

Rivers State: The Challenge of One-City State in the Geography of Underdeveloped Rural Region in Nigeria

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Abstract A clinical study of the challenges confronting Rivers State, an oil producing state south of the deltaic region of Nigeria was carried out by this paper. These challenges were looked at from two perspectives; a state that has only succeeded in developing one city, the state capital after over 40years of existence and secondly, the implication for that city, Port Harcourt in a state characterized by mass of underdeveloped rural communities. This work is a product of months of intensive field work. Both primary and secondary information contributed greatly to give us a true picture of “the way things are” in our study area. From this picture we were able to draw a conclusion that there exist socio-economic and environmental ‘crises’ in the city of Port Harcourt. This paper was also able to prove that the failure of successive governments in the state to pursue their visions of developing secondary cities was responsible for such ‘crises’. The paper at the end has been able to provide answer to the question of ‘what is to be done’ in the face of the existing ‘crises’.

Keywords: Crises, Population, City, Government

1. INTRODUCTION

From the pre-colonial era evidence of urban bias in the development policies of the government was easily noticed. There was a colossal concentration of economic and social infrastructure in the few but rapidly growing urban centres and cities at the expense of the rural areas. Although the resources needed to sustain the city’s economy came from the hinterland, the urban areas were favoured in the distribution of social and economic infrastructure because of their strategic importance to the colonial masters; centres of administration and by their geographical location provided easy avenue for the export of agricultural products needed to service the economy of the colonial masters back home. Port Harcourt was one of such cities in the then eastern region of Nigeria that enjoyed such favour from the colonial masters. This city came into existence through the Hargroove agreement signed between the colonial masters and some local chiefs from the Ikwerre and Okrika origin (the traditional owners of the land) in which 30,000 acres of land was ceded to the colonial masters in 1913 for administrative convenience (Akpogomeh, 1995). With a very insignificant population at that time the city grew rapidly in commerce and by 1963, the city was accommodating a population of 234,672 persons. Thus when Rivers State was created in 1967, Port Harcourt was the only city in the geographical territory ceded to the new state that qualified to wear the status of the state capital. This change in status increased the economic activities and human population in the city. It was the only urban area that offered job opportunities to the elites, where commerce thrived and has a mass concentration of economic and social infrastructure. By the end of the 1980s, its land mass had been overstretched by the competing land uses resulting into several social problems in the city (Kio-Lawson and Dekor 2014). By 2006, the city’s population was already close to 1.5 million persons leaving the question of “what is to be done” on the lips of every development scholars in the region. Both development scholars and successive government in the state had agreed in common that development of other urban centres in the state is one way of taking the population pressure away from the city. Several policies and programmes had been advanced by successive government towards this direction. As at 1996, there were over twenty of such urban centres in the state using population as criteria for definition. Some of these urban centres function as local council headquarters but in terms of development, they are several miles away. Thus several years after the creation of Rivers State, Port Harcourt had remained the only primate city in the state. It had continued to be the final destination for most rural migrants in the region as well as highly favoured in the distribution of social and economic infrastructure in the state. The implications for such a state with a population of over 5 million persons having just a city surrounded by a mass of traditional settlements miles away from development can be predicted. A more appropriate answer is undoubtedly needed to the question of “what is to be done” if any progress is to be recorded in the face of these implications.

II. METHOD AND TECHNIQUES

Rivers State was created in 1967 with Port Harcourt as the administrative capital. In 1987, another state, Bayelsa, was carved out of the state with a significant part of its population and geographical area ceded to the new state. Despite this development, Rivers

State still stands as one of the highest oil producing states in the country, Nigeria. Its capital city, Port Harcourt, also boast of having the highest agglomeration of oil producing companies in the country.

The state is administratively made up of twenty three local government areas housing approximately 1108 rural communities and few underdeveloped urban centres. The state is segmented politically into “Upland and Riverine” areas as a result of its geographical characteristics. The target populations for which this research study shall be primarily directed at are rural residents. A sample size of 345 rural communities was randomly selected from a total of 1108 communities. The twenty three local council areas were considered in the sample. From each local council area fifteen rural communities were randomly picked for the study. The “town hall meeting” approach was adopted in the study. In each community, a listing of all the identifiable local groups was made. Two representatives from the identified local groups in each community were drawn to participate in the “town hall meeting” for that community. Personal observation method was also helpful in the research. Relevant documented information from previous scholars also contributed greatly to the success of this research. The difficult geographical nature, the high level of insecurity occasioned by militant activities and poor communication network in rural Rivers State were major challenges that confronted this research work. Despite these challenges the study was a success.

III. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF RIVERS STATE

Rivers State was part of the Oil Rivers Protectorate from 1885 till 1893. In 1893 it became part of the Niger Coast Protectorate. In 1900 it became a part of the region that was merged with the chartered territories of the Royal Niger Company to form the colony of Southern Nigeria. It became part of the Eastern region when the regional structure was created in 1963. The state was officially created in 1967; one of the twelve states created by the military administration. Port Harcourt was chosen as the capital of the new state. In 1996, another state, Bayelsa was carved out of Rivers State. Today, it is one of the six states in the South-South geopolitical region of Nigeria. It is also one of the oil producing states in the Niger Delta. Its surface geology consists of fluvial sediments. The land surface can be grouped into three main divisions; the fresh water, the mangrove swamps and the coastal sand ridges-zone. Beside Port Harcourt that stands out as the only city in the state, the rest of the state is made up of rural communities and few underdeveloped urban centres. There are about 1108 rural communities scattered across the coastal plain of the Eastern Niger Delta with a population of more than five million people. The state is very poor in drainage; lying under water. There is so much surface water couple with high rainfall which had made virtually all parts of the state to suffer one form of flooding or the other in the year. This trend has limited agricultural practices which is a major occupation of the people. It has also become a major challenge to development efforts aimed at enhancing social welfare. However, beside agricultural activities which its rural population is noted for, the state is famous for its high reserves of oil and natural gas. Presently, the state is accounting for more than 40% of the country crude oil production (NDEBUMOG, 2016). The geographical location of its capital, Port Harcourt with its beautiful and peculiar topography has earned it the name “Garden City”. The city is easily accessible by road, rail, air and sea. Its seaport and airport stands among the busiest in the country. With a population of over 1.5 million people, this capital city has the highest agglomeration of oil companies in the country and is considered as one of the fastest growing cities in the country.



