

# Public Administration and Service Delivery in Riverine Communities: A Case Study of Tsekelewu and Opuama in Warri North Local Government Area, Delta State

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on public service delivery in Tsekelewu and Opuama. These bstudy communities are riverine settlements in Warri North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. This study uses a public administration lens and combines both primary and secondary data. For the primary data 64 questionnaires were administered among residents of the two communities, while secondary data were based on academic and institutional sources on governance, infrastructure and development administration in the Niger Delta. The findings of this study show that both communities possess educational and health facilities, but these facilities remain inadequate in staffing, maintenance, equipment, accessibility, and operational efficiency. The settlement of Opuama has both a government health centre and an oil company-supported cottage hospital, yet residents still travel to Gbokoda, Sapele, and Koko for advanced medical treatment and emergencies. The communities are accessible mainly through speedboats and canoes, and internal movement depends partly on concrete walkways and wooden bridges. Amenity of electricity is supplied largely through diesel-powered generators supported by oil companies because the communities are not connected to the national grid. The study argues that the major governance challenge is not simply the absence of infrastructure but the weakness of institutional maintenance, staffing, coordination, and sustainable planning. The article recommends participatory governance, improved staffing, sustainable infrastructure management, and stronger intergovernmental coordination for riverine development.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Public administration is fundamentally concerned with the organization of government institutions and the delivery of services that improve the welfare of citizens. Governments are often evaluated not merely by policies or political promises but by their capacity to provide health care, education, transportation, electricity, and other public services. In rural and riverine communities, however, this responsibility becomes more difficult because geographical conditions increase the cost and complexity of governance and infrastructure delivery.

The Niger Delta region presents one of the clearest examples of this challenge. Despite decades of oil exploration and the enormous wealth generated from the region, many communities continue to experience infrastructural neglect, weak social services, and poor development outcomes. The

United Nations Development Programme observed that the Niger Delta suffers from administrative neglect, weak social infrastructure, environmental degradation, and inadequate development despite its contribution to the Nigerian economy (UNDP, 2006).

Riverine communities are particularly vulnerable because they are often physically isolated and difficult to access. Waterlogged terrain, dependence on boats, flooding, and shoreline erosion make infrastructure provision more expensive and maintenance more difficult. These conditions affect schools, health centres, electricity supply, roads, housing, and emergency response systems. Consequently, residents often experience exclusion from many services available in mainland communities.

Tsekelewu and Opuama communities in Warri North Local Government Area of Delta State reflect many of these realities. The communities are accessible mainly by speedboats and canoes. Both communities possess schools and health facilities, yet the facilities remain inadequate in staffing, maintenance, and operational quality. Opuama has both a government health centre and an oil company-supported cottage hospital, but residents still travel outside the communities during emergencies and for better medical treatment. Electricity is generated mainly through diesel-powered systems supported by oil companies because the communities are not connected to the national grid.

This study examines these conditions from a public administration perspective using field survey data, observation, and secondary literature. The article argues that the major challenge in the communities is not merely the absence of infrastructure but the weakness of maintenance systems, staffing, institutional coordination, and sustainable governance. The study contributes to the growing literature on service delivery and local governance in riverine Nigeria by providing community-level evidence from Warri North Local Government Area.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A major strand in public administration literature emphasizes that the true measure of government is not merely the existence of institutions but the ability of those institutions to deliver effective services to citizens. Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) argue that public administration should focus on serving citizens and promoting the public interest rather than merely controlling society through bureaucratic systems. According to the authors, citizens should be treated as active participants in governance rather than passive recipients of state action.

Another important body of literature focuses on decentralization and local governance. Rondinelli (1981) argues that development administration becomes more effective when authority and responsibility are decentralized to local institutions that are closer to the people. In developing countries, local governments are expected to play important roles in infrastructure provision and rural development. However, inadequate funding, weak institutional capacity, and poor coordination often undermine local governance and weaken service delivery outcomes.

Studies on rural infrastructure in Nigeria also show that communities frequently experience severe infrastructural deprivation. Akinola (2007) observes that many rural communities rely on collective self-help and communal initiatives to cope with inadequate roads, electricity, and water supply. While these communal efforts reduce hardship, they cannot fully replace effective government intervention. The study further demonstrates that infrastructure deficits often encourage local adaptation but also reinforce inequality between rural and urban communities.

The Niger Delta literature equally highlights the relationship between oil wealth, underdevelopment, and governance failure. Ikelegbe (2005) argues that despite the enormous resources generated from oil extraction, many Niger Delta communities continue to experience poverty, weak infrastructure, environmental degradation, and social exclusion. Similarly, the UNDP (2006) Niger Delta Human Development Report notes that many communities in the region suffer from poor transportation, inadequate educational facilities, weak health services, and limited electricity supply.

