

# **Public Policy and Development Problems in Bayelsa State: A Review of the Education Policy of Former Governor Seriake Dickson Administration**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines public policy and the problems of development in Bayelsa State with a specific review of the Education Policy of former Governor Seriake Dickson administration. Public policy is an importance mechanism for governance towards development at any level. In Nigeria, government formulates public policies in addressing developmental challenges of the people and those policies serve as instruments for improving the lives of the citizens. More so, the pertinence of education to the realization of a developed system tied down to an effective and efficient policy process which plays a key role in nations overall goals. The research employed secondary means of data collection and utilized content analysis in its findings. The study frames its arguments with the people- centered paradigm. Major findings revealed that the educational policies promoted the administration of Seriake Dickson, but some challenges occurred despite the over 100 billion naira votes to the education sector by the previous and present governments and effective implementation of the education policy was hampered by hasty decisions, political instability, poor planning and mismanagement as well as the subvention policy issue . The paper, therefore, recommends among other things that: there should be a very strong political will in implementing the educational policies in the state, public awareness for the continues implementation of the educational policies by the previous administration should be given full attention. Also, the current administration should review the subvention policy provided by the past administration.

**Keywords: Administration; Development; Education; People-Centered; Public Policy**

## **Introduction**

The world over, effective and efficient policies have been identified as the driver of accelerated development. This assumption has greatly gained prominence in the contemporary global scene. Public policies play crucial role and also an instrument to the development and underdevelopment of a state. And couple with the emergence of educational reform in Nigeria, particularly with improvement of all aspects of the educational policies towards prioritizing its public policy efforts in its implementation strategies. However, most of these policies are beclouded with politics and implementation bottlenecks. The politicization of public policies in Africa has led to the formulation of overambitious policies by political parties to win political capital coupled with excessive bureaucratic procedures. An example is Nigeria's "free education for all" policy which could not established a strong public education system but rather got many choosing private education as a better alternative (Makinde, 2005, cited in Imurana, Haruna and Kofi, 2014).

Bayelsa State is without exception, the developmental aspects following the formulation of the education policy and its comprehensive coverage made it looked overambitious. It appears not surprising that the policy is struggling to achieve set objectives. As a result of the policy making process and during the formulation stage, many public policies inevitably face challenges in the implementation stage, making it difficult to address the major issues for which the policies are established.

Furthermore, Bayelsa State has formulated a lot of public policies in education, in other to solve the educational

problems of various ways since the creation of the state from the old Rivers State in 1996 by the then military head of state, late Gen.Sanni Abacha. The formulation of the various educational policies started in 1999, when late D.S.P Alamieyeseigha emerged as governor of the state. He saw the need to advance the educational deficiencies of his people and consequently established the Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island and made provision to send its lecturers abroad to obtain relevant qualifications to manage the citadel of learning. Also to militate against youth unemployment, cultism, youth restiveness and militancy, he established the Bayelsa State College of Arts and Science Agudama – Epie in order to produce Ordinary National Diploma (OND) certificates and provided automatic scholarship awards for university education in Nigerian and foreign universities for NDU junior academic staff and other indigenes in the state to further upgrade. Later, D.S.P Alamieyeseigha was impeached for money laundry in 2005 and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan his then deputy governor of Bayelsa State until December 12, 2005, was sworn in as governor of Bayelsa State.

Dr. Goodluck Jonathan administration maintained the legacy of late D.S.P Alamieyeseigha education policies until 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2017, when he was elected as Vice President to late Umar Musa Yar’dua. Thereafter, Chief Timipre Sylva emerged as the Executive Governor of Bayelsa State. The efforts made by Sylva administration in repositioning the educational sector as a mechanism for human capital development prompted him to formulate some policies within the state. Having identified earlier that education is a major tool and a strategic lever for socio-economic transformation. This notion corroborated with the vision of the ministry of education which sees “education as a tool for the total socio-economic and political empowerment of every citizen of Bayelsa, irrespective of gender, age, geographical location or terrain and tribe and to make Bayelsa economically vibrant and politically stable.” In the same position, the mission statement of the ministry implores the “provision of sound educational policy for effective and efficient management of our schools, the provision of the standard educational facilities to ensure equal access by all citizens and to reduce the level of illiteracy to its barest minimum. The administration of Chief Timipre Sylva masterfully sustained the foreign scholarship scheme introduced by previous administrations, he scrapped the then College of Arts and Science and established the College of Education and sited it at Okpoma town in Brass local government (John, 2019).

