The Role of Local Government in Grassroots Development

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Abstract: The understanding of Nigeria governments that the institution of local government is a core factor in grass-root development, has led the country into embarking on local government reforms in such an extensive nature as were introduced in 1976. The 1976 local government reforms were aimed among others, at ensuring development at grass-roots level. The successful nature of the new local government reforms have been the subject of debate both in academic and non-academic circles in Nigeria. This study examined the roles of Local Government Council in the provision and advancement of education, provision of good roads and market developments. The data collected in this research were through questionnaires, oral interviews and direct observations of the happenings in Nigeria Local Government.

Key words: Nigeria • Questionnaires • Oral Interviews and Direct Observations

INTRODUCTION

The local government system was introduced in Nigeria through indirect rule system that was established in 1900 by Lord Luggard [1]. It was established with the sole aim of maintaining law and order to provide some services and public amenities, co-operation and participation for inhabitant towards the improvement of their conditions of living and provide communities with a formal organizational frame work which enabled them conduct their affairs [2]. A goal is an image of future state which may be fully or partially achieved but the degree to which this goal is pursued justifies the existence of the organization [3, 4, 5 and 6]. This is made possible with complete reference to its statutory powers. The necessity of the development in grass root in the country became the corner stone of the development in government policy from 1976 onwards because government has realized that overall national development cannot be achieved without effective development of rural areas [7, 8, 9 and 10]. This led to the creation of local governments. And for these new created Local governments to participate actively in grass-root development as the third tier of government, was given more autonomy to deal with the problems of the people [11 and 12].

The Federal Government further demonstrated this by abolishing the former ministry of rural development and chieftaincy matters which was acting as the senior partner in the development of the rural area [13]. Before the abolitionment, this ministry used to impose projects on local government councils which may not be the priorities of the people at the grass root development. This guideline for Local government reforms in a nutshell wanted to establish the local government as the third tier of government activity in the nation, so that the local government should be precisely what the word government implies. The guideline also had other objectives and among these includes the promotion of development through making appropriate developmental activities towards the wish of the local people. In addition, the guideline sought to mobilize both human and material resources through involvement of the people in their local affairs [5 and 8]. This idea according to many social scientists is one of the key attributes of a development political system.

However, despite the 1976 local government reforms and its sound objectives of bringing government nearer to the people and life in the rural areas is nothing to write home about compared to the urban areas.

Objectives of the Study: For many years now, Nigeria has been in search of new forms of local government administration that would accomplish the desired objectives. This led to series of reforms including the 1988 local government reforms. The researcher thought it wise to undertake an empirical research of local government in other to find out what it had achieved in rural development and the problems facing it.
It is believed that the result of such findings will show whether the local government has been able to meet up with the desired objective which is development of rural areas.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study made use of deliberate selection gathering technique in order to cover those facts that could be seen from certain individuals in this study. Additional research method such as personal observation and the use of certain files were used. This source is used because of the unreliability of only one technique, since it has been found not to be totally adequate in gathering information. These additional methods thus served to compensate the inherent weakness of the primary data gathering methods, thus minimizing error and enhancing research results. This shows that the research made use of primary and secondary data.

**Theoretical Frame Work:** The theoretical foundation of this study is essentially based on David Eastons systems approach. The theory is also known as system theory. System theory has become an increasingly useful framework for thinking about organizations and management functions.

**Data Collection:** The data collection technique used in this research was based on personal observation (interview) and survey method (questionnaires). These form the primary source of data. Apart from the primary sources of data collection, the secondary sources such as textbooks, magazines, articles and official of governments, Journals and other material will equally employed. Information from these sources constituted the excellent check and was very useful.

**Data Analysis:** This research made use of a situational analysis in order to unravel the situation which spurs the local government effort towards rural development. This method of analysis was used to analyze the political, economic and social conditions of the local government.

**Hypothesis:** The following research hypothesis served as a guideline to this research.

- The inability of local government to meet up with its target objectives and goals are as a result of its weak financial resources.
- The local government staff is not dedicated to duty and this militates against realization of its rural development objectives.
- The geographical location of Enugu North local government is an added disadvantage to its development effort.

