

Challenges of Local Government Administration in Nigeria; An Appraisal of Nigerian Experience

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Abstract: *Local Government in Nigeria faces series of critical challenges like creating critical social services and how to sustain them. No Nation can boast of excellent performance within the public sector at the grass root if a large percentage of her rural inhabitants are facing uncontrollable abject poverty, needs/wants, socio-economic dilemma and basic social amenities. However in Nigeria, a series of social amenities at the grass root reveals that the third tiers of government are lacking performance in the area of service delivery, and over the years has caused the citizens to lose both faith and trust in local government, the closet tier of government to them. The failure of local government administration as an institution in Nigeria to solve ongoing problems of the people at the grass root further indicates a lack of contentment in the governance and consequently retards the closeness of the people to this grass root government. This paper looks at the reasons for the establishment of local government, functions and problems of good governance and accountability. Factors militating against performance of local government administration in Nigeria are articulated, areas of contribution to development are also identified and concludes that the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should be amended to empower Local Government authorities to provide the much needed goods and services for the people.*

Keywords: Local Government, Administration, poverty, socioeconomic, grassroots, social amenities

1. Introduction

Local government administration in Nigeria has been in existence since 1972 but its inefficiency and ineffectiveness in addressing the primary needs and wants of the people at the grass root has made the third tiers of government irrelevant in the administration of the country lowest tiers of government to the people.

However, the efficient and effective provision of basic amenities and social infrastructures for the people at the grass root are key factors to the existence of any government. The local government councils are required to serve the public interest in areas of constructing roads, public markets, healthcare centres, drainages, transportation, motor parks, building primary schools, among others. This is because, local Administration is the concern of the grass root people in the provision of social and economic amenities to the rural area where they come from, making it government at the door step of rural inhabitants.

These functions of local government are well known and popularized by the constitution of the country. What seems to matter most to the people of the grassroots is to see tangible results of their taxes, contributions, labor expended and the judicious use of monthly allocation from the federation account to their local governments.

These local government councils are however faced with series of problems and difficulties, which in the long run constitutes their challenges. Identification of challenges which attend these processes will lead us to proffering or suggesting how they can be properly managed in the benefit of the people in particular and society in general. So therefore, this paper focuses on these challenges and suggests possible solutions to these challenges in a country of seven hundred and seventy-four (774) local government councils across the six geopolitical areas in Nigeria, in order

to ensure development at the grass root level. This paper adopts a descriptive approach in its presentation.

2. Definition of Local Government

As an element of decentralization, local government is a result of devolution. Olowu (1988; 12) states: in the context of literature, there are two advances to define the local government. In aspect of comparative studies, under the central government, all those national structures are regarded as central government. In the second approach, the specifics and particular characteristics determine local government in more circumspect manner. These distinguished features mainly focus on five following aspects: (1) legal personality, (2) localness, (3) effective participation by citizens, (4) extensive budgetary and employing self-sufficiency in regard to bounded control from central authority, and (5) particular powers to execute a variety of functions. These attributes are significant in separating the government from the different forms of institutions at local level and furthermore. This approach makes certain that organizational effectiveness is maintained at an acceptable rate.

According to Kyenge (2013:70), the concept local government has been given various definitions by various scholars. No matter how differently the concept is defined, it focuses on the transfer of political powers to local areas by involving the inhabitants in the provision of basic needs in their respective communities.

Appadorai (1975:287) local government is government by the popularly elected bodies charged with administrative and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular place or district.

Furthermore, it is vital to note that these divisions of responsibilities are done according to the political interests and policy related agenda. The World Bank (1989: 88) has identified the successful correlation between the local and central government due to various conditions determined by Heymans & Totemeyer (1988: 6) as:

- 1) The requirement and the push for a well-built local government system in environment filled with democratic support.
- 2) In the national and regional development, a mainstream role will be played by the local government.
- 3) A fair distribution of the financial resources among central, local and regional bodies.
- 4) A distribution of human resources is done in a fair manner between the central and the local government.
- 5) The checks and balances between central and local government are conducted in a formal and effective manner.
- 6) The information sharing and flowing among all levels are in an accurate and consistent pace and the consultation is precise and complete.
- 7) The expansion of democracy exists in the all dimensions of government, such as the participation of all citizens to a full extent at the levels of administration and government, irrespective of any gender and race biases.
- 8) Harmony in social and political aspects.
- 9) Clearly mentioned affairs among various levels of government and the potential for pressure exertion at the local level so that central government alters legislation.
- 10) The fundamental principles of government are trust and honesty.
- 11) Ability to adopt innovations.

