

Gov. Amaechi Tackles Youths Unemployment

By Eze Chukwuemeka



I arrived Port Harcourt the Rivers State, Nigeria capital city on the 22nd October, 2011 after a two months hiatus away on a much needed vacation to recover from the exhaustion that was a result of the break neck schedule I had to contend with during the last April Polls in Rivers State; to be flung headlong into an equally busy schedule as a result of the three major events held in the State to commemorate the historical and landmark judgment by the Supreme Court of Nigeria that brought Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi to power as the Governor of the State.

The first stop was the thanksgiving service on 23rd October, where the Governor described the Supreme Court Judgement that brought him to power as an Act of God. The second event, a colloquium, featuring an esteemed panel of legal luminaries in the country, was held on 25th October, 2011 the exact date four years ago when the landmark Supreme Court judgment, lauded as unprecedented in judicial rulings in the country, ruled in favour of Rt. Hon. Chibuike Amaechi, endorsing him as the authentic flag-bearer of PDP in the place of his kinsman Sir Celestine Omehia, who had with the support of party leadership in the state hijacked Amaechi's mandate and following PDP's victory at the polls now held sway as Governor of the State albeit temporarily. The third event was an interactive session the Governor held with the Rivers State Youths on 26th October, 2011.

In a soon to be released article titled '*25th October, 2007: Supreme Court, Obasanjo, Amaechi, Omehia and the k-leg episode – divine or devilish?*' I would be spotlighting the thanksgiving service and the colloquium on the landmark Supreme Court judgment of 25th October, 2007. However for the purpose of this discourse I would like to focus on the Youth Interactive Session ably anchored by an embodiment of the Youth struggle in the State and member representing the Asari Toru/Degema/Akuku Toru Federal Constituency in the Federal House of Representatives, Hon. Dr. Dawari George, who prior to his election into the House, served meritoriously as Honourable Commissioner of Energy in the State.

At the interactive session, various suggestions on strategies to curb the malaise of unemployment amongst youths were proffered. The Governor used the opportunity of the event to reiterate Government's commitment to capacity building and reassured the Youth of that their issues were at the front burner of his administration's policies.

My interest in the event piqued as the Governor took time to enlighten both supporters and critics of his vision about the immediate needs and most importantly the future of Rivers State Youth. This interactive session was also unique because contrary to what Amaechi critics said when such sessions were held previously, calling it a show to canvass for votes for the election", this event served to prove the genuine concern the Governor has for this demographic group often times the brunt of any major lull in the economy.

In choosing to thoroughly handle the subject of unemployment at the event, the Governor who also serves as Chairman of the Governors Forum in the country was bringing to public consciousness the need for immediate intervention by government and the private sector working

together to ensure that Youth are gainfully employed especially at a time when anti patriotic elements can prey on them to ferment trouble in the polity. It is a known fact that the idle mind is the devil's workshop.

Recent studies have shown that 90% of crimes being committed today in our nation are masterminded by the youths, these in itself is considered a direct outcome of unemployment amongst the youths who after several years of graduation from high institutions still find themselves in the job market. A publication of Punch Newspapers of 28th October, 2011 titled "28 million Nigerian Youth unemployed – Minister" brings to fore the inherent danger facing the nation if efforts are not made at Federal and State level to address this malaise. In the report, the Minister of Youths Development, Mallam Bolaji Abdullahi, said that of the 67million youths in the country, 28.14m (a 42 per cent ratio) were unemployed and 80 percent of this number had a maximum qualification of SSCE. He spoke during the inauguration of the Youth Enterprise With Innovation in Nigeria Competition for North Central Zone, in Ilorin on Thursday, where he is quoted as saying "The Federal Government alone cannot create jobs. No matter how well-intentioned it is. There is the need for the private sector to support government in job creation and youth empowerment. If we do not find jobs for our youths, the devil will find jobs for them". Rt. Hon. Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi the Governor of Rivers State while interacting with the youths acknowledged this fact of the enormous challenges in tackling youths unemployment when he said, "youth empowerment is the most challenging and most difficult aspect of governance".

