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Africa Q&A Summary

Reform and Resource Governance in Nigeria

HE Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi

Executive Governor of Rivers State, Nigeria

Chair: Richard Fuller MP

Vice Chairman, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Nigeria, UK

24 July 2013

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QUESTION AND ANSWERS

Questions

Do you have any plans to develop waterways transportation in Rivers State, especially Bonny, as marine transportation would encourage commercial activities there?

Can you address the issue of Boko Haram?

Chibuiki Rotimi Amaechi

Mr Amaechi stated that he recognized the importance of waterways transportation around Bonny, an important economic centre for Nigeria. He has written to the federal government for permission to complete the Bonny-Bodo road, which he stated would be easier to complete than the Ogoni-Andoni-Opobo road. He has not yet received a response.

Mr Amaechi noted that five vessels bought by Rivers State government for passenger transportation have not been used because of a lack of adequate landing facilities around Bonny. Furthermore, improvements in internal transportation around Port Harcourt have been marred by piracy and militancy. He stated that marine transportation should be revisited, because improvements will shorten journey times.

Mr Amaechi stated that there was a high level of commercial activity in Bonny; however the local government has found it problematic to build new facilities in the area due to difficulties obtaining land. The local government has been encouraging commercial activity in Bonny by improving the Bonny Jetty.

Mr Amaechi noted that the state government had been monitoring Boko Haram activity in Rivers State before the current security crisis in the north. This was not made public so as not to affect Port Harcourt's economy. Some Boko Haram members arrived in the area, were arrested and subsequently handed over to the federal government. He noted that dealing with Boko Haram was a federal government issue.

Questions

As Chairman of the Nigeria Governors' Forum, are you using your position to repudiate the latest senate resolution on child marriage?

The recently built modern secondary schools in Rivers State are managed by foreign companies from Asia. What is the state government doing to maintain standards, while at the same time improving local capacity to manage these schools in the future?

Are there plans to harness the human resources acquired by Rivers State students in the diaspora in a resource centre where new ideas can be developed and integrated into the local market in Rivers State?

Will the Petroleum Industry Bill be passed soon?

Many deprived students from Rivers State have benefitted from your scholarship programme to study in the United Kingdom. Will you be able to expand scholarship opportunities?

A couple of weeks ago there was an incident in the Rivers State House of Assembly when a House Member ran amok with a mace, seriously injuring a Rivers State citizen. Will you denounce what happened to that citizen?

Chibuiki Rotimi Amaechi

Mr Amaechi explained the episode in more detail, noting that events were recorded only after his party entered the chamber with cameras midway through the incident. While waiting to address the House, he stated that he was informed by the speaker that the chamber had been infiltrated by 'thugs with guns'. He stated that the Rivers State commissioner of police had refused to intervene, and that the police had assisted the perpetrators' entrance into the House.

Mr Amaechi stated that he denounced violence, but when he realized that Assembly members' lives were in danger, he intervened with his security team to lead the members to safety. The man brandishing a mace (which according to him was a fake weapon) was part of a team of five who illegally tried to convene the House. Instead of condemning the man who used a fake weapon in the House of Assembly, he stated that the commissioner of police should be condemned for refusing to perform his legitimate function.

Mr Amaechi stated that a scholarship programme was not the ideal solution for a poor education system. The scholarship programme should be temporary, because the government should build up educational

infrastructure and train qualified teachers so that rich and poor children can attend the same public schools in Nigeria. By sending children abroad, the scholarship programme was transferring capital to the United Kingdom, to the detriment of the Nigerian education economy.

Mr Amaechi noted that it can be challenging for governments to provide suitable jobs and reintegrate diaspora. The government needs to create an economic environment that allows business to thrive, bringing employment. To permit a flourishing business environment, there must be as little government intervention as possible in order to reduce corruption and encourage foreign investment. He stated that he wanted diaspora students to return, because Rivers State University of Science and Technology needs teachers; this is the reason that the state government has been supporting PhD students abroad.

Mr Amaechi noted that the new modern secondary schools that have been managed by foreign companies have fared better than those managed by Nigerian companies. Before the management of these schools was transferred to foreign companies, a competition was held using a system of due process. This took two years, because the state government wanted a Nigerian manager but nobody met the desired criteria. A six-year contract was agreed with Indian education consultants who met the criteria. He stated that there were a number of six-year contracts with foreign education companies.