Scholars of development administration have also emphasized the importance of maintenance culture in public infrastructure management. Public facilities in many developing societies deteriorate rapidly because governments focus more on construction than on maintenance and operational sustainability. This pattern is visible in many rural and riverine communities where schools, clinics, roads, and electricity systems are poorly maintained after initial construction.

Literature on riverine governance further demonstrates that geographical conditions complicate public administration. Riverine communities often depend on boats for transportation, while flooding and shoreline conditions increase maintenance costs and limit infrastructure durability. Consequently, service delivery in such communities requires sustained institutional planning, local participation, and adaptive governance systems.

Despite the existing literature on the Niger Delta, there remains limited research focusing specifically on the practical realities of service delivery in individual riverine communities such as Tsekelewu and Opuama. This study contributes to filling that gap by examining how health care, transportation, electricity, housing, and educational services reflect the actual performance of governance at the local level.

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the New Public Service theory and Institutional Governance perspective.

The New Public Service theory developed by Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) emphasizes that public administration should focus on serving citizens and promoting democratic participation. The theory argues that governments should prioritize citizens' welfare, accountability, and effective service delivery rather than mere bureaucratic control. The theory also stresses the importance of citizen engagement and collaborative governance.

The Institutional Governance perspective associated with Ostrom (1990) is equally relevant. Ostrom argues that public infrastructure and collective resources require effective institutions, local participation, and coordinated management systems in order to remain sustainable. In difficult environments such as riverine communities, infrastructure

survival depends heavily on local institutional capacity and collaborative governance.

These frameworks are appropriate because Tsekelewu and Opuama possess some public infrastructure, yet the effectiveness of these facilities is weakened by poor maintenance, weak staffing, and inadequate institutional coordination. The theories therefore provide a useful basis for understanding how governance quality affects the sustainability of social services in riverine communities.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-method approach involving quantitative and qualitative methods. Primary data were obtained through 64 questionnaires administered among residents of Tsekelewu and Opuama communities. Respondents included traders, farmers, business persons, contractors, civil servants, teachers, students, and community leaders. The respondents consisted of both males and females, while most respondents fell within the age bracket of 22–55 years.

The questionnaire focused on health care delivery, educational facilities, transportation and accessibility, electricity supply, roads and walkways, housing conditions, and perceptions of government presence. The questionnaires were distributed purposively among adult residents who possessed reasonable knowledge of conditions within the communities.

Field observation was also used to assess the physical condition of infrastructure and environmental realities within the communities. The researchers observed the condition of schools, walkways, roads, bridges, shoreline areas, electricity systems, and health facilities.

Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, and institutional reports relating to public administration, decentralization, governance, and development in the Niger Delta region. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics involving frequencies and percentages. Qualitative observations from the field were integrated into the interpretation of survey findings.

#### V. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF SURVEY DATA

A total of 64 questionnaires were administered across Tsekelewu and Opuama communities. The findings are presented below.

##### ➤ *Gender Distribution:*

Male respondents constituted 57.8 percent while female respondents constituted 42.2 percent. This indicates that both genders were adequately represented in the study.

##### ➤ *Age Distribution:*

Most respondents were between 22 and 55 years old, indicating that the survey largely captured the views of economically active adults who interact frequently with public infrastructure and social services.

##### ➤ *Occupation of Respondents:*

Respondents included traders, farmers, business persons, contractors, teachers, civil servants, students, and community leaders. The diversity of occupations helped to provide broad perspectives regarding governance and public service delivery.

##### ➤ *Health Facilities:*

Most respondents assessed the health facilities as inadequate due to poor staffing, insufficient equipment, weak maintenance, and limited emergency capacity. Although Opuama possesses both a government health centre and a cottage hospital supported by an oil company, respondents stated that serious medical cases are usually referred outside the communities. Many respondents identified Gbokoda, Sapele, and Cocoa as destinations for emergency and advanced treatment.

##### ➤ *Educational Facilities:*

Respondents acknowledged the existence of both primary and secondary schools in the communities but expressed concern over poor infrastructure, insufficient learning materials, and difficult access routes. Field observations showed that pupils and teachers still rely partly on wooden bridges and narrow walkways to access schools. Such conditions create risks during rainy seasons and reduce the quality of the learning environment.

##### ➤ *Transportation and Accessibility:*

Transportation emerged as one of the major challenges confronting the communities. The communities are accessible mainly through speedboats and canoes. Respondents explained that transportation costs are often high and movement becomes difficult during bad weather conditions. Although some concrete walkways exist within the communities, wooden bridges are still heavily used for movement between residential areas, schools, and public facilities.

##### ➤ *Electricity Supply:*

None of the respondents reported connection to the national electricity grid. Most electricity supply depends on diesel-powered generators supported by oil companies. Respondents complained about irregular supply, maintenance challenges, and dependence on external corporate support.