Chief Timipre Sylva administration embarked on a comprehensive renovation of schools and built new ones during his tenure. Also, several capacity building programmes were mounted for teachers in the state. He further introduced some policies which include; the promotion of a friendly early child care and development education in public and private schools in 2012; the establishment of model primary/secondary schools across the eight LGAs of the state; and the recruitment of 3000 teachers and retraining of 4500 teachers in 2012. Timipre Sylva viewed on the prevalence poverty among parents, resolved and paid WAEC, NECO and NABTEB fees for students in public schools. A total sum of N83M was expended in 2008 and N163Million in 2010 on the examinations. More so, a fleet of free school bus was also introduced to commute pupils to and from schools at no cost. These bold steps introduced by Timipre Sylva increased enrollment, completion rate and drastically reduced truancy. Timipre Sylva went further to work on 14 Schools in Yenagoa and they were all fenced and beautified in order to put a stop to threat of encroachment and activities of reckless vandals. Then, public schools had conducive learning environment under his administration. Sylva was the first to implement the New Salary scale for the Niger Delta University lecturers and still retained the state bursary scheme for students within Nigerian universities and the foreign scholarship in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine respectively (Jackson, 2011).

Later, Timipre Sylva was removed from the Supreme Court over tenure expiration and illegal stay of office and Nestor K. Binabo was sworn in as acting Governor from 27<sup>th</sup> January till 14<sup>th</sup> February 2012, and he maintained former Governor Sylva legacy for the short period and in 14<sup>th</sup> February 2012, Governor Seriake Dickson emerged as the Executive Governor of Bayelsa State and due to the need for qualitative education, he declared emergency in the education sector and gave immediate order for free education in both primary and secondary schools in the entire state. Governor Seriake Dickson then in a determined effort to restore the lost glory of the

educational system of the state christened it “Bayelsa Restoration Agenda on Education and he still on course pending when his tenure will expire and he added the subvention policy to high institution to the state without considering the protest of higher institutions staff, asking him to put a stop to the subvention policy as its send danger to the education sector in the state.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to examine public policy and the development problems in Bayelsa State, with a review of the education policy of former Governor Seriake Dickson administration.

The specific objectives include:

- i. To investigate the extent public policy brings development in Bayelsa State
- ii. To review the education policy of former Governor Seriake Dickson administration in Bayelsa State
- iii. To suggest possible ways of implementing effective and efficient educational policies in the state

### **Review of Related Literature**

This aspect will document existing literatures that are relevant to the research work and the literatures will help contribute to knowledge.

### **Conceptualising Public Policy**

According to Egonmwan (1991) public policy is sometimes referred to as “government policy” It is ‘whatever government chooses to do or not to do’ (Dye 1972 :). In the same line, Frederick (1962) defined public policy as a proposed course of action of a government which provides challenges and opportunities which the policy was supposed to utilize and overcome in efforts to reach a goal or realise an objective (cited in Epelle, 2011: 54).

For Basu (2012) public policies are those, which are, developed by governmental bodies and officials, though non-governmental actors and agencies may also exact direct or indirect pressure or influence in the policy-making process. The special characteristics of public policies as differentiated from other policies emanate from the fact that they are formulated by what David Easton has term the “authorities” in a political system, namely “elders, paramount chiefs, executives, legislators, judges, administrators, councilors, monarchs, and the like”.

There are certain implications of the concept of public policy. First, purposive or resulted-oriented action rather than random behaviour is the hallmark of public policy. Public policies in modern political systems are not chance happenings. Second, Public policy refers to the action or decisional pattern by public administrators on a particular issue over a period rather than their separate discrete decisions on that matter in ad hoc fashion. Third, policy is what government actually does and what subsequently happens, rather than what they intend to do or say they are going to do. Fourth, public policy may be either positive or negative in form. Positively, it may involve some form of government action regarding any issue or problem; negatively, it may involve a decision by government officials not to take action on a matter on which government opinion, attitude or action is asked for. Lastly, public policy, at least in its positive form, is based on law and is authoritative. It has a legal sanction behind it which is potentially coercive in nature and is binding on all citizens.

