BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Historical Development: Rivers State was created on May 27, 1967 by a military Decree and by 1996, Bayelsa State was carved out of Rivers State. However, agitation for the creation of Rivers State predated Nigeria's Independence from Britain in 1960. During the Colonial period, Britain signed many treaties of protection with the chiefs of many coastal and autonomous communities.

Some of these chiefs had hoped that with Nigeria's independence, the treaties of protection they signed with Britain would also lapse and thus, they would become independent states. The 1958 constitutional conference which affirmed Nigerian nationhood dashed such hope, but agreed on some measures to allay the fears of the ethnic minorities in this area.

Between 1941 and 1952, an organisation known as the Ijo Rivers People's League had agitated for the creation of a distinct Rivers Province. In 1953, another body called the Council of Rivers Chiefs replaced the League and became the Rivers Chiefs and Peoples' Congress in 1954, and the Rivers Chiefs Peoples Conference in 1956. The leaders of this organisation cooperated with the Calabar Ogoja Rivers (COR) State Movement formed in Uyo in December 1953, but later broke away to press their own case before the Willink Commission.

To allay the fears of the minorities under the dominant ethnic groups within the Nigerian nationhood, the British made one important concession by setting up a Commission headed by Sir Henry Willink to look into the misgivings of the ethnic minorities. The Willink Commission recommended the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) to address the problem of underdevelopment of the area.

NDDB did not meet the aspirations of the people and thus, some people attempted to take the extra-legal route to achieve their goal. In February 1966, Isaac Boro, Sam Owonaro and Nottingham Dick with their supporters proclaimed a "Delta Peoples Republic." Federal and Eastern Nigeria Governments brought this rebellion to an abrupt end. On May 27, 1967, Rivers State was among the twelve States created by the Gowon Regime.(Salawu, 1993).

The cries of political marginalisation, environmental degradation and economic pauperisation continued among the Ijaws, such that the Old Ijaw province was carved out of Rivers State as a distinct Bayelsa State in 1996 by the Abacha led military government of Nigeria.

Administrative Areas: As at 1967 when Rivers State was created, there were fifteen Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the State and when Bayelsa State was carved out in 1996, additional LGAs were created such that the present Rivers State is made up of twenty three LGAs. The State has many communities that organise community development efforts aimed at mobilising the local resources and assisting the State government in the maintenance of law and order.

Administrative Structure: There are three arms of government in Rivers State and these are: The Executive Council; The Legislature; and The Judiciary. The State Executive Council is made up of the Governor, the Deputy Governor, and several commissioners, special advisers and the Secretary to the State government. The commissioners are the overall heads of the ministries, while the permanent secretaries oversee the day today activities of the same ministries.

The parastatals are organs of the government charged for the establishment and running of certain key economic areas of the State government. They are placed either under the supervision of the Governor or the Deputy Governor. The special advisers are assigned responsibilities in the following areas to enhance productivity and accountability: education, information, hotels and tourism et cetera.

The Rivers State House of Assembly is the legislative (law making) arm of the government. The thirty two member House of Assembly was inaugurated in June 1999, with the Speaker of the House as chairman in all the proceedings. The judiciary is the body that interprets the law in the State. It is headed by the State Chief Justice. The second tier of government is the local government administration. This is the grassroots government that is closest to the people of the State. There are twenty-three local government councils and each is run by its executive council and legislature.