

Prebendal Politics and Development in Cross River State, Nigeria

¹Felix Onen Eteng (PhD) & ²Bassey E. Anam (PhD)

¹Department of Public Administration

²Institute of Public Policy & Administration, University of Calabar, Calabar

Abstract: The concept of prebendal politics has emerged as a concern in the development process of many nations. The principles and practice of prebendal politics undermines the norms, values, principality and credibility of good governance as a result of individual and group interest. These interests have negative effect on national development. In Cross River State, prebendal politics has become a bane in development as selfish political interest is dominant in appointment into public offices, award of contracts, citing of projects and so on. This explains why the state is not making significant progress in terms of development. The aim of this study is therefore to examine the impact of prebendal politics on the development of Cross River State. The study is qualitative in nature. Data are obtained mainly from secondary sources and analysed through a content process. Base on extant literature reviewed and the discourse, the study advocates for the entrenchment of public values and merit systems in the management of public affairs especially in Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole.

Keywords: Prebendal politics, corruption, development

Date of Submission: 19-02-2020

Date of Acceptance: 03-03-2020

I. INTRODUCTION

This study is carried out in Cross River State. The state is one of the minority political units that occupy the coastal region of the Niger Delta area of Southern Nigeria. It is made up of several “pockets “of ethnic groups that has different languages. Agbor and Eteng (2018) opined that “the various ethnic groups have produced a ‘Tower of Babel’ which is highly demonstrated by nearly kilometre to kilometre differences in language”. The state is rich in agricultural produce and mineral resources that can favour the development of the state.

Over the years, the state which was considered as a giant because of the rich agricultural and industrial resources have unfortunately suffered in the hands of political leaders due to prebendal politics. The practice of prebendalism has weakened the industrial base of the state, retarded human and structural development and consequently created a name tag for the state as “educationally disadvantaged state”. Since 1976, many industries have been wiped out of existence because of prebendal politics. The collapse of the Mercantile Bank Limited (the only state-owned bank), Calabar Cement Company Limited (CALCEMCO), Calabar Plywood Industry, Cross River Limestones Limited, Dura Foam Industry, Paper Mill Industry, etc that are state owned parastatals have been primarily due to prebendal politics. This ugly situation has resulted in creating weak industrial base for the state and have resulted in severe unemployment, social insecurity due to armed robbery, corruption as well as advance fee fraud (419) and kidnapping (hostage taking) that are difficult to control at present.

The huge lamentation of the people is for a good government that can protect the people from social insecurity and poverty. The government have been bedevilled by series of prebendal practices that makes life uncomfortable. Consequently, the poor can’t operate petty business established through their hard-earned income without the harassment of corrupt government offices who exploit the people through false levies imposed on them. The result is that many petty business environments end up folding due to the uncertain business environment. Many big companies like Mr Biggs, Leventies, etc folded from the state due to high taxation because of prebendal politics of the political leaders whose aim was to replace these companies with the establishment of their own businesses.

Eteng and Adie (2016) maintained that “the craze to get rich quick has given rise to material prebendal structures in the state and the pursuit for prebendal offices at both the political and bureaucratic levels”. Some of the people seeking political or bureaucratic offices happen to come from the same villages or speak the language of who may be in control to make such appointments. One may notice this impression by the number of new recruits into the public office which usually reflects where the man in charge comes from. Eteng and Adie (2016) buttressed this fact clearly that “in most cases however, what is most disheartening is that the calibres of people appointed into these offices are novices who can hardly correlate cause and effect”.

In view of this development, the question is, how does prebendal politics affect development in Cross River State? The skill to answer this question shall however form the basis for this research.

Clarification of concept

Prebendal politics

The term prebendal politics refers to the prevalent practice among political leaders that negates the socio economic fortunes of a nation state due to corruption, favouritism, or “god fatherism” and is carried out mainly for the interest of the individual, tribal kinsmen, family or party supporters for their past support during electioneering activities. The term is the dominant political value when considering candidates for party nomination for election, appointment into public offices, award of contract, success in business, and scholarship award. It is the dominant practice of many leaders in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and through a “bush fire effect” has led to the overthrow of past leaders by military coups.

According to Eteng and Adie (2016), “prebendal politics is a term which seeks to describe the determined activities of the political process in the state, or take advantage of the public offices they occupy”. Joseph (1999) argued that “because of the corrupt activities of the political leaders they become rich at the expense of the poor masses”. In short prebendal politics is anti national development in nature.

Development:

Development is a process of improving the social conditions of the people, especially the most vulnerable rural populace who lack basis social and economic conditions to enhance their wellbeing. The process may involve building infrastructures. It leads to modernization. For Eteng (2005), “Development can be seen as a process and not a stage of modernizing backward societies. It is a process of transforming a traditional or rural area into the type of technology and associated social organization that usually characterize the urban areas”.

Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change, which adds to the physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components of the society. The aim of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment or interfering with the future. The development process may have a long term effect depending on the objective of the planned development programme. However, it must seek to create change and improve on the quality of life of citizens.

Development experts like Sen (1979), stated that “development must enhance the capacity of the people. He calls it “capability approach” (cited in Anam, 2011). To him development is a tool enabling people to reach the highest level of their ability, through granting freedom of action, i.e., freedom of economic, social and family actions, etc. This approach became a basis for the measurement of development by the HDI (Human Development Index), which was developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 1990. It is important to stress that, to achieve development, the government must play the leading role through the enhancing effective political and economic systems; create viable institutions and infrastructure that will promote the course of the process. Prebendal politics affects that process of government and this leaves the country and Cross River State in particular in a continuous state of underdevelopment.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research adopted an expo facto research design. This was necessary because the data for the study were obtained mainly from secondary sources. Extant literature was assessed to explain the variables of the study. The literature was evaluated with content analysis. The issues raised provided the basis for suggestions to reduce ongoing corruption and improve the performance of the governance in Cross River State, especially in enhancing even development in the state.

Discourse on prebendal politics and development in Cross River State

Development has a human and structural dimension. Until recently, the state has observed structural development which has aided human development as well. Paradoxically, these two dimensions of development have been truncated by the winds of prebendal politics. Prebendal politics represents a social picture in which the poor are frustrated and alienated from the society. It is a sociopolitical condition involving the destruction of the hope and aspirations of the common man in that those who lack influential people in government become helpless because nobody speaks for them. This situation hinders the development of the people which also affects structural development. Eteng and Omenka (2016) described prebendal politics as “the sociopolitical process of attaining good success through patronage due to linkages with the political class”. Therefore, those who lack these linkages end up perishing or frustrated.

In Cross River State, development is tied to prebendal practices. A community or village that wants a project to be sited in its area must have an influential person in government. This condition creates “ethnic

watchers” who want to see how many people are in the state cabinet and where they come from. This explains why there are always agitations or lobbying when appointments are being considered at the state level.

The development of prebendal politics has affected the location of industries in the state. This situation is as old as the state even when the present Akwa Ibom State was not carved out of the state. For instance, in order to establish a Paper Mill industry in the state in the 'Seventies, prebendal politics was used as an index to locate the industry in Oku Iboku where no raw materials were found instead of Akamkpa where the raw materials were actually found. The result was that when Akwa Ibom State was eventually carved out of the state and Oku Iboku came under Akwa Ibom State, the paper mill industry died naturally due to lack of raw materials for its operation.

Prebendal politics has weakened the industrial base of the state. Two major industries in the state namely, Calabar Cement Company Limited (CALCEMCO) and the Cross River Limestone Limited were wiped out of existence due to political insinuation as a by-product of prebendal politics. The Cross River Limestone Limited was established by the Federal Government to produce limestone for the Alaja Steel Industry in Delta State. At the same time, the industry also supplied limestone to CALCEMCO. The CALCEMCO industry relied dominantly on the limestone supplied by the industry even though it was often plagued with obsolete equipments and operational difficulties which made it attain little or no success. In most cases because of this problem, CALCEMCO became non-operational and consequently resort to political intrigues by instigating the Cross River State Government against the Limestone Industry.

In the light of this situation, the Cross River State Government often threaten to revoke the provisions of Article 5.1.7 of the share holders agreement to take over the limestone deposit at Mfamosing back to the Calabar Cement Company Limited (CALCEMCO). Conscious of the importance of limestone in our national economy, the state government often accuses the limestone industry of crippling operations of CALCEMCO. The management of CALCEMCO and the state government often complain of running a company without a quarry of their own. This development created an atmosphere of uncertainty resulting in the frequent removal of the Chief Executive of the Limestone Industry. Continuous insinuations and operational difficulties and subsequent lack of raw materials led to the collapse of CALCEMCO industry in the state.

Unemployment in the state is affected by prebendal politics. Gaining access to job employment requires having linkages within the government cycle. According to Eteng & Omenka (2016), “people always want to have their tribal kinsmen in public agencies as Managers or Chief Executive”. In order to get “crumbs” for their relatives or tribal kinsmen, Eteng & Omenka (2016) observed that “a carbal of tribal kinsmen often surround the political leaders when the vast majority of the poor are roaming the streets for job and gainful employment”. Unemployment in the state is so high and the greatest cry of the poor is for the government to ease the situation by recruiting school leavers into at least the teaching job. As a reward to political supporters, the state government recently retrenched teachers employed from 2015 to 2019. The findings are that this is to pave way for recruitment of tribal kinsmen or party supporters who contributed to the political success of the Chief Executive in the state. Thus appointments are entirely based on who is in government, where you come from, and how well connected you may be with influential people in the state. In some parastatal in the state, the Chief Executive who happened to come from the village may engage the services of a village announcer to recruit people for employment by listing their names through the village head. This condition explains why at periodic adjustment, one finds the dominance of a particular ethnic group in the recruitment process indicating who is in charge or on top.