In a similar line, Abdulsalami (1998) in Ezeani (2006) public policy refers to hard patterns of resource allocation represented by projects and programmes designed to respond to perceived public problems or challenges requiring governmental action for their solution. Implicit in the above definition is that public policy is what governments actually do and not what they intend doing.

### **Development**

Onah (2006) assumed that development means a high national income, accompanied by a market economy. To these scholars, development is seen in terms of the structure and growth of the national economy which is indicated by high per-capita income and the annual rate of growth in the national income. The idea of the meaning of development has come under serious attack based on the fact that development is more than per-

capita income. To them development should be concerned with mankind. To this end, development is conceived as a state of human –wellbeing. In the word of Rodney (1969) cited by Salami (2004) development is a many sided process which at the level of individual implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being.

Todaro (2002) sees development as a “multi-dimensional process involving there organization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system. This involves in addition to improvement of income and output, radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and belief”. Todaro’s position gives the meaning, which the concept of development assumes whenever it is discussed in relation to countries.

Seer (2000) succinctly defines development as appreciable and uniform improvement in the general living standard of people within a nation to the extent of eliminating or significantly reducing poverty, unemployment and inequality. Seer’s definition sees development as an exclusive national question. According to Seers, the questions to ask about a country’s development are therefore: what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this is a period of development for the country concerned. However, the elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment demand global restructuring of relationship. Salami (2004) sees development as a constant process of transformations and it is a widely participated process intended to bring about social and material advancement, equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the people through their gaining greater control over their resources. Agbakoba (2003) posits that development is a derivative of a country’s history, endowments, experience, aspiration, values and vision which underscores the necessity and urgency of improving the well-being of the people through their active participation.(Cited in Attai, Orokpo, Ogbole and Ojonemi, 2012).

#### **A Review of former Governor Seriake Dickson Administration Education Policy in Bayelsa State**

When Governor Henry Seriake Dickson took over governance of Bayelsa State on the 14<sup>th</sup> February 2012, at a time when the state was the hot bed of militants, the first thing he did was to declare a state of emergency on education. The decadent state of education especially at the primary and secondary education levels at the time compelled him to do that. Also, there was no single boarding secondary school in the state. This was exactly the situation Dickson found the state and decided to attack the problems directly. The genesis of this generational transformation in this critical sector can, as a matter of fact, was historically located in his first inaugural address to the good people of Bayelsa State, precisely on February 14, 2012, wherein he declared the immediate commencement of free and compulsory education for all Bayelsans at the primary and post-primary levels. Former Governor Dickson’s famous inaugural address read in part:

In the course of our campaign, we promised massive investment in education, critical infrastructure, agriculture, health, as well as peace and security. The development of human capital is our most compelling and urgent need. That is why we promised you free and compulsory education for all our children in primary and secondary schools with emphasis on computer literacy, science and technology. I hereby announce with effect from today the take-off of free and compulsory education at primary and secondary school levels across Bayelsa State. The rebuilding of our educational infrastructure commences forthwith. Our curriculum will emphasize the study of Ijaw language, history and culture.

Using the instrument of education as a solid pillar of the Restoration Agenda, Dickson has truly lived his lofty dream of a better Bayelsa. The state was later reckoned among the best-performing states in the country as statistics of results from public examinations recently conducted by WAEC, NECO, NABTEB and JAMB elaborately indicated by the examining bodies. For instance, from a dismal and uncomplimentary position back

