, Okigwe, Onitsha and Port roads. All these roads were dilapidated following the civil war. The most important landmarks were Ama JK, Control Post, Assumpta Cathedral and Okigwe road roundabout. The only tertiary institution in Owerri was the Alvan Ikoku College of Education.<sup>3</sup> Owerri was one of the urban centers in the defunct East Central State that was created by Gen. Yakubu Gowon in 1967. Most of the buildings in Owerri then were mud houses with thatched roof. There was nothing special, nothing significant about Owerri until 1976 when Imo State was created by Gen. Murtala Muhammed and Owerri became the capital. That ushered Owerri into the Third Phase of evolution with changes coming to the town.

The third phase was from state creation till date. The creation of Imo State brought Owerri into sharp development focus as a state capital. Although, the first three governors between 1976 and September 1979 were military men who did little to improve Owerri, nevertheless, the idea of a New Owerri, World Bank, Ikenegbu and Aladinma neighborhoods were conceived during this period.<sup>4</sup> The development of Owerri took a dramatic turn after Governor Samuel Onunaka Mbakwe (Dee Sam Mbakwe) took the mantle of leadership. Some of these developmental strides after the creation of Imo State under the Military and Civilian administrations in Owerri Capital Territory, which is our area of study, will be discussed in details.

Previous works like, Mbaegbu, discusses the template for development of Owerri and other parts of Imo State; <sup>5</sup> Nwaka, examines the growth and development of Owerri; <sup>6</sup> Fingerhuth and Partners, dwells on the Owerri Twin City design; <sup>7</sup> Galantay, looks at the planning of Owerri, among other developments in the city.<sup>8</sup> However, their study on the developments in Owerri Capital Territory under various administrations in Imo State have not specifically try to compare and contrast the impact made by these administrations, from the creation of the state to 2020. More so, this work juxtaposed the civilian and military administrations to highlight their respective input towards the development of Owerri Capital Territory under the period of study.

### **Historical and Geographical Location of Owerri Capital Territory**

The progenitor of Owerri Nchi Ise, the core villages of Owerri municipality was Ekwema Arugo, according to oral historical account. He was said to have fled from Uratta in the present Owerri North Local Government Area following a family feud over the sharing of the funeral cow of their late father, Ndumoha. The escapee Ekwema finally arrived at a hill top later called Ugwu Ekwema and settled there. He was in the middle of a thick rainforest infested with lions, tigers, pythons and other dangerous wild animals from where after his family grew in number there was dispersal to the present locations, which was where Owerri originated. The entire Owerri was before colonialism in large expanse of agricultural field subjected to intensive self subsistence farming, the original settlers were farmers, cultivating local subsistence crops with yields that were adequate to keep families going and little left for exchange. With time the area

began to witness the influx of migrant elements from her neighboring villages such as Mbaise, Ikeduru, and from her immediate neighbors like Nekede, Obinze, Egbu, Naze and Agbala.<sup>9</sup> Many events in history culminated in the founding of Owerri as the seat of colonial government in 1902. These events included the conquest of Owerri by the colonial army, the establishment of military garrison in Owerri in 1902 under the leadership of Major Henry L. Gallway, who had returned from a military expedition to Arochuchukwu. It was in the same year that fourteen military constables were placed in Owerri to start a police command there. This was intended to maintain British presence in the area, not only as a conquered area, but as a semi administrative unit, waiting to be formally declared full administrative centre.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, Owerri was official declared the capital territory in May 1902, the Consul-General, Sir Ralph Moore, in pursuant to the Order-in-council, visited Owerri and proclaimed it a district headquarters and appointed Harold Monday Douglas, who was formerly at Akwete, the District Commissioner (DC) of Owerri District. In 1912, Owerri was made the headquarters of Owerri Province, which included parts of modern Imo, Abia, Rivers and Bayelsa States under J.D. Maxwell as the leader. The old Division covered an area of about 1,085 square miles and was bounded on the north by the Okigwe Division, on the east by the Bende and Aba Division, on the south-west by the Ahoada Division and on the north-west by the Orlu Division, on the east was also the Imo River.<sup>11</sup> The geographical expression of Owerri was altered in 1964 to include the county council area of Ikeduru, Mbaise, Mabitoli, Ngor Okpala, Ohaji, Oratta, Owerri and Oguta Urban County areas. However in 1999, Owerri Division was still made up of the areas of Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ezinihite Mbaise, Ikeduru, Mbaitoli, Ngor Okpala, Oguta, Ohaji/Egbema, Owerri North, Owerri West and Owerri Municipal.<sup>12</sup>