Figure 1 Map of Nigeria Showing Rivers State

IV. THE SPATIAL GROWTH OF PORT HARCOURT, THE CAPITAL OF RIVERS STATE

The geographical location known as Port Harcourt today was a product of an agreement reached between the Ikwerre and Okrika land owners on one hand and the Colonial Masters on the other hand. The agreement was signed in May 1913 which saw the ceding of 30 acres of land to the Colonial Masters. Before the agreement, the area was a meeting point for trade between the agricultural upland communities and the fishing and trading communities of the riverine areas. (Akpogomeh, 1995). Thus when the need arose on the part of the Colonial Masters to establish a seaport for easy evacuation of the agricultural products from the Eastern region, the coal and minerals from Northern Nigeria, Port Harcourt was chosen ahead of other riverine towns like Bonny, Okrika and Degema. The establishment of a seaport in Port Harcourt also facilitated the construction of railways to link it with other cities and towns for easy transportation of the needed agricultural products to the seaport for onward transportation to the home countries of the Colonial Masters. This new development sparked off mass movement of commerce and human population into the new city. Most trading firms doing business in the deltaic region saw the new city as ideal place to locate their operational offices. To the colonial government, it became a seat of administration. It was not long when it became a lucrative commercial city for the Hausa from the North, the Ibo businessmen from the East, and the highly educated Yorubas from the West. When oil was discovered in 1958 in commercial quantity in the region, new business entered into the city fuelling increased migration. It was therefore not surprising when the city was chosen as the capital of the Ijaw Rivers State created in 1967 by the military administration. The state was created out of the need to take development to the backward region of the Ijaw people. Before the creation of Rivers State, there was an existing local government structure established by the colonial administration as a bridge for regional development. The reason for the establishment of such structure was to muster local resources, arousing general interest, supporting and meeting local needs more efficiently and extensively. With the outbreak of the civil war in Nigeria in 1967, the local government system came to an end. After the civil war and with a new government in place in 1969 in Rivers State the old local government system was seen as ineffective and inefficient towards rapid development of the local government units. Under Edict No.5 of 1969, the old county councils were reconstituted and put under the field Administrative Division of the government functions. With Edict No.4 of 1971, the county councils were finally removed and replaced with eighteen divisional structure. The creation of these new divisions was associated with government strategy of deliberate urbanization. This was followed by decentralization of the operations of state government ministries. The primary objective was to take development to the hinterland and reduce the rate of migration to Port Harcourt, the state capital. The 1976 local government reform of the federal government was seen as a right step in the right direction. It was aimed at involving an integrated rural-urban framework for development planning. The local government headquarters were considered as “growth points” through which development will trickle down to the surrounding rural areas.

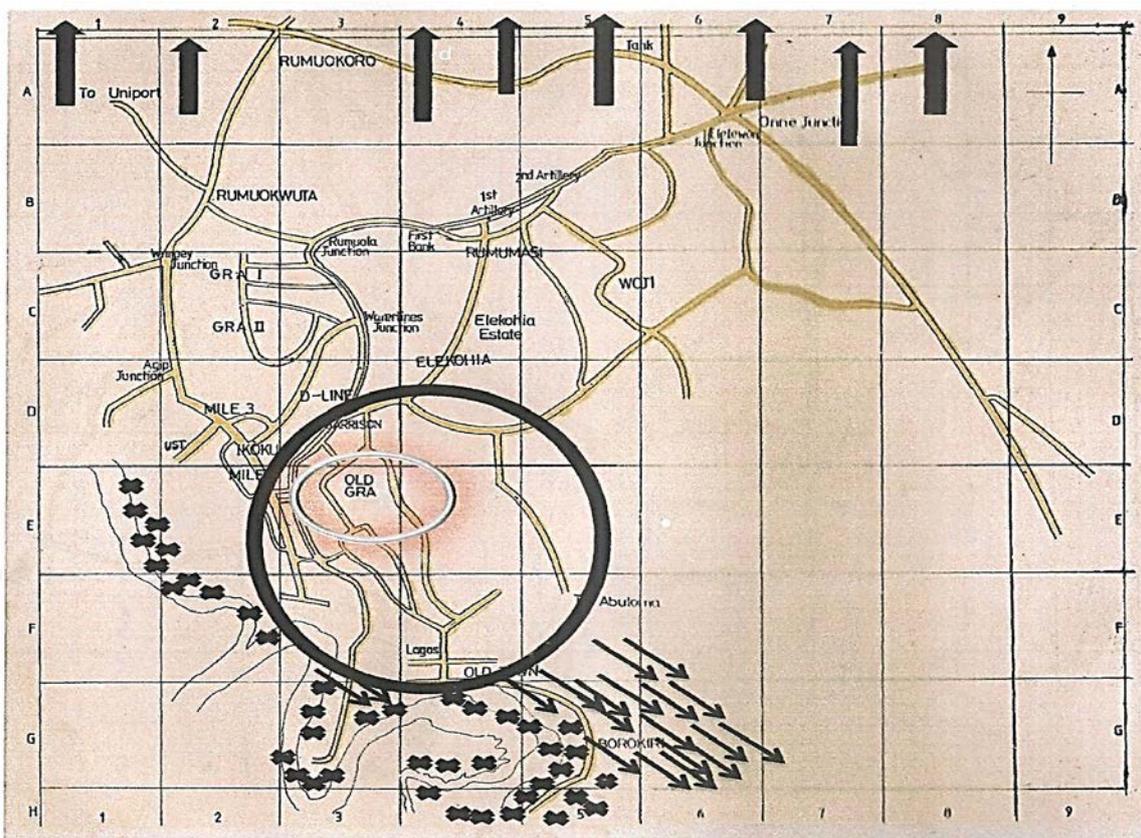


Figure 2 Spatial Expansion of Port Harcourt

Southern part of the City where available land space has been exhausted leaving a larger percentage of the low income to find 'a roof over head' at marginal land known traditionally as 'waterside settlements'

Current direction of pressure on land for physical development is towards the Northern boundary of the city where there are still more arable land housing some traditional settlements of the Ikwerre's who are traditional farmers.