Mr Amaechi stated that the child marriage law has not actually been passed. There were changes that have been misconstrued as encouraging child marriage. He noted that he supported the sentiments of his female supporters in this issue.

Mr Amaechi stated that he did not know when the Petroleum Industry Bill would be passed, but the sooner the bill is resolved, the better. Companies cannot operate in the oil industry without a Petroleum Industry Bill. Due to this, capital flight from Nigeria is heading to other African countries with oil, such as Angola. He stated that by next year Angola will be the largest oil-producing country in Africa, and this was not in Nigeria's interests.

Questions

You spoke about the funds that are available for new businesses to set up in Rivers State. What are you doing to ensure that Rivers State citizens will

have access to employment opportunities with these companies, and in the development projects you mentioned?

Your jet was recently grounded in Nigeria: where is it now? If it is still available, why did the Rivers State government want to acquire a new jet?

You spoke about development and the need to move away from oil. Have you spoken to any companies about the shipbuilding and ship breaking industries, and what has been their response?

Do you have any fears that militancy in the Niger Delta might return? Do you have contact with those groups, and has there been any follow-up on previously powerful groups that may be regrouping?

You mentioned the work that has been done in the primary and secondary schools in Rivers State. Are there any plans to improve infrastructure and capacity at tertiary institutions such as the Rivers State University of Science and Technology, and will there be more opportunities to fund PhD students?

Chibuiki Rotimi Amaechi

Mr Amaechi stated that local government policy was to only fund PhD students who would return to teach in the Rivers State University of Science and Technology. This was because the government has been focused on getting every Rivers State citizen to attend university at undergraduate level, rather than funding Masters Degrees and PhDs. He noted that his government was working to improve the university in terms of the training and quality of teachers, as well as building new facilities including accommodation for all the teachers and students.

Mr Amaechi noted that he was concerned because it appears that the federal government has been encouraging militancy through its amnesty programme, which has not worked. During the current security crisis, militant groups have appeared in Port Harcourt demanding the removal of the governor; he stated this was because he has taken a tough stance on militancy.

Mr Amaechi stated that the amnesty programme rewards crime. The policy of granting funds discriminates against poor people who need social welfare and the programme is not sustainable. Poverty has not ended and more insecurity can be seen creeping up in Niger Delta, Lagos and the north. Mr Amaechi stated that the only way to address insecurity was to address poverty.

Mr Amaechi stated that Rivers State government bought an aircraft and planned to sell the other one, but this was complicated due to the registration

of the aircraft. Although Rivers State government own the plane through a trust, the state government registered the plane with a company in the United States because the value of a second-hand American aircraft is much higher than that of a second-hand Nigerian aircraft.

Mr Amaechi noted that he requested a new aircraft because he travels frequently, and the previous aircraft was old and not suitable to travel often across Nigeria through challenging weather. The State Assembly approved the transaction and Rivers State government bought the aircraft. Rivers State government also bought two helicopters from the United States for surveillance purposes. The federal government supported the purchase, but when the state government applied for an import licence for the aircraft, it was declined. Therefore these helicopters are still in America and state government is now paying tax on the aircraft.

Mr Amaechi stated that the only reason the aircraft was grounded was because of politics. He stated that he has been targeted by the federal government because of assumptions that he would run for presidency in 2015. He noted that the only people who will lose out because of these political tactics by the federal government are the Rivers State citizens who were being punished for one man's perceived ambition.

Mr Amaechi stated that local people were employed in the building of health centres and farming projects. The only people that are outsourced are the general managers, accountants and other specialists. Every village in Rivers State has at least one primary school, and many others are being built. There are 319 wards in Rivers State and 500 primary schools, which will be increased to 750. All the employment in the building and running of these schools will come from the local community.

However, Mr Amaechi noted that when it comes to venture capital, it would be a mistake to localize the economy. He stated that when he first became governor, venture capital funds were only given to Rivers State citizens and many contracts that were awarded were not executed. Venture capital money must be used to encourage the growth of small and medium enterprises, which is important in a country dependent on natural resources. He added that is better to consider the local economy like that of Lagos, which is very broad and can accommodate everybody.