Imo State created on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, 1976, is one of the 36 States of Nigerian Federation. It is located in the South-East Geo-Political zone of Nigeria, and Owerri was made the State Capital and seat of government. The geographical location of the state is approximately the land area between the lower Niger River and the upper and middle Imo River from which the state took its name.<sup>13</sup> The State is boarded by other states namely, Abia State to the east, River Niger and Delta States to the west, Anambra State to the North and Rivers State to the South. The State lies within latitude 4.45 North and latitude 7.15 North. It also lies between longitude 6.50 East and 7.25 East. The State is land locked with a total area of 5.530km<sup>2</sup> (2.140sq miles).<sup>14</sup> Owerri the capital city shared boundary on the north and north east with Mbaise and Ikeduru local Government Areas respectively, on the south and south east with Agbala and Ngor Okpala respectively, on its west end was Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta Local Government Areas. It is made up of five clans of Umuonyeche, Umuororonjo, Umuoyima, Amawom and Umuodu. The core Owerri area was later divided into three local government areas. These included; Owerri North, Owerri West and Owerri Municipal. At the creation of Imo State, Owerri Capital Territory Area as mapped out included some parts of Mbaitoli, Owerri West, Owerri North and the whole of Owerri Municipal Council.

### **The Creation of Imo State and The Politics of Choosing The State Capital**

Capital cities play a distinguished role in the life of their respective states or countries of which they are often the economic, cultural, intellectual and political centers. They are also usually the largest municipalities being the seat of the state or national government and main institutions. The choice for Owerri as a place good for the position of a capital city was started under the British colonial rule. According to historical account from Eze Emmanuel Emenyeonu Njemanze of Owerri Nchi Ise Kingdom, the British were fascinated by the fine and undulating topography adorned by the clean and free flowing rivers, Nworie and Otamiri flanking Owerri town west and south respectively with a confluence on the way to Nekede. He went further to say that with stability assured, Captain Douglas, acting on behalf of the Brigade

Commander, Colonel Galway, stationed at the Oguta Lake, acquired land after due negotiation with the then King Eze Njemanze Iheancho of Owerri. On the land was built the Government Reservation Area (GRA), which was leased for 99 years for one shilling.<sup>15</sup> Thus the Government station was set up with a military hospital, staff quarters (both senior and junior), notably Douglas House, Government offices, the prisons, police station, post office at the present location of opposite Imo Hotels, while the post office then stood at the present site of Modotel Hotels. Note that government business in the aforementioned areas attracted an influx of people to Owerri and Government College Owerri was sited at the present location of the prisons in 1906.<sup>16</sup>

When the State was created in February 3, 1976, a very large number of civil servants, professionals and traders moved from different parts of the former East Central State where they reside into Owerri to staff the administration and services of the nascent State, and for the traders and artisans, to explore new opportunities for better life. Most of the people that moved into the new Imo State headed for the three major cities of Aba, Umuahia and Owerri none of which was well equipped in terms of physical infrastructure, services and organization to cope with the influx of people, especially Owerri, that became the State Capital in spite of its poor economic base and the chequered history of its administration and planning.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in 1976 when Imo State was created, Owerri was considered as the capital because a major attraction was the serenity of the city. Owerri was quiet and security has been a major advantage it enjoyed. Again, the people are very hospitable which the British also acknowledged during colonial rule. However, the importance of Owerri as seat of power predates the amalgamation of Nigeria. It had been district headquarters in the Southern protectorate as well as provincial headquarters in Eastern Nigeria following the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates to form one united Nigeria. As provincial capital, its jurisdiction covered Aba, Umuahia, Port Harcourt, Okigwe and Orlu. It was this historical role that made Owerri to be preferred to Umuahia as State Capital in 1976. The nodality of Owerri made it easily accessible by road from Port Harcourt, Aba, Umuahia, Okigwe and Onitsha.<sup>18</sup>