○ Central Business District of the City (CBD)

▲ Area infested with Marginal Settlements. This area is mainly occupied by the fishing Okrikas', the traditional owners of the land and other riverine population from the State

● Concentration of development in the City

In Rivers State it was regarded as a channel to decentralize development and take the pressure away from Port Harcourt. However, this reform was not backed up with the investment necessary to enable these "induced growth centres" to achieve self sustaining growth. Secondly, there was no provision made on the part of the government for an integrated approach to the development of these local government headquarters. These flaws are reflected in the status of the twenty three local council headquarters today. They have been reduced to mere "administrative units". Port Harcourt still remain today as the only city in Rivers State. From a population of 234,672 in 1963, the city today is housing a population over 2 million persons (NPC, 2015). Next to the city in terms of population among the urban centres in the state is Bori with a population of less than a 300,000. The city has grown to exhaust the original 30,000 acres of land ceded to it by the traditional land owners. Land space south of the city that is housing some of the traditional homes of the Okrikas' has been fully exhausted pushing some residents especially the low income to find "roof over head" at the waterfront where land is less desirable. In this part of the city alone, there are about thirty two of such identifiable settlements on marginal land (Kio-Lawson, D. 2013). The current pressure on land in the city is towards the north, the home of the Ikwerres' who are traditional farmers and where there is still wide expanse of arable land.

V. SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES OF SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENT IN RIVERS STATE

Spatial development pattern of the regional government that was in operation in the country before the creation of Rivers State had favoured development from "above". This was the trend during the colonial administration and was adopted after independence. There was a colossal concentration of economic and social infrastructure in the major cities across the country. Rural development was primarily associated with agricultural development by the urban elites (Igbokwe and Ajala, 1995). This pattern gradually turned major urban centres especially the state capitals into attractive centres in the eyes of the rural population. Thus while the cities continually boast of rapid population growth, the rural areas on her part became continually depopulated. It was partly in recognition of this fact and the desire to avoid any possible social and environmental nightmare in the future that led to the introduction of several policies and programmes by successive government in the state. These programmes and policies were all targeted at decentralizing development and taking population pressure away from Port Harcourt the state capital. Some of these programmes were;

a) The government of Alfred Diette Spiff (1967-1975)-The central objective of this administration was captured in the governor's 1968/69 budget speech, "it will be the cardinal point of my government policy to bring the benefit of modern utilities to the rural areas of the state. This measure will be the first step in the state in the development of the sadly neglected areas of the state which with purposeful planning could be transformed into beautiful cities and tourist attractions" (Government of Rivers State, 1976).

This was reaffirmed by the governor in his 1973/74 budget speech "The policy of my government to take development to the rural areas is reaffirmed. It will be pursued with full vigour this year". In line with this vision specific programmes were designed by the administration;

- i) The establishment of a utility board
- ii) The establishment of a special ministries with rural development division
- iii) The establishment of community development committees
- iv) Village Integration Scheme

b)The ZamaniLekwot Regime(July 1975-October 1979)-This administration adopted the policy of the last administration. In addition,the administration encouraged the establishment of Rural Development Association which was seen as a self help organization sponsored by the government to promote rural development. The governor also established a small unit in his office tasked with the responsibility of promoting rural development activities(Government of Rivers State,1976).

c) Chief MelfordOkilo (1979-1983)-The central focus of thisadministration was “Even development and Decentralization”. For the first time money was sent directly to the rural people to develop their localities according to their needs. It encouraged the provision of government services to every urban and district council areas using the rural development committee system. To ease the population pressure on Port Harcourt, the government commissioned the development of seven New Towns;Ekeremor, Boro, Woji, Bori, Ogbia, Abua, and Oyigbo. The New Town scheme was partly seen as a means of meeting up the policy of the federal government in the 3rd National Development Plan(1975-80) on housing. In line with this, the government set out to build 600 housing units of one,two and three bedroom houses in each new town(Government of Rivers State,1980). These houses were to be handed over to the people on completion. This vision was not actualized when the second republic was terminated by the military government in 1983.

d)The FedelisOyakhilome Regime(1984-1986)-This regime from her budgetary statement was “maintain utilities and services in addition to embarking on new projects”. The government invested massively on projects and vigorouslyimplemented increased participation of the rural people in food production. Another point to note was that the administration encouraged communities to engage in self help projects by offering them marching grants.

e)The Anthony Ukpo Regime(August 1986-June 1988)-The regime came in at the time when the Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure(DFRRI) was established as well as the Structural Adjustment Programme(SAP). In order to key into these programmes the state government established the Rivers State Accelerated Integrated Rural Development Programme. The primary objective of the programme was among others, the enhancement of the economic power of the rural dwellers. This by extension meant harnessing the ability of and mobilizing the rural people to effectively utilize their environment for their socio-economic wellbeing.

f)The RotimiAmaechi Regime (October 2007-May 2015)

The government made a firm commitment to Rivers State to rebuild the city of Port Harcourt which had falleninto a terrible state of decay due to huge population pressure. In line with this the Greater Port Harcourt Development Authority was established. This was followed by the preparation of the Greater Port Harcourt Master Plan which covers eight local councils in the state; Port Harcourt, part of Oyigbo, Okrika, Ogu/Bolo, Obio/Akpo, Ikwerre, Okehi, Nchia (Greater Port Harcourt City Brochure 2009). The building of the new city is to make Port Harcourt a mega city.