in 2012, Bayelsa State steadily risen to an enviable fifth among the 36 states in the 2017 WAEC examination, a testimonial of the educational strides achieved so far by then Dickson administration. Similarly, the state took third position in the 2017 NECO examination coming only behind Edo State and Ekiti State in that perking order. These developments were the direct result of the over N70 billion the administration has invested in the sector alone, leading to the de-classifying of Bayelsa as educationally disadvantaged state in the federation. It is against this backdrop that an x-ray of the far-reaching educational investments the Dickson administration made can be explored, even as the state then celebrates six eventful years of educational transformation. It is also noteworthy that right from inception, the administration has routinely underwritten the WAEC and NECO registration fees of indigenous students of the state. Deplorable state of the public schools as an affront to the realisation of the goals of the restoration agenda in the school system, the Dickson administration carried out the renovation of over 400 school buildings in all the 105 political wards in the state. He also awarded fresh contracts for the building of residential quarters of head-teachers in nearly the same number. This is in addition to model secondary schools built in each of the 24 state constituencies with ICT and computer halls, well equipped science laboratories, libraries, multi-purpose halls, state-of-the art toilet facilities, standby sound-proof generators and boarding facilities. A good number of them are being run as boarding schools with free feeding and accommodation, and zero-tuition fees. The Dickson administration brought back the Bayelsa State College of Arts and Science (BYCAS) which was scrapped by the previous administration. The administration also restored the moribund College of Education into a thriving academic institution of repute. In fact, the middle-level manpower institution, the Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education (IJBCOE), following its relocation to Sagbama opened up opportunities for many young Bayelsans, many of whom had completed their studies successfully. Seriake Dickson made a pronouncement of free education policy for Agricultural and a Mathematics undergraduate student in any of the state owns institutions. His interest for scholarship, established the Bayelsa State Education Tertiary Trust Funds (BYEDTF) in 2017 to promote research and training of lecturers as well as Bayelsa State Students Tertiary Education Loan Board to provide access to tertiary education by undergraduate and postgraduate students in order to avoid the lack of funds of indigenes who are in schools of higher learning, with a repayment period of 10 to 20 years of graduation after they have commence work. However, the administration of Seriake Dickson education policy trust made other pronouncement of the establishments of some new institutions and they include:

**Special Education Projects:** The Ijaw National Academy is among the flagship educational institutions established and founded by the Dickson administration in Bayelsa State. Commissioned by former Military Head of State, Gen. Yakubu Gowon in 2017, the Ijaw National Academy at present accommodates about one thousand students all on full state-funded scholarship, including free feeding, accommodation and textbooks. The institution boasts of hostels, halls, laboratories, staff quarters and other facilities that are possibly among the best in any tertiary institution in the country.

**The University of Africa:** The University of Africa, Toru-Orua, was a brainchild of the Dickson administration. It was conceived to meet the special educational needs of the state. Designed to have world-class facilities that will make it compete favourably with universities in any part of the continent and beyond, the institution currently runs 21 programmes in four Faculties at its permanent campus at Toru-Orua and Faculty of Engineering, Law and College of Medicine have also been proposed to kick off in the upcoming academic sessions and the school has produced two sets of graduates.

### **Training Institutions**

Other training institutions established by the Seriake Dickson administration include the Bayelsa State Driving School, the International Institute of Tourism, Catering and Hotel Management, the State Polytechnic, Aleibiri; the Bayelsa State School of Music, and the Sports Academy at Asoama. Remarkably too, the administration initially set aside a whopping N1billion for post-graduate scholarships to indigenous students. Many of the beneficiaries had successfully completed their programmes in flying colours thereby justifying the investment

made in sending them to study in some of the best universities abroad.

### **Medical University Bayelsa State-Yenagoa**

Governor Seriake Dickson administration also established another higher institution, Medical University and this new university is expected to specialise on primary healthcare and tropical medicine. It would also serve as a teaching hospital. Medical university is for the training of medical professionals in the state and will help to generate revenue for the state. At present, the law that established the university has been passed into law by the State House of Assembly and assented by the present Seriake Dickson administration.