The over half a century political hegemony enjoyed by Enugu city, beginning with the Eastern Regional Government, as its headquarters, along with its adjoining towns of Nsukka, Onitsha, Awka and perhaps Nnewi, would give way to Owerri, the quiet capital city of Imo State, but with eminently educated and informed citizenry. Owerri, a hospitality town, is an educational hub. It is now arguably emerging as the political capital of Ndigbo. Owerri, like a few other state capitals in Nigeria, is known as a civil or public service city. The city is believed to be a place where money is rather spent. It is, however, not like Port Harcourt, Aba, Onitsha, Nnewi, Enugu and others where various production industries are scattered all over. As a result of this, Owerri city is bustling with entertainment activities all week-long, especially during the weekends. The sobriquet, “Owerri Ebe Ngwori” (Owerri, a place of merriment), perhaps evolved as a result of this.

### **Owerri Capital Territory Area**

The entire land area of Owerri Capital Territory was fifteen Kilometers radius beginning from Owerri Municipal as its core area.<sup>19</sup> The Capital Territory area was located within the rain forest belt of Nigeria, with temperature of about 200c to 360c. The area had two major seasons which were the wet season which began in April and ended roughly in October, and the dry season which began mid October to March. The area’s texture type varied from the plain lands to the hills and wetland around Nworie and Otamiri River which flows across Owerri Municipality from its source at Egbu through Nekede and Ihiagwa to Etche in Rivers State from where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>20</sup> The



Area that covers Owerri Capital Territory is grouped into Area A-D among the towns of Owerri and the surroundings. Area "A" includes the main town of Owerri Nchi Ise, an area which stretched from Emmanuel College through whetheral Road to Okigwe Road and Royce Road to Hausa Quarters (Ama Awusa) and back to Emmanuel College. Area "B" comprised the Government Station area of Government House and offices. Area "C" is the Ikenegbu layout area; while the vast land surrounding areas A, B and C as described above which included Egbu, Awaka, Emekuku, Naze, Agbala, Nekede, Ihiagwa, Umuguma, Avu, Irete, Ndegwu, Orogwe, Ubomiri, Nwaoriubi, Orji Uratta, Amakohia/Akwakuma Uratta, altogether were grouped under Area "D". All these areas formed the Owerri Capital Territory.<sup>21</sup>

### **The state of Development in Owerri City at the Creation of Imo State**

From the time the State was created on February 3, 1976 all development programs have been on urban development with concentration on Owerri Capital Territory. The creation of Imo State brought Owerri into sharp development focus as a state capital. At the beginning, there were few motorable roads across the length and breadth of Imo State. The only tarred roads passing through Owerri, the state capital then were colonial roads which included the Owerri-Umuahia road via Mbaise; Owerri-Aba road; Owerri-Port-Harcourt road via Elele; Owerri-Okigwe road and Owerri-Onitsha road. As if by design, all the roads radiated from Owerri, which then was the biggest suburban centre in the region. The iconic Maria Assumpta Cathedral, arguably, was the only prominent edifice bestriding the Onitsha and Elele roads at the popular Control Roundabout. Electricity was a fairy tale seen only in Owerri and almost non existence in other parts of the new state. There was no airport, no telephone communication, the Alvan Ikoku College of Education was the only tertiary institution in the entire Imo State.<sup>22</sup> The creation of Imo State on February 3, 1976 was more like an assignment to the people to go and develop the area.