VI.THE GENESIS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRISES IN THE CITY OF PORT HARCOURT

‘Crises’ is one word that can be used to describe the current socio-economic situation in the city of Port Harcourt. This ‘crises’ is occasioned by the lack of commitment of successive administration in the state to decentralize development. Though policy statements were made on paper but no administration was able to pursue the goals behind it successfully. This singular act is responsible for the situation the state has found itself today; the only state in the country with one city. Development scholars believed that the city today isat breaking and horrifying point in terms of spatial growth and infrastructural development(Ochereome, George and Jimitota,2009). Its rapidly increasing population, the continuous influx of economic activities into the city occasioned by a favourable business environment and the lean finances of the government in power have functioned together to push the city into a ‘Crises’ point, This has left us with several questions that urgently has to be answered as policy makers and development scholars.

This ‘Crises’ is experienced in the housing sector, health, educational, social, economic and physical environment of the city. For Joachin(2007) ‘the city of Port Harcourt has degenerated into a jungle today’. With the lack of commitment on the part of government to promote development from ‘below’the other urban centres in the state had merely been reduced to administrativecentres. They lacked the opportunities to stimulate the needed growth that is expected to trickle down to the surrounding rural communities. Port Harcourt city is viewed by the rural population as holding the resources that will bring them out of the yoke of poverty and economic deprivation. The implication is that while the city will continue to boast of astronomically rising population, the rural communities in the state will continue to suffer from depopulation occasioned by rural-city migration. The over 1.5million persons that the city is currently housing has already created some nightmarish problems to the government and residents.

One major area this “crises” can easily be noticed even by a first time visitor to the city is in the area of housing. Successive government in the state had done little or nothing in the area of public housing provision especially for the low income earners. Housing provision has been completely left in the hands of the private sector in the city that are desirous of making huge profit from their investment. The high cost of building materials in the city has also affected housing supply. Thus with a large population chasing the few available stock in the housing market accommodation in the city is almost out of the reach of the common man especially in the main Port Harcourt township. The desire to have a “roof-over-head” by those who could not afford the high rent in the planned residential areas had fuelled the development and spread of marginal settlements in the city. Today, there are about thirty-two of such identifiable marginal settlements in the city housing over 200,000-500,000 persons (Kio-Lawson, 2013). While the cost of residential accommodation can be considered to be on a relatively high side when compared with rent in some cities in neighbouring states, the spatial expansion of these marginal settlements is not without its own social and environment problems. With the increasing profile of the city in cultism, kidnapping, drugs, armed robbery and other forms of criminality the government and residents of the city believe that these settlements are providing “dens” for these criminals. The last administration of Hon. Ameachi succeeded in clearing two of such settlements during his eight years reign. The present administration of Barrister Wike is already threatening to destroy about fifteen of such settlements with high profile criminal records with the Nigerian police.

Table 1. Rise in yearly rent in residential accommodation in main Port Harcourt Township between 2000 and 2014 (in Naira)

Accommodation type	2000	2005	2010	2015
One bedroom apartment	30,000	60,000	100,000	250,000
Two bedroom apartment	50,000	100,000	200,000	300,000
Three bedroom apartment	75,000	150,000	250,000	400,000
One room self contain	15,000	30,000	70,000	150,000
One room apartment	12,000	24,000	30,000	60,000

Source: Compiled from author’s field work

Table 2. Current Cost of Rental Residential Accommodation (per annum) in the medium density areas of Port Harcourt, Owerri and Aba (in Naira)

Accommodation type	Port Harcourt	Owerri	Aba
One Room Apartment	60,000	30,000	36,000
One Bedroom Flat	250,000	75,000	120,000
Two Bedroom Flat	300,000	150,000	170,000
Three Bedroom Flat	400,000	200,000	230,000
Self-Contain	150,000	70,000	90,000

Source: Kio-Lawson and Dekor, 2014

The health sector is not left out in the “crises” that has engulfed the city. The available health facilities have been over stretched to a breaking point. There have been frequent calls from members of the public on the government to recruit more doctors and other medical staff to enable the government owned hospitals and health centres cope with the pressure on the demand for their services. At the government owned Braithwaite Memorial Specialist Hospital, it is common to see one doctor attending to over thirty patients a day. The development and spread of health centres across the state by the last administration of Hon. Ameachi to bring some measure of relief to the health sector in the state has been hindered by the shortage of medical personnel. This singular factor combined with the lack of adequate equipment in the public health institutions in the city and incessant strike by medical staff working for the government had provided a fertile market in the city for private hospitals and clinics with very exorbitant charges. Traditional herbalists are also striving in the city providing health care for the poor who could not withstand the frustration a patient has to undergo in public hospitals before getting medical attention or afford the exorbitant charges in the private hospitals.

In the area of public water supply, there was a complete breakdown of the existing structures long before the last administration of Hon. Ameachi took over. The four major pumping stations in the city are no longer functioning. Government officials at the water stations had claimed the machines were not provided to supply water to the present population in the city hence the breakdown. Thus the public water taps that were popular in the streets of the city in the 70's up to the early 90's have disappeared replaced by private commercial boreholes. Commercial water hawkers have taken over the business of supplying water to residential homes in the city. It will cost an average household size of five persons six hundred naira weekly to provide water for the family through a commercial water hawker in the city(Kio-Lawson and Dekor,2014)

Despite the Amnesty Programme of the federal government which many believed had brought relative peace to the Niger Delta region, there are still chains of cult and militant groups working against each other to remain relevant in the political and economic landscape of the city. The high level of joblessness among these youths driven away from the rural areas by poverty and misery, and the desire to survive in a very expensive city had driven them into criminality. The frequent clashes among the various cult groups in the city and their nefarious activities had made the city unsafe to live and do business.

With the ever increasing population and commercial enterprise the city is ranked among the busiest cities in the country. This has subjected the various classes of roads to immense pressure. Residents have to contend with terrifying traffic hold ups to get to the office, to drop kids at school, to get to the market place. The implication of this development is an increase in travel time.