In the designing of sound democratic political system, local government should be viewed as the cornerstone as it serves as a cardiac vehicle on specific level to ensure able and conscientious citizenship.

3. Objectives of the Paper

The main objective of the paper is to examine the challenges facing the administration of local governments in Nigeria. Other specific objectives include:

- 1) To examine the reputation of the Local Government performance in its quality social services.
- 2) To examine the nexus between the third tiers of government and citizenry.
- 3) To scrutinize local government delivery of high quality of social services in the Southwest from 2008 to 2012.
- 4) To examine issues mitigating against local government performance in Nigeria.
- 5) To suggest appropriate recommendations within the context of the identified problems.

4. The Significance of Local Government Administration in Nigeria

Local Administration refers to the administration of a community by a body which is not responsible to the local people but to those who appoint them to govern the community. Ugoo. E. Abba et al., (2007:17) usually, such officers are appointed by the central government, and are seen as representatives of central government. However, local government is seen as government by local inhabitants freely elected to carryout programmes to improve the wellbeing of the people at the grass root. Administration per se, is getting things done, therefore local government Administration entails the whole process of decision making at the local government level or selected persons by central or state governments to carry out certain functions for the benefit of the local inhabitants.

Moreover, it is argued that without the local government, there cannot be considered any political system to be comprehensive and complete (Mawhood, 1993: 66, and Wraith, 1964:118). Three distinct reasons are put forwarded in order to create the awareness about the vitality of local government and these reasons are as following:

- a. Training platforms so that masses are politically educated,
- b. Training foundation for the development of strong political leadership, and
- c. System ensures that accountability of government is maintained.

These considerations even make more crucial and strengthen the role of local government. Therefore, these reasons are explained more in depth below.

(A) Mass' political education's training ground:

The foundation and formation of local government is affirmed and advocated because it is a fundamental source to train the masses about mobilization and political education. Tocqueville (1935: 631) states that, meetings of town are linked with freedom as the science is closely linked with the primary schools. Government is brought among people's reach as it assists men toward using and enjoying the facilities. Marshall (1965: 59) is more dynamic in explaining the following as: A sound and healthy political awareness is the fundamental objective cannon of local government. The member of mass public realizes to identify the inaccurate demagogue, citizens learn to avoid voting for the representatives who are incompetent or corrupt, they learn to debate on the agendas in more effective and healthy manner, to establish the relationship between the expenditures and revenue, and they also learn to think for future. According to Holm (1971: 61) Local government is seen as another bureaucratic government organisation when masses directly participate in local politics and councillors of local government work in political consciousness by executing and aiming to intensify public awareness toward local politics.

(B) Political leadership's training ground:

The basic foundation for political leadership is served in shape of training provided by local government, particularly for those individuals who intent to further prosper their

career in national politics, and Laski (1931: 31) suggests, "if M.P's (members) prior to their entry were officially permitted, allowed to serve tenure of three years on local grounds, they would attain the experience of foundations so essential to prosper. There are few certain advantages in this reason, but it cannot be entirely conceived that law makers with a little experience in politics surrounded by local government are improved national legislators than those who lack it. Undoubtedly, the participation in local administration provides breakthroughs to councillors to avail experiences in politics, especially since the government is influenced by the involvement of councillors in the politico-mechanism.

(C) Capacity of Government Accountability:

In general perspective, local government is viewed as a defence mechanism, especially against subjective power by government, which means that any unsound concentration of power merged at the centre can be unhealthy for progress and this is prevented by the local government. The oppression due to the power constrained at centralization is discouraged by means of local government as it claims to do so and therefore Smith (1985: 27) argued that, "There is correctness in this regard that greater level of accountability can be restored by means of local democracy. It can be said that local democracy have greater control than public corporate, appointed agencies and field administration. The element of 'elective' relates citizens with bureaucrats who make the entire procedure more meaningful as accountability is more visible in local government. Activities of political nature inside local government, such as elections, pressure of political nature, formulating rules, public debate, publicity that bridges the gap among citizens and their responsible administration, as well as the provision of opportunities for the handling of grievances."