**Ndubisi Kanu Administration, March, 1976 - July, 1977 (Military):** In July 1975 as a lieutenant commander he was appointed a member of Murtala Muhammed's ruling Cabinet, the Supreme Military Council. When he became appointed as governor of Imo State in March 1976, he brought in town planners, Fingerhuth and Patners, to prepare a plan for Owerri. Kanu built roads in Owerri metropolis, expanded that number of Local Government Areas to 21 and founded the Imo Broadcasting Service, located at Owerri municipality, which went on air in December 1976. The idea of a New Owerri Area, World Bank Area, Ikenegbu and Aladinma neighborhoods were conceived and initiated during the administration of Kanu.<sup>23</sup>

**Adenkunle Lawal Administration, July, 1977 - July, 1978 (Military):** Admiral Adenkunle Shamusideen Lawal Succeeded Ndubuisi Kanu and become governor of Imo State in 1977. Admiral Lawal held the position of Lagos State Military Governor until 1977, when he was transferred to become governor of Imo State in 1977, and Kanu sent to Lagos. His tenure lasted for one year without any significant effort towards development in the Capital Territory, perhaps it was as a result of the short period he stayed. However, his tenure saw adequate maintenance of security in and around the Capital Territory of Owerri. <sup>24</sup>

**Sunday Ajibade Adenihu Administration, July, 1978 - Oct, 1979 (Military):** Sunday Ajibade Adenihun was appointed military governor from July 1978 to October 1979 during the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo. Bob Njemanze from the Njemanze ruling dynasty in Owerri, Imo State described him as "a young man with so much vigour and vision but without time to conclude anything."<sup>25</sup> However, he did introduce simple but effective procedures for ridding the town of mountains of garbage that had accumulated before he took over administration. <sup>26</sup>

**Samuel Onunaka Mbakwe Administratio, Oct 1, 1979 - Dec 31, 1983 (Civilian):** The development of Owerri took a dramatic turn after Governor Samuel Onunaka Mbakwe (Dee Sam) took the mantle of leadership. With practically nothing on ground, Mbakwe started from the scratch to put things in place. His first assignment was to give Owerri a facelift. Douglas road was rehabilitated and made passable. This was followed with the opening of Wetheral ring road to reduce traffic on Douglas, the only arterial road in Owerri. The iconic Mbakwe then embarked on the construction of Imo Concorde Hotel and the Imo Airport. Mbakwe fought a battle with the federal authorities who initially opposed the construction of the airport and refused to give support. Undaunted and determined to make a mark, Mbakwe persisted on the airport project without federal assistance. Instead, contributions came from Imo people who gave their full support to the project in the form of endowment fund set up to aid in building the airport. He also founded the Imo State University (IMSU) in 1981 designed after the Nebraska University of USA, which became the first university in Imo State. Mbakwe was said to have wept when he took visiting President Shagari to inspect the Ndiegoro erosion site. According to Tobs Agbaegbu, who metaphorically captured what the elder statesman's purported weeping disposition meant. He said, "His, is the experience of one man who turned within a record of four years, his Imo State, from a state of dilapidation to a land of envy, using all strategies which, included shedding of tears, to attract attention to the plight of his people." "He was regarded as a miracle man because of his foresight, ingenuity and developmental strides which suddenly transformed Imo State so much so that the state became a model of a sort in the entire South-East then,"<sup>27</sup> He built many roads, extended electricity to many rural communities and provided pipe-borne water. Some of the industries he established included the Imo Modern Poultry Complex, Avutu; the Aluminum Smelter Company, Inyishi; Resin and Paint Factory in Mbaise and the Amaraku power station. The Amaraku power station is reputed as to be the first major rural electrification project in Imo State. He also set up the Progress Bank.<sup>28</sup> Mbakwe's tenure was truncated in December, 1983, when the military took over the reins of power.

**Ike Nwachukwu Administration, Jan, 1984 – Aug, 1985 (Military):** Ike Omar Sanda Nwachukwu as the Military Governor moved the Imo State University (now Abia State University) to Uturu its permanent site at present. There were no developmental efforts in other areas he was known for, especially as it concerned the Owerri Capital Territory.