### **Appointment of First Class, Foreign Sponsored Graduates and Ph.D Holders in the Niger Delta Ijaw States as Lecturers**

Seriake Dickson administration went further to employ first class graduates, foreign trained graduates and PhD degree holders across the ijaw states to work in all the state owned higher institutions. He added that, the above policy should be followed by next administration.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical paradigm anchored in this study was People Centered Approach. This paradigm was formed by David Korten in 1984. People centered approach suggest that true development must start with the people themselves in terms of needs, which should, in fact , determine the nature and process of production . This being the case, the proponents of people -centered approach have further suggested that consideration should be given to the creation of conditions which would enable the people to participate in the initiation of programmes and influence them along the direction of their felt needs. The values which are associated with the people-centered approach include the following:

1. Improvement in the welfare of citizens
2. Reduction in social, economic and political inequality among citizens
2. Strengthening of the socio-economic base for self-reliance
3. Promotion of mass participation in development process and
4. Creating a function for sustainable development through involvement of the critical stake holder. (Ibodje , 2009: 50).

According to Korten (1990) cited by the prevailing growth-focused development strategy is unsustainable and inequitable. He calls for transformations of our institutions, technology, values, and behaviour, "consistent with our ecological and social realities." Published in 1989, The Manila Declaration on People's Participation and Sustainable Development sets forth principles and guidelines for enacting these transformations. The concept of people-centered development gained recognition at several international development conferences in the 1990s, such as the Earth Summit in 1992, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, and the Summit for Social Development of 1995. The concept was first widely promoted in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Report in 1990, in which countries' level of development was measured by the Human Development Index (HDI). The UNDP's report deems economic growth a necessary means to achieving sustainable development.

The relevant of this framework to the analysis of public policy towards educational development of a nation cannot be overemphasizing. The theory has made public policy researchers viewed how the theory has helped governments in formulating appropriate policies for it citizens, because policies in education ought to have been made towards the aspiration and needs of the people. Additionally, this framework centers on the people personal needs, wants, desires and goals so that they become central to the care and policies of the government. This can mean putting the person's needs, as they define them, above those identified as priorities by the government.

### **Methodology**

The research employed secondary means of data collection in the research findings which include textbooks, internet materials, journals, magazines, government documents etc. Also, the study utilized content analysis in analyze the content, features of the data collected which help to ascertain the public policy and the problems of development in Bayelsa State education policy of former administration of Governor Seriake Dickson's education policy.

### **Findings and Conclusion**

Based on the research, it was revealed that from 1996 when Bayelsa State was created till as the time of this study, several education policies were introduced with the aim of providing and maintaining effective and enduring process that will improve the standard of the citizens at every level. The education policies from the past and present governments were formulated and some not implemented as result of several reasons. But some challenges faced in these policies according to Ambedi (2018) include; change of government, lack of funds, mismanagement of resources, lack of facilities, lack of awareness, stiff opposition. In a similar line Ken(2018) Bayelsa State government since inception has faced a lot of challenges in implementing its policies and among these were; Corruption, improper planning, lack of communication and enlighten from the government on intending policies, lack of Political will, incompetent public officials, Inadequate funding and hasty decisions on policies.

However, the study concludes that public policy is an important aspect of the government that is characterized by course of activities carried out by government towards achieving predetermined goals. Over the years, there have been a lot of good policies by the government but such beautiful policies are not fully implemented owing to hasty decision-making, political instability, poor planning and mismanagement by the various organs of government. Bayelsa State as one of the less educationally advantage state in the country has introduced many educational policies to their citizens. Governor Seriake Dickson's education policy came at a time when the state was in dire need of revamping its educational sector. But several factors have affected the smooth running of the state education policies which include: introduction of the Education Trust Fund where every worker contributes an amount to the fund, Bayelsa State Education Loan Scheme whereby the citizens have not benefited ever since it was introduced, establishment of too many institutions in the state without proper funding, paucity of funds to higher institutions to run their various activities/programmes, lack of accreditation of some of the higher institutions in the state.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the above result, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- Academicians, researchers, policy experts should be consulted to offer advice on the techniques of policy formulation and implementation of Bayelsa education policies.
- There should be a continues strong political will in implementing the educational policies in the state as provided by the state education laws.
- Bayelsa state government should review the subvention policy to favour the running of higher institutions in the state as promised by the current administration.
- The government should continue to increase and release education fund for higher institutions for effective and efficient service delivery for the training of teachers and award of research grants.
- Government should provide units that will make inputs and monitor all the government education policies in the state.
- There should be a comparative study and analysis of government policies across states in other to provide an enduring polices in education.

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