THE STRATEGIES AND STEPS GOVERNOR CHIBUIKE ROTIMI AMAECHI INTENDS TO EMPLOY TO ADDRESS THE MALAISE OF UNEMPLOYMENT AMONGST THE YOUTHS IN RIVERS STATE:-

Below are some of the plans highlighted by Amaechi that will hopefully alleviate unemployment:

- He stated that the Rivers State Government has signed a long lease contract with Siat Firm to revamp and manage the RISONPALM. According to him, when fully operational it would create about 4,000 job opportunities.
- Additionally, the Rivers State Government has commenced paper work to establish and develop a N20bn Agric Scheme. According to him, "The scheme would encompass a settlement and cluster units in different areas of agriculture and is geared towards providing jobs for the teeming youths of our State". He said the project is expected to have about 300 housing units, a processing industry and primary schools. This multi billion Naira Agricultural Scheme will be splintered into three areas of the State housing 100 families each in the 100 housing units to be constructed.
- Construction is now ongoing to construct a multi-purpose Shopping Mall located at the Front gate axis of the Government House. On completion the mall will employ about 600 youths.
- The state is embarking on establishing a Banana Farm at Ogoni where about 200 workers

will be engaged.

- The Rivers State Government has established a Fish farm at Buguma where many youths are today engaged.
- He reiterated government's commitment to revamp most of its ailing companies to create jobs for the youths based on Public/private partnership to avert the pitfalls of the old system. In this regard, both the SUPABOD and the Olympia Hotel will soon be leased out.

EDUCATION

Apart from the areas mentioned above, the Governor stated that the Rivers State Government under his watch apart from retraining its Teachers has employed more Teachers to teach in the new model schools. The State he said has offered scholarships to over 2,000 students in Nigerian Higher Institutions and has spent about N5bn for her students in foreign Intuitions. The State is building a world Class University which when completed will turn out well equipped graduates that will hold their own in any field and compete with the best in the world. In Rivers State University of Science and Technology the Rivers State Government is building a hostel that will accommodate about 6, 000 students and accommodation for all the Lecturers of the university. The university according to him will be fully ICT compliant. He stated plans to buy a computer for every student in the secondary schools to ensure that the state is ICT compliant. It's important to point out here that the Rivers State Government is among the few States in Nigeria that offer free education and free health delivery to its people but stands apart as the only State offering free education, free sandals, free books and free uniform in Nigeria. About 200 primaries schools have been set up in 200 communities, a feat that no other state is yet to accomplish.

HEALTH

So far, about 100 medical Doctors have been employed to staff most of the Health Centres in the rural areas. The Rivers State Government has currently embarked upon the exercise to eradicate malaria vectors from the State. The Health Centre at the Rivers State University of Science and Technology will soon be opened to the public. The State was lauded last year for its daily commissioning of a health centre over a 60 day period in 60 communities in its 60-60-60 initiative. The Dental Hospital located in the Garrison area of Port Harcourt will soon be opened. All of these will also generate employment amongst the youths in the State.

SECURITY AND PUBLIC POWER SUPPLY

The State intends to purchase two equipped and modern Helicopters for aerial surveillance to fight crime in the State. Considering that foreign investors can only operate in an enabling environment, the issue of tackling the state of security is of primary importance because it has a multiplier effect that includes employment generation. The Power Sector in the State is working tirelessly to ensure an end to epileptic power supply in the State by the year 2014 this would also serve to boost employment in the state and will also encourage entrepreneurship among the Youths.

In conclusion, Rt Hon. Chibuike Amaechi Rivers State Speaker of the State House of Assembly from 1999-2007; Chairman, conference of speakers of State Houses of Assembly in Nigeria. (1999 – 2000) Governor of Rivers State (2007 – date), Chairman of the Governors Forum in Nigeria, a humanist, radical and a pragmatist added another feather to his cap that day of the interactive session by enlightening Nigerians on what good governance is all about.. Going by the look of hope on the faces of majority of the Youths in attendance at the end of the event, it had become glaringly obvious that he had become a symbol of sheer tenacity and resolve to succeed against all odds. It became quite clear to me that Amaechi had finally shed whatever “Toga” that had plagued him during the course of his campaign for second tenure, when opponents were vocal about his complicity in all that ailed Rivers State giving that he held sway as Speaker for 8 years, 3 of which were during the dark days that preceded the end of Sir Peter Odili’s tenure. Suffice it to say, Amaechi has proven his mettle and shown in the last four years that the fateful decision of 25th October 2007 is one that people of the state who thronged out enmasse to the streets of Port Harcourt on hearing the good news four years ago will never rue.

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