**Allison Madueke Administration, Aug, 1985 – Aug, 1986 (Military):** The tenure of Madueke for one year did not witness any significant capital development project, and was also adjudged not to be in reckoning to any major development, particularly in the Capital Territory.

**Amadi Ikwecheghi Administration, Aug, 1986 – Aug, 1990 (Military):** Ikwecheghi tried to build on the foundation laid by his predecessors in office by contributing to changing the Infrastructural development of Owerri, the state capital and other major towns and communities. However, he was said to have sold off to a neighboring state all the refuse silos kept within Owerri city for easy evacuation of waste, without providing any tangible alternative for the environmental cleanliness and maintenance of the metropolis. This distorted the environmental sanitation efforts already existing in the capital city before he came.<sup>29</sup>

**Anthony E. Ogugua Administration, Aug, 1990 – Jan, 1992 (Military):** During his administration, Imo State airport was commissioned and built. He was known to have once famously said "I saw money and looked away, it is not everything, we can all do the same and teach it to our children."<sup>30</sup> His administration took a strong hold with Trade Unions. In 1991

he demanded a list of absentee workers who were striking for a minimum wage of N380. As governor, he commissioned the 100 bed Osina Community hospital in 1991.<sup>31</sup> He did not do much to develop the Owerri Capital Territory.

**Evans Enwerem Administration, Jan 1992 - Nov 1993 (Civilian):** Under his administration the only state university in Imo state, the new Imo State University was built by him, after the former one went to become of Abia state when it was carved out from Imo State. Enwerem ensured that the State University in Owerri continued its programs, which was commended.

**James M.J Aneke Administration, Dec, 1993 – Aug, 1996 (Military):** Navy Captain James N.J. Aneke was appointed military governor of Imo State in Nigeria from December 1993 to August 1996 during the military regime of General Sani Abacha. Under him the completion and Operationalizing of the Sam Mbakwe International Cargo Imo Airport for Full Commercial Flights took place. Its commissioning was by Head of State, General Sani Abacha on 15 July 1994. Speaking of his administration, Bob Njemanze from the Njemanze ruling dynasty in Owerri, Imo State, described him as "a young man with beautiful ideas but no action."<sup>32</sup> During his period as governor, Owerri was plagued by kidnappings and ritual killings, which he was unable to prevent. The above thus best described Aneke's tenure as dry and drab without much to show for development in Owerri and the state in general. However, under him was the full takeover by the Federal Government of the State Polytechnic at Nekede (now Federal Polytechnic) and General Hospital Owerri (now Federal Medical Center). Undertaken during his tenure was the employment of 1000 Young Graduates of different disciplines into the Public Service and the Rehabilitation of schools and improvement of the Welfare of teachers in the three tiers: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels. To his Administration is owed the honoring of acclaimed Imo State achievers in various fields. Hence, the naming of the Owerri Township Stadium after Nigeria's erstwhile football captain, "Dan Anyiam". He acquired a land area of 53 hectares for a model Workers' Haven. It now houses the Redemption Estate along the Owerri - Port Harcourt Express, which was developed by a later administration.<sup>33</sup>

**Tanko Zubairu Administration, Aug, 1996 – May, 1999 (Military):** During his tenure, he had to deal with violent protests over ritual killings. In 1997 he signed warrants for execution by firing squad of six men accused of the crime of "Otokoto saga", which disrupted the peaceful atmosphere, hospitality and good security that Owerri was known for. Again, in the words of Bob Njemanze, a member of the Njemanze ruling dynasty in Owerri, Imo State, he described Zubairu's tenure as that of "a soldier in hurry to nowhere and getting to nowhere".<sup>34</sup> This showed that Zubairu's tenure was without any remarkable achievement of development in Owerri Capital Territory.