##### ➤ *Housing and Internal Roads:*

Housing conditions are mixed. Most houses are constructed with cement walls and zinc or aluminum roofing sheets, though wooden structures are still visible especially near shorelines and swampy areas. Internal roads are limited, while movement relies heavily on concrete walkways and wooden bridges.

## VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate that the central challenge confronting Tsekelewu and Opuama is not merely the absence of infrastructure but the weakness of institutional sustainability and service functionality. Health facilities, schools, roads, electricity systems, and transportation structures exist to some extent, yet they remain inadequate in quality and operational effectiveness.

The findings on health facilities reveal a major gap between infrastructure presence and effective service delivery. The fact that residents still travel to Gbokoda, Sapele, and Cocoa for emergencies demonstrates weak local health governance. Health centres without adequate personnel, equipment, and drugs cannot effectively meet the health needs of residents. This finding supports broader observations in the Niger Delta literature that infrastructural provision without maintenance and staffing produces limited development outcomes.

Educational facilities also reflect broader governance challenges. Although schools exist within the communities, poor access routes, inadequate infrastructure, and difficult environmental conditions undermine educational quality. The dependence on wooden bridges and narrow walkways exposes pupils and teachers to daily physical risks. Educational infrastructure in riverine communities therefore involves more than classrooms alone; it also requires safe mobility systems and environmental adaptation.

Transportation and accessibility emerged as major development problems. Dependence on boats increases transportation costs and complicates emergency response. During adverse weather conditions, access to health facilities, schools, and markets becomes even more difficult. Transportation in riverine communities is therefore both an economic and governance issue because it shapes access to nearly every aspect of social life.

Electricity supply also reflects broader institutional weaknesses. The absence of national grid electricity demonstrates the marginalization of riverine communities within wider infrastructure planning systems. Dependence on diesel-powered generators supported by oil companies creates uncertainty because supply depends on external actors rather than stable public systems.

The findings further reveal the important but limited role played by oil companies in local development. Corporate support has contributed to electricity generation and health infrastructure in Opuama. However, such interventions remain supplementary and cannot replace comprehensive state-led development planning. Sustainable service delivery requires stronger collaboration among government institutions, local communities, and corporate actors.

The findings align with the observations of UNDP (2006) that many Niger Delta communities continue to experience infrastructural neglect despite the enormous wealth generated from the region. They also support Akinola's argument that rural communities frequently rely on communal adaptation and self-help responses in the face of inadequate government support.

### ➤ *Comparative Perspective on Riverine Governance in the Niger Delta*

Compared with many other riverine communities in the Niger Delta, Tsekelewu and Opuama display similar patterns of infrastructural inadequacy and administrative weakness. The UNDP report observed that many communities in the region suffer from weak transportation systems, poor social infrastructure, unreliable electricity, and inadequate public services despite the economic importance of the Niger Delta.

Akinola (2007) notes that rural communities in Nigeria often rely on communal cooperation and self-help arrangements to cope with infrastructural deprivation. This pattern is visible in Tsekelewu and Opuama where residents depend on local walkways, wooden bridges, and informal support systems to sustain daily movement and access.

Oil companies also play supplementary roles in several Niger Delta communities by providing generators, health facilities, and educational support. However, such interventions are usually fragmented and insufficient to replace effective state-led development planning.

Riverine governance therefore requires stronger institutional coordination, long-term maintenance systems, local participation, and greater state commitment to rural infrastructure development. The evidence from Tsekelewu and Opuama suggests that development in riverine communities should be approached through integrated planning that combines transportation, education, health care, electricity, environmental management, and local participation.

## VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined public service delivery in Tsekelewu and Opuama communities from a public administration perspective. The findings show that both communities possess educational, health, and infrastructural facilities, but these facilities remain inadequate in quality, staffing, maintenance, and functionality.

The study concludes that the major governance challenge lies not simply in the absence of facilities but in weak maintenance systems, inadequate staffing, poor planning, and limited institutional coordination.

The following recommendations are therefore proposed:

Government should renovate and properly equip health facilities in both communities. Qualified medical personnel and teachers should be posted to the communities with adequate incentives. Internal walkways and wooden bridges should be upgraded to durable concrete structures. Sustainable electricity projects should be developed beyond temporary diesel-powered systems. Local governments, state agencies, oil companies, and community leaders should adopt participatory development planning. Riverine infrastructure planning should receive greater attention within Delta State development policies. Maintenance culture and monitoring systems should be strengthened to ensure long-term sustainability of public infrastructure.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that effective public administration in riverine communities requires more than the construction of facilities. Sustainable governance depends on maintenance, staffing, accessibility, local participation, and long-term institutional commitment. Riverine development policies in the Niger Delta should therefore focus not only on infrastructure provision but also on institutional sustainability and social inclusion.

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