Other sectors of the economy also affected by prebendal politics include health, award of contract, and business cycle. In terms of health, those living in the villages have no access to health care services and are therefore compelled to travel by long distances through the narrow foot path to the nearby health centers in the town. Pregnant women are most vulnerable and often die due to stress and loose of blood during labour. Those who live in the cities sometimes lack the funds for medical treatment due to high cost of medical bill and drugs. The National Healthcare Insurance Scheme (NHIS) that was introduced by the Federal Government could not cover the treatment of certain ailments. This gives great burden on the poor to meet the demand for medical treatment. The result is that those who lack the means to get medical attention may resort to the use of traditional herbs which may be dangerous to health.

Contract award has been highly prebendalized. An officer in government whose duty is to award contract does this to himself through his friend, tribal kinsmen or relative that fronts for him. In some cases, where there is no person to front for them, they demand 10 percent “kick back” as their personal gains in the contract award process. In the business cycle, high taxation and other business levies are used as tool to fold up people’s businesses. The official tax agents sometimes use threat or harassment to force the poor to close their petty businesses. This situation causes business failure in some parts of the state. The effect is far reaching as this leaves the state with crippling development. There is lack of infrastructure to support economic activities in the state, increased level of poverty and criminality, inadequate economic opportunities and slow progress.

III. CONCLUSION

The study was set to examine the impact of prebendal politics on the development of Cross River State. For the discourse examine above, it is clear that prebendal politics in the State accounts for the slow state of development in the state. Iiepe (2017) opined that “leadership problems, weak institutions, pervasive corruption, and existence of multiple centros of loyalty base regime, ethnic and religious interest among others”. There are no functional economic infrastructure, no viable industries, small scale businesses are closing up, while poverty and criminality is in the increase. This is as a result of governance is not run on merit but on selfish individual, political and group interest. This has continually affected the development of key sectors in the state. To achieve the gains of development, the paper calls for the enthronement of merit system in governance. Public officers must acknowledge the importance of accountability and transparency and be guided by it in the distribution and management of public resources. Government must be seen as a state business for the interest of all and not for few.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Base on the conclusion above, the study recommends as follows,

1. A vibrant and constructive opposition, including opposition political parties and independent news media, are critical in overcoming the challenges of prebendal politics and ensuring good governance. Effective opposition is critical for the maintenance of good governance and the deepening of democracy, which in turn, helps in the maintenance of good governance.
2. Government must be committed effectively and efficiently delivers on its constitutional duties and promises to the electorate in a fair and equitable manner. This means that they must accountable to the people.
3. Development must be defined and pursued by improving the productive capacity of the society, improving welfare and enhancing opportunities.
4. There is need to restore due process and respect for government procedures, rules and regulations. This process must be complimented by adequate sanction for erring public officers. Accountability and transparency will help in restoring an orderly and smooth functioning governmental administration.
5. To support the growth of industrialization in the state, there is need for friendly economic and tax reform policies which privileges the private sector as the engine of growth and employment generation.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Agbor, U.I. & Eteng, F.O. (2018), “Challenges of Rural Women in Agricultural Production and Food Sufficiency in Cross River State, Nigeria”. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* (5) 12
- [2]. Anam, B. (2011). “Understanding rural development”. Calabar: Kingsview publishers.
- [3]. Eteng, F. O. (2015). “Rural Development in Nigeria: problems and remedies”. *SOPHIA: An African Journal of Philosophy*. 8 (2)
- [4]. Eteng, F. O. & Omenka (2016). “Ethnic Plurality, Prebendalism and Poverty reduction in Nigeria” *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*. 6(8).
- [5]. Eteng, F.O. & Adie, H.I. (2016), “Prebendal Politics, Poverty Pervasiveness and Eradication in Cross River State, Nigeria” *International Journal of Education and Research*. 4(1).
- [6]. Iiepe, J. A. (2017). "Good Governance and Development in Nigeria: The Gap between Rhetoric and Reality," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 7(9), pages 521-531.
- [7]. Joseph, R. A. (1999), *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: the Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.

Felix Onen Eteng. “Prebendal Politics and Development in Cross River State, Nigeria.” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 25(2), 2020, pp. 50-53.