Table 3. Service availability in the major 20 urban centres in Rivers State

No.	Urban Centre	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
1	Port Harcourt	1	10	60	85	20	10	6	1	3	1	2	15	1	120	10	25	20	
2	Bori	1	1	10	14	3	4	5	-	-	-	-	4	-	10	5	5	3	
3	Okehi	1	1	6	7	4	2	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	2	3	4	
4	Omuku	1	1	10	12	5	4	3	-	-	-	-	4	-	10	4	4	5	
5	Ahoada	1	1	8	6	5	2	3	-	-	-	-	3		6	3	4	5	
6	Ngo	1	1	2	2	1	1	2					2	-	2	-	2	-	
7	Buguma	1	1	3	3	1	1	2					2	-	4	1	2	-	
8	Kpor	1	1	5	5	1	2	2					1	-	3	1	2	-	
9	Emuohua	1	1	5	5	-	2	3					2	-	3	2	2	-	
10	Ayama	1	1	3	4	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	1		2	1	2	-	
11	Isiokpo	1	1	4	4	2	2	3	-	-	-	-	2		3	2	3	-	
12	Tombia	-	1	2	4	-	1	-					2	-	3	-	2	-	
13	Degema	1	1	3	3	1	1	2	-				1	-	2	-	1	-	
14	Oyibo		1	7	7	5	2	-					2		6	3	3	5	
15	Norwa	-	1	2	3	1	1	-					1	-	4	1	3	-	
16	Bonny		1	8	5	5	2	-					2	-	8	1	2	5	
17	Nchia	-	1	5	6	4	1	-					1	-	7	2	4	3	
18	Omuma	-	1	4	4	2	1	-					1	-	2	1	1	-	
19	Ogu	-	1	2	1	1	1	-					1	-	2	1	1	-	
20	Opobo	-	1	2	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2	-	

1.General Hospital 2.Primary health centre 3.Clinics 4.Vocational/Secondary school 5.Police station 6.Communication services 7.Courts 8.Teaching Hospital 9.University 10.Polytechnic 11.Airport 12.Market 13.School of Nursing 14.Hotel/Guest house 15.Motor park 16.Government Ministries 17.Banks

Power supply in the city is dropping by the day. Despite the assistance given to the Power Holding Company by the state government and the Niger Delta Development Commission no significant improvement has been recorded. The reason advanced by the electricity company is that its facilities are over loaded by the astronomically increasing demand for electricity by the ever increasing human population and commercial activities in the city. They disclosed that the city is rapidly expanding daily and that most of the newly developed areas in the city are not included in the power distribution master plan of the company. The company has managed to include such areas in the power distribution plan and this has grossly affected power distribution in the city. Study has shown that average power supply in some residential neighbourhoods in the city is as low as seven hours daily(Kio-Lawson and Dekor,2014). Most enterprises in order to remain in business are depending on private electricity generator which means increase in running cost. This also means the consumer paying more for the goods and services. The city today is also ranked among the most expensive cities in the country. The population of Port Harcourt has grown astronomically surpassing the population of the other nineteen urban centres by a wide margin between 1963 and 2006(see table 4). This wide gap is also reflected in the Rivers State urban hierarchy presented in table 5.

Table 4. Population growth between Port Harcourt and the other Urban Centres from 1963-2006

S/No	Urban Centre	1963	1982	2002	2006
1	Port Harcourt	234672	574695	967886	1000908
2	Bori	15109	25583	284959	292942
3	Okehi	15315	23473	262470	270485
4	Omoku	15305	23450	262420	270435
5	Ahoada	15105	22540	250178	258143
6	Ngo	14625	19147	247145	255110
7	Buguma	12875	17397	229497	237462
8	Nkpor	11725	16247	219415	227380
9	Emuohua	10625	15147	213171	221136
10	Ayama	10565	15087	184959	192924
11	Isiokpo	10150	14672	172527	180492
12	Tombia	9985	14507	140583	148548
13	Degema	9865	14387	131941	139906
14	Oyigbo	9675	14197	117418	125383
15	Norwa	8995	13117	108627	116592
16	Bonny	8755	113277	104583	112548
17	Nchia	8625	12565	71865	79830
18	Omumma	5650	10172	68608	76573
19	Ogu	950	5472	66367	74332
20	Opobo	750	5272	60991	68950

Source: Nigeria Population Commission

In table 5 presented below, Port Harcourt is the only first order urban centre in the State. The theoretical urban hierarchy order holds that the first order settlement in the hierarchy is twice the population size of the second order settlement and thrice the population of the third. Taking a look at table 5 there are no second and third order urban centres in the state. The urban centre after Port Harcourt in the hierarchy is Bori which is a fourth order town. The primary reason behind this wide gap can be attributed to the policies of successive government which had always favoured the state capital in terms of spatial development. This development had hindered the growth of other urban centres into city status or world class urban centres. There is over concentration of population in Port Harcourt occasioned by over concentration of investment and infrastructure in the city. This has resulted into structural weakness in the distribution of population among the urban centres since 1963.

The population data between 1963 and 2002 shows that Port Harcourt population alone constitute over fifty per cent of the population of the twenty urban centres added together between 1963 and 1983 and about twenty-five per cent between 1983 and 2002. It can be concluded therefore that “Primacy” is the main feature of the urban system in Rivers State as reflected in table 6.

Table 5. Rivers State Urban hierarchy using the 2006 population

Urban Centre	Population Size	Order
Port Harcourt	1000908	1 ST
Bori	292942	4 th
Okehi	270485	4 th
Omoku	270435	4 th
Ahoada	255143	4 th
Andoni	243110	4 th
Buguma	237462	5 th
Kpor	227380	5 th
Emuohua	221136	5 th
Ayama	192924	5 th
Isiokpo	180492	5 th
Tombia	148548	7 th
Degema	139906	7 th

Oyigbo	125383	8 th
Norwa	116592	9 th
Bonny	112584	9 th
Nchia	79830	13 th
Omumma	76573	13 th
Ogu	74332	13 th
Opobo	68940	14 th

Source: NPC, 2006

Dekor, 2015

Table 6. Primacy Indicator of the Urban system in Rivers State using the 1963-2006 population