5. Functions of Local Government in Nigeria

The Local Government system, composed of democratically elected Local Government Councils, is guaranteed under the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, section 7. Based on this section 7, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution provides for the functions of a Local Government Council under its Fourth Schedule. This schedule tends to derive mainly from the Basic and Constitutional Transition Provisions (Decree 15 of 1987). Thus, functions of Local Governments are categorised into;

- i. *The Exclusive list; and*
- ii. *The Concurrent list.*

The exclusive list of functions is those functions that are solely performed by Local Governments, while the concurrent list of functions are those that the Local Government performs in collaboration with State and Federal Governments. The State and/or Federal Government can also perform these functions on behalf of Local Governments until Local Governments are in a position to perform such functions. According to the Fourth Schedule 1 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, The main functions of a Local Government Council are as follows:

- a) The Consideration and the making of recommendations to a State commission on economic planning or any similar body on;
 - I. The economic development of the State, particularly in so far as the areas of authority of the council and of the State are affected, and
 - II. Proposals made by the said commission or body;
- b) Collection of rates, radio and television license;
- c) Establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infirm;
- d) Licensing of bicycles, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheel barrows and carts;
- e) Establishment, maintenance of and regulation of slaughter houses, slaughter slabs, markets, motor parks and public conveniences;
- f) Construction and maintenance of roads, streets, street lightings, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces, or such public facilities as may be prescribed from time to time by the House of Assembly of a State;
- g) Naming of roads and streets and numbering of houses
- h) Provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewage and refuse disposal;
- i) Registration of all births, deaths and marriages;
- j) Assessment of privately owned houses or tenements for the purpose of levying such rates as may be prescribed by the House of Assembly of a State; and
- k) Control and regulation of:
 - i. Out-door advertising and hoarding;
 - ii. Movement and keeping of pets of all description,
 - iii. Shops and kiosks,
 - iv. Restaurants, bakeries and other places for sale
 - v. Laundries, and
 - vi. Licensing, regulation and control of the sale of liquor

Under section 2 of the Fourth Schedule, the functions of a Local Government Council shall include participation of such council in the Government of a State as respects the following matters:

- a) The Provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education;
- b) The development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals;
- c) The provision and maintenance of health services; and
- d) Such others functions as may be conferred on a Local Government Council by the House of Assembly of the State.

Local government administration also carries out informative functions such as enlightenment, development projects, administration, democratic and leadership initiative and maintenance of peace, law and order in the locality (Awotokun 2005). In addition to the above, the local government administration also provides the following functions:

- I. Inspection of meat and abattoirs;
- II. Provision of nursery, primary and adult education
- III. Provision of scholarship and bursaries award
- IV. Provision of public libraries and reading rooms;
- V. Agricultural and animal health extension services and veterinary clinics, fire service

VI. Lighting and drainage;

6. Challenges and Problems of Local Governments in Nigeria

6.1 Corruption

One of the fundamental problems of contemporary Nigeria is corruption. It has thrived, progressed and flourished unabated. Corruption has been institutionalized to the point of accepting it as a part of our system. Albeit corruption is ubiquitous, it is found all over the world, but the degree of its manifestation varies from system to system (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010: 232). Corruption is the greatest bane of local government administration in Nigeria. At the grassroots level, corruption has been canonically accommodated, entertained, and celebrated within the system. In the local government setting corruption is misnomerlabelled and euphemistically referred to as "Egunje" (a slogan which means "illegal offer" in Nigeria) and a major hindrance to good government.

It has been identified as one of the problems confronting effective local government administration in Nigeria, also non-adherence to provisions of the financial memorandum (FM), conspicuous consumption of the part of the local officials, lifestyles that are not commensurate with official sources of income, imposition of leaders on the local government through corrupted political process and low wages of local government officials (Ali, 2008). Some of the areas where corruption thrives in local government in Nigeria include the following:

- a) Inflation of prices of bought items;
- b) Over estimation of cost of projects;
- c) The ghost worker syndrome;
- d) Poor financial base and limited revenue
- e) Award of contracts and subsequent abandonment;
- f) Payment of huge sums of money to political godfathers;
- g) The age-long belief by the officials that people are ignorant, illiterate and unenlightened;
- h) Lack of accountability

6.2 Lack of Autonomy

Autonomy simply refers to freedom, independent, free from external and remote control but in Nigeria the reverse is the case, Local Government are totally independent, they are managed by the federal and state governments who dominate over the local government administration through the state government offices of local government affairs, the ministry of local government, and the local government service commission. All these government agencies are denying the autonomy of self-dependent administration of Local Government in Nigeria.