**Achike Udenwa Administration, May 29, 1999 - May 29, 2007 (Civilian):** Before Udenwa was elected Governor, the state of Imo was in a mess. Udenwa tried in the areas of road construction, rehabilitation of Government house, and Government owed parastatals, he also tried in clearing outstanding salaries of most government owned corporations. He tried in the area of developing the state's infrastructure, e.g. the building of a modern State Secretariat, adding more infrastructures in Imo State University and Teaching Hospital, and construction of roads in various zones of the state. But his developmental efforts were considered low in the Capital Territory and the state in general.<sup>35</sup> Udenwa concentrated his effort only in Orlu, his home senatorial zone, leaving other parts of the state blank. It was Udenwa who opened the floodgate of development in Orlu zone. His most striking achievement was the establishment of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the Imo State University in Orlu. This and other

infrastructure developments he initiated in Orlu remain the legacies of his eight years administration.

**Ikedi G. Ohakim Administration, May 29, 2007 - May 29, 2011 (Civilian):** Ohakim was a great politician with sweet mouth. He loves planting Christmas trees. He wanted to turn Imo state to a green land by planting flowers and beautifying the metropolis, through his “Clean and Green” environmental program. He did much remarkably in his environmental cleanliness pursuit. However, his administration rehabilitated the Owerri-Aba Road which is a federal road that connects Imo and Abia states and passes mainly through communities in Owerri North, Ngor/Okpala in Imo State and Isiala-Ngwa South local government in Abia State. This road was a huge death- trap till the rehabilitation. The Owerri-Umuahia Road was also rehabilitated with partition and paint in an attempt to make it a dual carriage way, though without any major effort to expand it. Apart from the Clean and Green Initiative, Governor Ikedi Ohakim established the Imo Rural Roads maintenance Agency (IRROMA), which claimed to have built 100 roads in hundred days in 2009.<sup>36</sup> Areas within the Capital Territory were beneficiaries of the road rehabilitation and the IRROMA projects.

**Rochas Anayo Okorochoa Administration, May 29, 2011 - May 29, 2019 (Civilian):** In pursuance of his program all major roads were tried to be upgraded to eight (8) lanes with four (4) lanes on each side of the divide or median. In consequence of this all unapproved structures on the roads were pulled down. Roundabouts were constructed at the inland roads, the first, second, third, fourth and other strategic road junctions. Five link roads were constructed to link old Owerri and New Owerri. The dilapidated school buildings that were neglected by previous administrations were reconstructed and upgraded into storey buildings with the pupils granted fee free education. He also built twenty seven new hospitals, one for each local government area. Motor parks were created to make rooms for the free movement of people and traffic, especially within the capital territory. The markets that caused congestion in the old Owerri business district were relocated to the sub urban areas so that movement from the airport through the city centre to the government secretariat and the posh hotels springing up in new Owerri will be unimpaired. Flyovers and tunnels were constructed at strategic places, though they were later discovered to be substandard in quality. This is perhaps one of the ways to enhance ease of doing business in the State capital. He embarked on remodeling the Concorde Hotel Owerri, then decayed and almost collapsed supposed Five Star Hotel to the reputation as the “five star pearl of the East”. He massively transformed the Imo State Government House bringing it to the standard of one of the best government houses in the federal republic of Nigeria. A diagnostic center he built provides free breast and prostate cancer screening in the State. It has facilities and services like MRI, CT SCAN, MAMMOGRAMS, etc currently running.<sup>37</sup>

However, the suburban areas on the periphery of Owerri Municipal have not been favored with the Urban Renewal Programs. These suburbs have no intra city roads and drainage systems. When it rains life becomes hard for the sub-urban dwellers. The suburbs include the following: Uratta layouts and town, including Orji town; Mbieri - Akwakuma Layout; Irete - Orogwe Suburb-urban area; Avu - Umuguma - Nekede - Sub-urban area; and Naze - Egbu Sub-urban area. These suburbs were left out and not considered during the urban renewal program. Single lane roads in these areas are sufficient for connectivity, for they do not need boulevards like the business district area, yet renewal program was not extended to these important components of the Owerri Capital Territory.