	Year			
	1963	1982	2002	2006
Percentage of Port Harcourt urban population to the other urban centres	53.4	65.0	23.2	23.0
Primacy ratio	0.53	1.53	0.23	0.23
Primacy index	1.87	1.53	4.31	4.31

Source: Dekor, 2015

VII. THE GEOGRAPHY OF UNDERDEVELOPED RURAL REGION SURROUNDING PORT HARCOURT IN RIVERS STATE

The colossal concentration of public infrastructure in Port Harcourt at the expense of other towns gave it an edge when the choice for a new state capital was to be decided. In order to stop the continuous depopulation of the hinterland and to avert the problems usually associated with congested cities the pioneering administration of Diette Spiff set out as its central agenda the development of neglected rural region of the state through the provision of modern infrastructure. This was intended to raise more beautiful cities and tourist towns beside Port Harcourt. However, his administration achieved little or nothing in this direction. The visions of successive administrations from the time of Diette Spiff to the present were not different; developing the other urban centres into economically viable and well developed growth points. But close to fifty years after the creation of Rivers State, Port Harcourt had remained the only city in the state. Considering the economic status of the city and the state, several questions could be raised by development scholars. From the present political structure and by the definition of urban centres using population as criteria there are over thirty urban centres beside the state capital. Twenty three of these urban centres are serving as local council headquarters. These urban centres were looked upon to serve as growth points expected to stimulate development that will on the long run trickle down to the surrounding rural communities. Several years after their creation these centres have functioned as mere administrative centres. Despite the fact that money released from the ‘top’ to the local councils is hardly enough to tackle the developmental challenges in the areas, the little released is often channeled into the pockets of their political representatives. In terms of social and economic infrastructural development, these urban centres are miles away from the global definition of urban centres.

Rivers State stands among the highest oil producing states in Nigeria. From 1958 when oil was first discovered in its rural community of Oloibiri, the state has contributed immensely to the growth of the Nigerian economy and that of the multi-national oil companies doing business in the country. It is also on record that both the Nigerian State and the multi-national oil companies doing business in the state had not been fair to the people in the area of provision of public infrastructure that would have helped to better the well being of the people. This neglect had sparked off several protests from the people both in the past and present that had resulted into both economic and humanitarian tragedy (Ukeji, 2001). Today besides Port Harcourt, the totality of the geographical area called Rivers State is still a picture of poverty and deprivation with a large proportion of her population cut off from the basic amenities that would have given them descent existence.

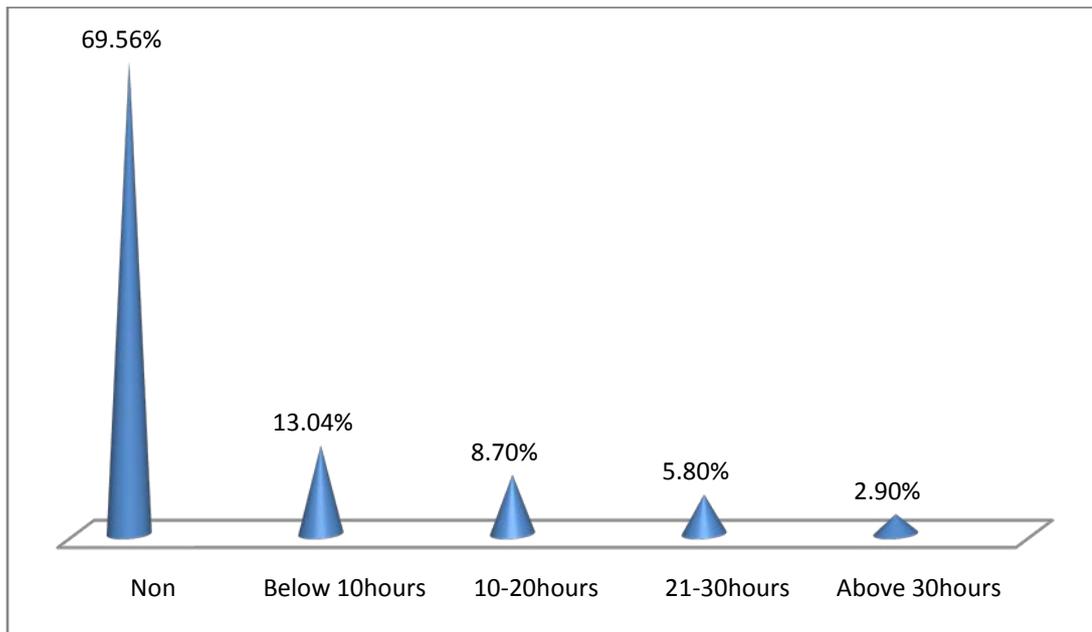


Figure 3 Availability of public power supply in sample communities(average number of hours per week)

Table 7 Social Conditions in Rivers State as at 2006

S/NO	Social Condition	Percentage of the population
1	Access to pipe borne water	12. 42
2	Access to electricity	18. 30
3	Firewood as the main source of cooking fuel	67. 60
4	Poverty level (income) 2004	40. 65
5	Food poverty level with less than 2,900 cal, intake	37.56
6	Probability of birth of not surviving to age 40	24.00
7	Attainment of primary school	33.40
8	Attainment of secondary school	49.50

Source :Ademola, 2008

Table 8 Human Development Index for Rivers State

Life expectancy	0.563
Educational index	0.590
GDP	0.620
HDI	0.591

SourceAdemola, 2008

Though the Human Development Index in Rivers State presented table 8 is slightly higher than the national average which is 0.453 but if we have to compare it with other gas and oil producing regions of the world it is significantly lower. The HDI of such countries like Saudi Arabia is 0.800, Libya 0.7999. Kuwait 0.844(Ademola, 2008). Secondly though the HDI gives a picture of the socio-economic and material growth of a region it cannot be used in totality to measure development. The reason is that it is not adequate enough to present a proper picture of the state of poverty in Rivers State. Variables such as potable water, health, electricity, roads etc. are not included in the summation of the HDI. Access to pipe borne water is very poor. Besides the picture in table 7, an analysis of thesources of drinking water in the sample communities gave us a very sad picture in figure 4.