6.3 Leadership problem

In most states in Nigeria, the ruling party appoints and blesses the candidate who must run for election at the local government level. Without their blessings, such candidates cannot win an election. The various state governments also appoint caretaker chairmen for the Local Government

Council, who are mostly stooges and appendages of the state governor. Even when elections are held, the ruling party in the state and the state government, in particular, rigs and manipulates the election process to favour their preferred candidates. It is a clear case of who pays the piper dictates the tune. This again creates inefficiency of administrative performance and diversion of local government functions, as well as oriented programs for the local people.

6.4 Unskilled Workers

Local government in Nigeria are faced with the problem of inadequate skilled workers such as engineers, accountants, medical doctors, town planners, statisticians, etc. Reasons for this unfortunate development are that, there is a very low image of local government in the minds of these professionals. Again, there is lack of job satisfaction that can keep them in the local government. Most skilled and qualified personnel's and professionals prepare to gamble their luck either in private organisations or establish their own firms rather than risk staying at the local government where there are no incentives, and they may be wasted away. This has forced local governments to depend on unskilled labour. For example, some are diploma and certificate holders who cannot defend the certificates they hold. These circumstances are a great challenge to local government efficiency. People who don't know their left from their right in what they do can hardly be productive and effective.

6.5 Inadequate and Poor Budgetary Allocation:

Local governments in Nigeria are known to suffer from inadequate and poor budgetary allocation. This is done by deliberate cut-offs of budgetary allocation to the local government by some States Governors either for political reasons or absolute corruption. The siphoning of funds through frivolous activities and fictitious contracts to their party members and friends greatly affects the financial needs of local governments. This is one of the major reasons why local government in Nigeria usually performs below expectation, thereby making the third tiers of government meaningless and lacking the diffidence of democracy.

6.6 Administrative Inefficiency

Local governments in Nigeria suffer from administrative inefficiency and ineffectiveness resulting from low educational qualifications of staff, poor motivation, autocratic leadership, poor work environment, etc. The management and control of finances is a central factor in the management of local governments. The quality and promptness/effectiveness of local government services depend on the quality and quantity of workers in the system. Politically, politicians divert from their campaign promises through scheming of ways to remain in office and swell their private financial bank accounts with public funds from the local government. They abandon principles of good governance and democratic ideals that are fundamental in promoting administrative efficiency in order to satisfy their selfish desires.

6.7 Lack of provision of Basic Social Amenities

The decline in delivery of social services for the people at the grassroots is perhaps, felt more by common people. This revealed that the local government administration has failed in meeting the basic needs of the people – good roads, metro-transport, potable water, regular electricity supply, sanitations and rehabilitation of local road under their local jurisdiction, qualitative healthcare delivery and education. Close on the heels of this is poor or non-maintenance of existing social services. Local Governments appear to have failed in this respect thereby leading to strong voice for the cancelation or eradication of the third tiers of government which is Local Government Administration in Nigeria.

7 Scope and future of this study

Local government as the third tiers of government should not be scrapped or changed rather it should be strengthened, democratized and the federal government should enact laws that promote transparency and accountability at all level of governance, most especially, at the local level of governance. In this regard, it will, be crucial to strengthen institutions of horizontal accountability and empowerment of civil society organizations to monitor the performance of Local governments officials and report any found wanting to anti-corruption agent. Moreover, there is a great need to reform the structure of government at all levels (Federal, State and local government) in Nigeria to be accountable to the masses of the people that elect them to the political office.

The cases reviewed in this work are series of short-comings and mal-administrations of local government in Nigeria ranging from lack of initiative that improves the lives of the inhabitants reflecting the lost priority to provide better services like portable water, adequate good roads, drainage facilities, health care centres, and standard education with state of the art technologies, vocational training, and other social services as a means to attaining good services provisions to the masses of the people under their geographical area for effective development at the grassroots level. These, if done, will enhance efficient and effective service delivery at the grassroots level and sustaining its future.

As reported in the Sun online Newspaper, May 9, 2014; 'The Committee on Political Restructuring and Forms of Government of the ongoing National Conference has recommended the scrapping of the local government tier of government, and the delisting of the 774 existing local councils from the Nigerian Constitution.

If that recommendation scales through, all the councils will be disbanded, and they will cease to be a constitutional third tier of government. They will consequently no longer receive statutory allocations from the Federation Account. Responsibility for the duties now carried out by the councils would pass to the respective states, giving the country a two-tier system of government comprising the federal government and the state governments.

This recommendation has, expectedly, been generating varied reactions from all over the country. It has, once again, brought into bold relief the disaffection of many Nigerians with the local government system, which is widely believed not to be effectively playing the role expected of it.