However, aside the staple claim of many politicians, especially governors, of having constructed many roads, built hospitals and provided water etc. to the citizenry, Okorochoa's governorship days are better remembered for the governance oddities. What struck many people most was the molding of several statues of local and foreign leaders in Owerri at huge cost to the finances of the state at a time many civil servants as well as pensioners and retirees in the state were being owed many months of unpaid salaries. It was a loud query on the question of priority. The next front page exhibition of the Okorochoa governance years was the creation of Ministry of Happiness and Purpose Fulfillment. It was a ministry meant to generate and spread laughter, according to Okorochoa, the whole essence of governance is to make the people happy. There is obviously no data to prove that Imo people became happier and more purposeful in life as a result of the creation of that ministry, which has long gone extinct.

**Emeka Ihedioha Administration, May 29, 2019 – Feb 14, 2020 (Civilian):** Ihedioha was not given the opportunity to prove himself, though the few months in office, he wanted to diversify Imo State. His agenda was centered on Agriculture, road construction and employment. Ihedioha is an iconic builder of minds and personalities, who within nine months of being the governor transformed Imo State through words and deeds in the interest of the masses. His brief stay as governor of Imo was very remarkable as he showed capacity to turn the fortune of the state around. Some his achievements are the flag-off of N13.5 billion 380km rural roads in collaboration with RAMP (Rural Access And Mobility Project), backed by the World Bank, control of massive flooding of Owerri that has ravaged the state for years, revitalization of technical education through the reconstruction and re-equipping of three major technical schools in the state, he signed into law the Treasury Single Account (TSA) to ensure financial discipline and ended the months-long strike action by doctors in the state that kept the Federal Medical center in Owerri and others out of service for weeks.<sup>38</sup> As a panacea for positive transformation of self and society, he insisted on the need for well-rounded development that comprises the following: total education, the maximal use of one's intellectual capabilities and physical endowment, volunteerism, self employment, as well as the cultivation of a personal resolve to solve problems. His administration was able to restore effective budget presentation, reduce cost of governance, embarked on extensive road rehabilitation projects, deployed technology as an enabler for effective service delivery and carried out broad reforms in the state civil service. The revitalization of the local governments for optimal performance, rehabilitation of schools, promotion of investment and industrialization of the state and training of thousands of Imo citizens on many fields of endeavors were also part of his achievements.<sup>39</sup> His stay was abruptly cut short after few months of governance by a Supreme Court decision that ousted him from office. However, Ihedioha was commended for seeking holistic solutions to intricate problems he inherited from the Okorochoa Administration.

**An Appraisal of the Military and Civilian Administrations in Imo State:** The developments that now define Imo State did not start from the outset. After, Imo State was created on February 3, 1976 by General Murtala Muhammed administration, by August 27, 1991, Abia State was carved out of the old Imo State. Since its creation, sixteen leaders have presided over the affairs of the State either as military administrators or civilian governors. Of the sixteen, only seven were actually civilian governors while nine were military. Suffice it to say that whereas the military administrators presided over the state affairs largely on a care-free basis, without making much significant impact. Virtually, all the developments that have been recorded were at the instance of few civilian governors. This happened over a period of roughly thirty (30) years out of forty seven (47) years in the life of the state so far. That is to say, seventeen (17) years in the existence of Imo State were seemed wasted. Although, the first three governors between 1976 and September 1979 were military men, they did little to

improve Owerri, nevertheless, the idea of a New Owerri, World Bank, Ikenegbu and Aladinma neighborhoods were conceived during this period.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

What today is called Imo State was a large farmstead within the geographical circuit of the defunct Eastern Region that was split into three states by the Yakubu Gowon military government at the onset of the Nigerian civil war in 1967. The indigenous Igbo populations that occupied Imo land were mostly farmers who cultivated variety of subsistence and cash crops among which was palm produce, one of Nigeria's major export crops at independence. A little over four decades later, Imo has grown from being a large farmstead to one city state by dint of hard work of the people. It was therefore a major challenge, indeed, a daunting task for the people and the leadership to create something out of nothing. That challenge seems to have enamored the spirit of the people to roll their sleeves and get down working. The new dawn breaking in Imo State provides an opportunity to highlight some key development strides that have been recorded in the state.