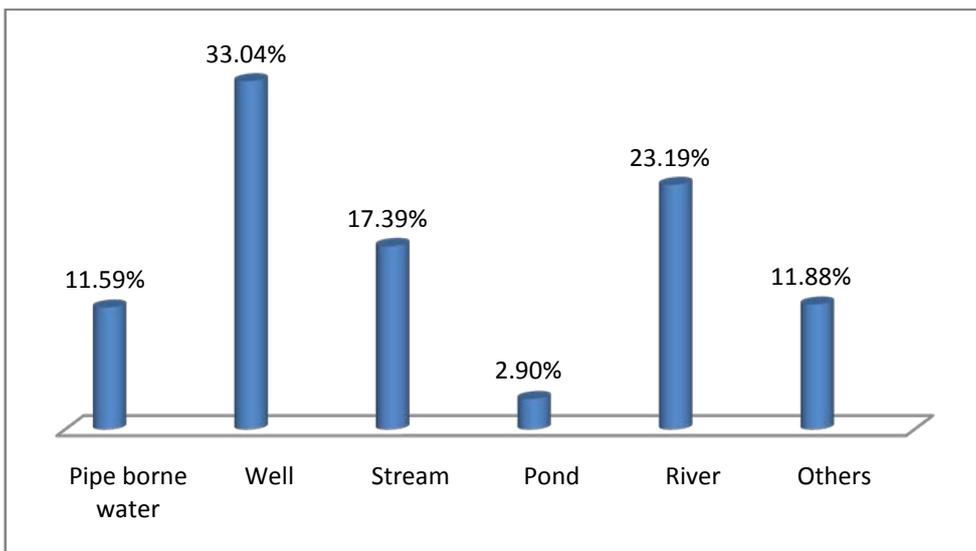


Figure 4: Primary sources of drinking water in the sample communities

The most common health facility in the rural region is the primary health centres that are inadequately equipped in terms of personnel and facilities. Another problem is that most of them are not centrally located. The high level of poverty in addition to the poor geography of the region; difficult terrain, poor communication network and inadequate transportation structures has made access to public health facilities difficult (see figure 5).

This bias in the distribution of services has been the greatest factor that has fuelled high level of migration into the city of Port Harcourt from the hinterland. Analysis of the population growth of the city when compared with other urban centres shows an astronomical increase since 1963 as shown in table 4.

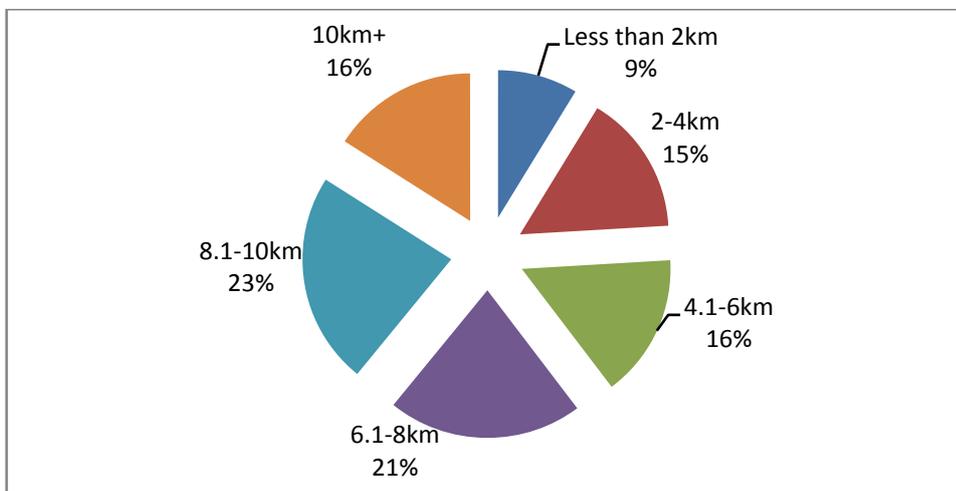


Figure 5: Distance to the nearest public health facility from sample communities.

Basic infrastructure such as portable water and electricity is still a luxury while road to link its rural communities with the outside world is still miles away. The rivers, wells and streams polluted by the activities of oil exploration still remains primary sources of drinking water for the people (see figure 4). The level of poverty in its rural areas has denied many of the rural population access to education which would have provided a remedy to some of the social problems in the area. The government of Hon. Amaechi decided to take education to every community with the establishment of primary schools across the rural communities during his tenure. The schools have refused to attract qualified teachers due to the absence of basic infrastructure needed to sustain life in the rural areas; secondly access to majority of these communities is through the sea. This is always frustrating and costly for the poor teachers. The same story goes for the health facilities located in the rural communities. In most of the health centres located in rural Rivers State, patients are often left at the mercy of nurses. Doctors posted to the health centres hardly report for duty. It is the tradition of most doctors to appear in their duty post once a week. The doctors too have their tales to tell; the rigours

involve in the journey, the lack of adequate facilities to work with and the lack of adequate rural security to give them protection from the hands of kidnappers and rural militants are some of the key factors keeping them away from their duty post. This distance one has to cover to get medical attention in the geography of poor transportation network is also a discouraging factor for the sick in rural Rivers State. In figure 5 above more than 50 per cent of the sample communities must cover a distance of 8km and above to get medical services from the nearest public health facility