There is no debating the fact that local councils in many parts of the country have shown themselves to be a major drainpipe of the nation's scarce resources. With the exception of a few shining examples, the councils are regarded as looting centres, where nothing seems to be happening. In many states, elected and appointed council officials, and their cohorts in the civil service, reportedly gather at council headquarters monthly to share allocations from the Federation Account and disperse, only to return the following month to share that month's allocation and disperse again. As things stand today, nearly all the functions designated by the constitution as responsibilities of the councils – from primary education and primary healthcare to environmental sanitation – have virtually been abandoned. But, the failure of the councils to live up to the expectations of Nigerians and the constitution may not require an outright scrapping of the system, because it is the nearest to the masses'.

(<http://sunnewsonline.com/new/?p=62782>, Editorial on May 9, 2014)

The editorial in the said newspaper (The Sun) concludes that 'Scrapping the councils, for instance, does not have to translate to automatic retrenchment of existing workers, because those statutory functions which are currently not being carried out by the councils, would still have to be carried out, and the states should not need to employ new workers to carry them out. Our appeal to all stakeholders is that they should altruistically evaluate the pros and cons of this recommendation, without losing sight of the fact that we need a tighter, more efficient and more transparent system of governance. This is the only way we can be sure that our common wealth is used for the common good of Nigerians in every nook and cranny of the country, instead of ending up in the pockets of politicians and unscrupulous civil servants.' (<http://sunnewsonline.com/new/?p=62782>, Editorial on May 9, 2014)

8 Policy Implications and Recommendation

This paper explored the challenges confronting the local government administration in Nigeria and its failure to meet the basic and social services provisions of the people at the grass root. It also presents an appraisal on Nigerian experience with the third tiers of government administration at the grass root. The paper also focused on social service delivery most especially at the local level. It presented an empirical analysis of co-production as a way forward in ensuring effective and efficient delivery of social services, most especially, road, water, electricity, healthcare and education. Governance crisis has not only engendered poverty and hardship; it has robbed people of their happiness and left them hopeless. In concluding this paper, some suggestions are offered that will stem the tide of governance crisis and launch Nigeria on the path of effective and efficient delivery of key social services to the citizenry most especially at the local level. The recommendations are:

- I. The crisis of governance that gave birth to the crisis of service delivery has to be tackled headlong and with sincerity. There is need to embark on effective decentralisation policy that would discourage over-concentration of power and resources in the central government.
- II. Centralisation has to be jettisoned. Concentration or over-concentration of power in the central government relegates the relevance of community-based organisations that incidentally have organisational abilities to get things done.
- III. The Local Government should be more empowered to promoting rural development, reducing poverty and inequality, and stemming excessively high rates of rural-urban migration while corruption must be deterred and punished in the local government system to enhance efficient and effective service delivery at the grassroots level.
- IV. There is need for civil society to constantly demand transparency and accountability from local government officials and there should be explicit and enforceable constitutional and statutory provisions that will make local governments responsive and accountable to local people. Accountability and transparency must be encouraged and promoted in the local government administration system so as to attain good governance for effective development at the grassroots level.
- V. The local government officials should be equipped with better education and training and a sound orientation about value system and democratic cultures. Thus, they are required to be truly democratic administrators, "real service providers, efficient decision makers, and dynamic grassroots transformers. They should also, endeavour to imbibe real democratic practices in order to promote value systems and democratic ethos at the grassroots level.
- VI. The local government should provide special mechanisms for active and maximal participation of local residents in local government affairs. People should be allowed to participate in the initiation and implementation of the projects in the local government system.

9 Conclusion

This paper has examined the menace in the administration of local government in Nigeria vis-à-vis the manifestations in the appraisal of administration of local government across the country, which has constituted a threatening force to grassroots development. The paper captioned the significance of the creation of the third tiers of governance, functions and most challenges confronting the administrative deficiencies and lack of efficient delivery of social services in Nigeria.

The paper argued that, Local Government is no doubt a vehicle for national development. Its importance in providing essential services that have great bearing on national development cannot be over emphasised. It has a great bearing on the important sectors of the economy i.e. agricultural development, education, health-care services, industrial development and reduction of unemployment, poverty and inequality in society.

The overall effect is the improvement in the wellbeing of the general populace of the country mostly the last populace. Politically, Local Government serves as a ground for inculcating democratic political ideas and a training ground for future political leaders with correct democratic ideas and values that can continues to move and project the country forward from its present third tiers of government.

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