Before Owerri assumed the status of State Capital, it was but a big village centrally located with roads linking it and major cities in Eastern Nigeria. The urban development of Owerri all this while had centered on the construction, reconstruction and dualization of the major roads linking Owerri and the cities of Port-Harcourt, Aba, Onitsha, Umuahia, Orlu and Okigwe. A cargo airport was later built as part of its infrastructural development. What the capital city lacks in industrialization, it makes up as an educational centre with two universities, one federal, The Federal University of Technology (FUTO) and one state, The Imo State University (IMSU); two polytechnics, one federal, The Federal Polytechnic Nekede (FEDPOLYNEK) and one state, The Polytechnic, Umuagwo. The state college of education, now Alvan Ikoku Federal University College of Education, Owerri and numerous other lower educational institutions. There are also two tertiary hospitals, the Federal University Teaching Hospital, Owerri, founded on 1903, under the colonial administration, later named General Hospital, then Federal Medical center in 1995, with a seven hundred (700) bed capacity.<sup>40</sup> The hospital relates with the State University Teaching Hospital Located at Orlu. And the Umuguma Specialist Hospital, Owerri-West. For over four decade, the Owerri Capital Territory has been developing steadily as the preferred hospitality and tourism destination in the South East. There has been an upsurge in exotic hotels, highbrow residential estates, entertainment centers and other commercial ventures in the area. In addition, almost all the federal and state government infrastructure are located in the capital territory. The Federal College of Land Resources and Technology, Owerri (FECOLAT) at Avu, and the Claretian University, Nekede are also existing in the area.

Obviously, the capital territory area would not have gained the stupendous developments if not that Owerri became a State capital. This is the reason whenever the town is compared with Okigwe and Orlu towns, it elicits reminiscent feelings of envy and jealousy from this other two zones. But Owerri has paid its price for serving as a State capital. While other surrounding towns remain for their indigenous owners, Owerri and the adjoining capital territory areas has now become metropolitan, occupied by persons from every nook and cranny of the world and the people's land forcefully alienated for government development. The study suggests by asking, why is it that each administration that comes concentrates on the municipal roads, without thinking on how to expand the town? Owerri State capital city extends up to Nekede, Ihiagwa, Obinze, Irete, Agbala, Avu, Umuguma, Mbieri, etc. Must every Government project be sited inside the main Owerri (municipality)? Only a new vision will move Owerri Capital Territory forward. The study also shows that slow pace of growth is not unconnected with the

low economic and industrial activities when compared to cities like Port Harcourt or Lagos, coupled with non performance of the various administrations.

This work notes that a number of past Imo State Government administrations did not have projects or programs that could revive the economy of the state like it was done by the late Sam Mbakwe administration in the Second Republic. Therefore, it is recommended that government programs that are superficial in nature should not be embarked upon because they do not constitute genuine high priorities in the state economy. Year in year out, the state government presents budget proposals, which from observation does not transform to tangible infrastructural development that could create the much needed employment opportunities for the teeming youths, who roam about without job, and are easy catch for social vices like kidnapping, armed robbery, yahoo yahoo, etc. Government should channel the yearly budgets towards wealth creation by at least reviving the shoe industry in Owerri, the Avutu-Obowo Poultry Farm and the Adapalm Oil Factory in Ohaji-Egbema local government. The state of roads in the state is appalling. There is no public water in the capital territory, and Imo State at large, still every year, each successive government has huge budget estimates. It is also recommended that the government should create industrial structure in Imo State, in order to absorb the numerous graduate workforce churned out yearly from higher institutions, which will include the absorption of those within the middle and low cadre positions. This writer believes that if the recommendations above are implemented judiciously, it will improve the welfare of Imo State and her citizens.

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