**Roles and Functions of Local Government in the Grass-roots Development:** Despite all the roles and functions of local government as elaborated in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in course of this study only the roles and functions of local government that affected the rural development was studied. The roles and functions of local government in grass-root development are as follows:

- Construction and maintenance of roads, streets, street lightings, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces or such public facilities like museum as may be prescribed from time to time by the house of assembly of the state.
- Naming roads and streets and numbering of houses.
- Provision and maintenance of public convenience, sewage and refuse disposal.
- They participate and make sure that state government provides the following matters:
  - The provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education.
  - The development of agriculture and natural resources other than exploitation of minerals.
  - The provision and maintenance of health service like immunization.
  - Establishment of slaughter house, slaughter slabs, market, motor parks and public conveniences.
- Mobilization of people for rapid rural development of the grass-roots with special reference to:
  - Self help projects, farm productions
  - Conflict resolution among warring communities
  - Provision of housing and urban layouts.
  - Provision of electricity
  - Enlightenment service.

In the exercise of the functions conferred under the law, a local government may either by its employees or by duly appointed agents or otherwise for the discharge of such functions.
However, it may have to be noted that the environment of every local government council will be to large extent determine the nature and the value of the functions of Urban Local Government in respect of degree of development and nature of roles to be performed.

The Local Government Reforms: Before 1976, local government was essentially a regional responsibility. There was thus enormous disparity in the approaches adopted by all the then regions in Nigeria, the North, Western and Eastern rejoins. Irrespective of inter-state differences in the structures and forms of local government administration in all states of the federation followed the integrated model. However, this continued until 1976 when the local government system of administration faced the thorough information [5 and 8].

The 1976 Local Government Reform: Local government has been going through reformation even before the attainment of the independence in 1960. There were reforms of 1948, 1952, 1955 and 1966. The 1979 local government reform, which was introduced by the Murtala/Obasanjo’s regime ushered in a uniformed system of local government administration in the country. One of the objectives of the reform was the establishment of local government as a third tier of government. It was in line with this objective that General Shehub Yaradaa opined that “local governments are to do precisely what the word government means: administration at the grass-root level.” The then government spokesman equally declared that it is only through an effective local government system that human and material resources could be mobilized for local communication between the government and the governed. But above all, the reform was intended to entrust political responsibility to whose it is most crucial and most beneficial, that is to the people at the grass-root. The government hopes that the reform would further entrenched the principle of participation, democracy and of political responsibility to every Nigeria [11].

The reform would have meant nothing if it didn’t include the certainly that every stratum of Nigeria society would benefit from the continued development of the country. To facilitate this, the reform ushered in a number of changes in the structure and organization frame work of local government in Nigeria. The reform defined local government as a government local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as staff and institutional and financial and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their area and to ensure through devolution of functions to those councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions that local initiative and repose to local needs and conditions are maximized. The reform further introduced the following: changes in the structure and organization of local government administration and system. It introduced a uniform government administration emphasized earlier. This uniformity entails the constitution of councilors directly elected by the people. Creation of 299 single-tier local authorities in the country as primary authorities: this was discourage the frivolous creation of local government sub-division of existing ones. The population and size of local authorities was stipulated to be between 150,000 and 800,000 persons. The introduction of supervisory councillors into the administrative and political mechanism of the local governments.

The 1988 Local Government Reform: Ever since the 1976 local government reform, there have been reviews amendment and reforms of local government system in the country. However, the most outstanding additional review so far was the one introduced by former Military president Ibrahim Babangida in 1998. The reform which took effect from 1991 brought about the granting of financial autonomy to the local government and increased their share of federal revenue from 10% to 15%. The implementation of this is that local government’s share of federal allocation will be remitted to them directly rather than through the state government [9].

Some of the intentions of the Babangida administration for the introduction of the reforms were for the removal of financial bottlenecks local government suffered in the hands of state government. State government had used the local government federal allocation in slowing state own problem and had government federal allocation in slowing state own problem and had always chosen to pay the local governments at their (states) convenient time. All these had in no small way frustrated the efforts of the local government in their effective discharge of legal responsibilities to the people [10].
The reform also facilitated the appointed of local government secretaries by the elected “Executive Chairman”, in accordance with the letters and spirit of civil service reforms as applied to local government. The position of secretary relinquishes his or her position at the expiration of the tenure of office of the chairman, who appointed him or her. This secretary may be a serving of retired person having a considerably den record of performance and administrative experience, preferably but within the public service.

The secretary functions as the chief administrative adviser to the executive chairman and arm of local government co-ordinating all activities and serving as secretary. Consequently, the principles of separation of power were adopted in the reform. This was to justify the full political and financial autonomy granted to the local government and to reflect three tier structure of government at the federal, state and grass-root.