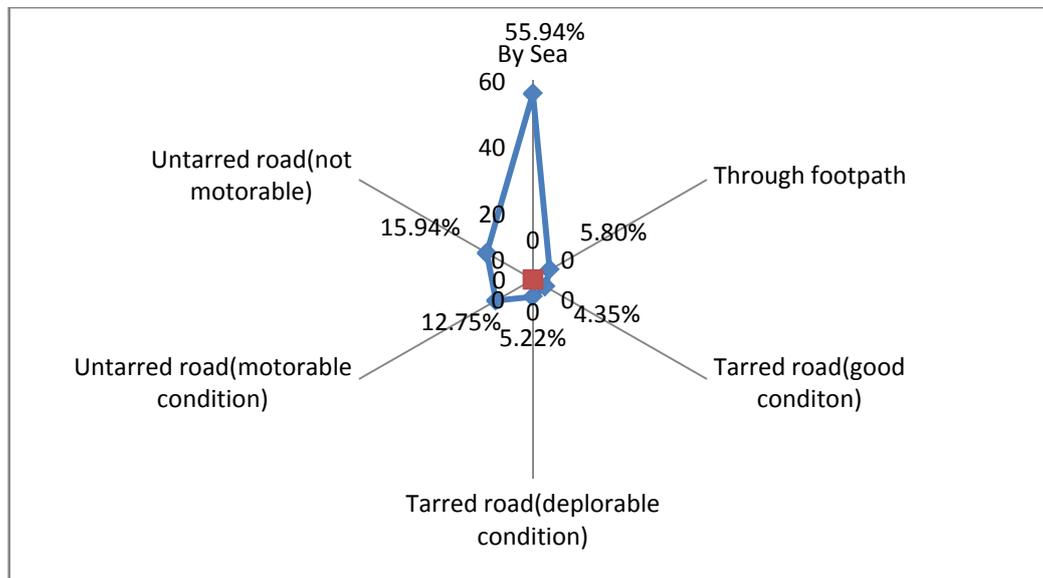


Figure 6. Access to local council headquarter from the sample communities

The local council headquarters play very significant role in the exchange of goods and services between the city and the rural household, enterprise and economies. The population of the city is fed by the products of the rural farmer. This is made possible by urban and city based traders and marketers. Because of the limited market in the rural areas, agricultural products are often taken to the council headquarters where larger markets exist for their products and where urban and city traders easily access them. Accessibility is therefore a key factor and is related in the concept of minimum effort or movement minimization. The ability to get to a destination involves cost which can be measured in time and money. When the cost is on the highside travelling to a place becomes discouraging. Absence of adequate road network as seen in figure 6 to link local council headquarters can hinder agricultural productivity in the rural region. Difficulty in getting to local council headquarters where larger markets exist will ensure that the rural farmer stays within the confine of his subsistence level of production. Embarking on large scale farming will result into wastage since his immediate local environment does not have the market to accommodate such level of production. This explain the reason why rural Rivers State is economical poor and backward. The implication is that the youths in the rural areas do not see agricultural practice as an instrument to change their fortune. The city of Port Harcourt is therefore seen as holding the key to their deliverance from the chains of poverty. This is greatly responsible for the astronomically increasing migration of the rural youths to the city leaving the rural areas in a continuous state of depopulation.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The over concentration of socio-economic activities in Port Harcourt at the expense of other urban centres has resulted into the growth of Port Harcourt into a primate city within the urban system in Rivers State. Available evidence has proved that there are potential urban centres in the state that can be developed into secondary cities based on their population, spatial location and functions. Secondary cities all over the world function to take pressure away from a country's primate city by providing an alternative place to live and do business (Bolay and Robinovich, 2002). Development of other urban centres into secondary cities in Rivers State is necessary to put an end to the skewed development in the state; all demographic and economic activities occurring in just the primate city. It will also on the long run control the growth of Port Harcourt in terms of its population that has been growing at an astronomical rate.

Such secondary cities can also function as markets for the agricultural commodities of the surrounding rural communities as well as administrative and service centres for the hinterland. By playing these roles they could become a bridge between the rural areas

and the primate city of Port Harcourt. Over population does not only affect the spatial size of a city but also the available facilities and the quality of life in the city. Prevention of further decay and threat to the quality of life in the primate city of Port Harcourt can be achieved through the enhancement of the policy of industrialization and administrative decentralization. One way we can achieve this in Rivers State is by giving special attention to the urban centres that has the potential for growth. Location of major industries and infrastructure in such urban centres will generate small scale and information sector industries. This on the long run will lead to the growth of such urban centres into “market towns, gateway towns or service centres”. If this is achieved then these urban centres will eventually become “growth points” or new “growth poles” to a large population thereby reducing the population of Port Harcourt.

Studies have revealed the absence of 2nd and 3rd order towns in Rivers State but 4th order towns like Bori, Omoku, Okehi and Ahoada have the potential to develop into the status of secondary cities based on their population, accessibility, services, functions and spatial location. Studies had revealed that the major factor that stood as a constraint to the development of secondary cities despite the efforts of successive government was the absence of institutional framework and secondary city development policies in the state. Development of these urban centres into secondary cities must start with the setting up of institutional framework for physical planning within the context of the Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning law (Decree No. 88 of 1992 and Decree No. 18 of 1999). The law stipulates the establishment of a Physical Planning Commission at the federal level, an Urban Development Board at the state level and a Planning Authority at the local council level. The development of these urban centres should not be left in the hand of the State Ministry of Urban Development as presently practiced. In the past, development of these urban centres had been tied to rural development policies and programmes. This was an error and stood as obstacles to their development. To make a positive progress, there should be a deliberate policy targeted directly at the development of these urban centres into secondary cities. Such policy should ensure that certain classes of firms that will help in stimulating economic growth be encouraged by the government to locate in some of these urban centres where these firms are compatible with the available local labour, needs and resources. This method will promote development outside the over congested primate city of Port Harcourt. Additional strategy that should be adopted is the selection of these 4th order towns on positive bases in the distribution and development of socio-economic infrastructure. This is an indirect way of pushing economic activities to locate in 4th order urban centres. The government should also adopt deliberate and carefully planned economic activities in these 4th order urban centres to magnet population to the centres. This strategy must be supported by a deliberate, timely and aggressive development of the public housing sector in the locality. Without any argument we know that this strategy may be a long term plan but within the context of good governance and careful implementation of the consciously planned programmes it will help to sustain the population and growth in the locality.

However, precautionary measures should be taken by the government in the development of such secondary cities to ensure that no damage is done to the social structure, natural environment or planetary system of the local people. Any development that shall be put in place should not reduce the value of the resources that gives the local people means of livelihood or employment opportunities.

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