Factors Hindering Efficiency in Rural Development:
Local governments which have been created as instruments for rural development, have so many factors hindering the efficient performance of their development duties. These factors could be looked at in different ways, ranging from political, administrative, finance and other problems. Politically, the influence of organized special interest group on the political system has been a hammer lock on the system through all sorts of channels, that is gang up, log-rolling tactics, hidden lobbying techniques, etc and these has often made it impossible even for successive government to deal with pressing national problems. Therefore, if the local government must set foot remedies that are very necessary to eliminate the improper influence of getting things done that is bribery and corruption, nepotism, favoritism etc. this could be achieved through conduct of regular internal investigative studies dealing with conflict of interest and other forces militating merit, fairness and fair play.

On the administrative aspect, the vital issues in the organization of local government is the structure of the local government system of administration and the physical area as well as the population of the units, there is also a problem of tired structure of the local government. The local circumstances of each state including its historical and administrative legacies are not considered in reaching decision on the matters. In organizing local governments, the sizes of the units are not considered as to facilitate deliberate in a representative council of the local communication.

Again, in Nigeria where the structure of local government undergoes frequent reorganization, private sector and financial institution are less likely to grant term loans to local authorities for any development programmes. This is because of the uncertainties surrounding their existence [5].

Finance is another major factor that hinders the efficient rural development. Historical, local government finance has been looked at from a narrow point of view which is concerned with rising of resources necessary to meet the expenditure needed to provide local government service, allocating those resources between the various services and ensuring that the value of money is being obtained. Local government finance has now overgrown from meeting the base service of local government to that of development of such area especially the communities.

This could also be referred to as income and expenditure. The income of income of local government is necessary as well as its expenditure, as it serves to determine the roles and functions of local government and their abilities in seeing to the development of rural areas. The gap between the two is examined to determine its effectiveness. In some cases, if expenditure outweighs its income, it is showing that inability of such local government to meet its needs with the available resources showing the gap to be negative.

On the other hand, if the income is higher than the expenditure, it is indicating positivity. It then means that the local government is able to meet its obligation and still stand the chance for development projects. Judging from this, it has been a general overview that the performance of local government in the country has been quite unsatisfactory as most of them encounter negative gap between incomes attributed to the neglect of internal revenue generation by local government.

Solutions to the Problems of Rural Development by the Local Government: The solution to the problems of rural development could be seen in the size of the units in terms of the physical area as well as the population of the units. The size of the unit should be such as to facilitate deliberations in a representative council of the local communities. Again, the total population should be big enough to generate reasonable revenue for the service and activities of the authority. Grouping of antagonistic elements should be avoided. There should be an easy means of communication within the physical area of the council. Common interest and previous association of the communities should be taken into consideration.
Furthermore, the people should be made to have sense of identification and participation in the administration of area.

Rural development should be given priority attention in our developmental strategies, this is necessary owing to the fact the 80% of Nigeria live in the rural areas. These developmental strategies should include: The mobilization of the rural populace for effective participation in the development programmes through self help projects in the provision of essential social service such as adequate education and health facilities, pipe borne water, rural electrification, industries and housing, the development of a comprehensive network of good roads and bridges to facilities the mobility of goods and persons.

Another solution is for the federal and state government to increase their financial allocations and state government to increase their financial allocation and grants to the local governments, in other to ensure a steady growth of the respective contributions to the joint loan and pension funds, the central government policy should provide for.

Finally, tax/rate payers in each local government should be encouraged by allocating some development projects in their different zones or in each ward of the local authority.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the problems hampering the effectiveness and efficiency of Local Government can best be handled under the headings financial and personal problems. The problems of finance as faced by the local government arise from in-adequate revenue from external and internal sources of revenue generation. The State had not been giving statutory allocation to the local government. The federal government in its own aspect had not been punctual or regular and equally, such allocation had been grossly inadequate to enable the Local Government meet its service requirements.

Again the bulk of the Local Government expenditure was mostly recurrent. In regards to personnel of Local Government, the first inadequate competent staff, the Local Government lacked skilled and educated staff to enable it accomplish it objectives. At present there are only 10% graduates and Higher Diploma holder of the Local Government work force. There is a factor of unattractive working conditions in the local government which scare away highly qualified and competent people from seeking employment in the local government. Another personal problem is lack of proper motivation due to poor incentive such as delay in payment of salaries to workers and allowances undue delay in promotion and poor working condition.

Finally, the educational qualification of the elected executives and councilors should be increased to at least first degree holders as against school certificate. This will go a long way in improving the Local Government effectiveness.

REFERENCES