

## IMPROVING HUMAN RESOURCE CAPACITY IN THE NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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### ABSTRACT

*Local government administration is at the lowest, yet most critical level of government in a rural- dominated federation such as Nigeria .It is critical to rural and ultimately to national development if properly managed. However, local governments in Nigeria have been incapacitated to function effectively over the years. One of the age-long problems of this important level of government is the ineffective use and development of the human resource of local governments. This is why local government personnel are often perceived as inefficient, inexperienced, unqualified, unskilled and incompetent in the performance of their duties. It is therefore recommended in this paper that for local governments to become vibrant and perform their responsibilities to expected standard , the process of their recruitment, training , and development of their personnel should be strictly in line with merit , staff development and sound personnel management practices.*

**Keywords:** Human Resource Capacity, Local government administration, Service delivery, Personnel Management Practices and Autonomy

### INTRODUCTION

Local government is an administrative device aimed at bringing the government nearer to the people. It is an administrative unit operating as a government in its own right at local level. Its proper management and development can lead to national development(Oyedele, 2015). There is a general agreement among scholars and practitioners that local government are established not only as representative organs of the people, but also as a channel through

which goods and services can be delivered to the people within the ambit of the laws establishing them. They are therefore , created to bring government nearer to the people so as to improve their living standard and political awareness( Center For Democratic Studies, 1990).

More than 70% of Nigerians reside in the rural areas where there is acute shortage of social infrastructure and economic needs (Oyedele et al 2017) This is why the 1999

Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria bestowed enormous functions and responsibilities upon local governments administration in the country. These functions and responsibilities were designed to bring rapid and substantive development to the grass root. By extension, grass root development is expected to lead to national development.

However, over the years, local governments in Nigeria have remained unable to perform this role to expectation. Among the numerous problems and challenges facing local governments in Nigeria is the problem of inefficient, inexperienced, unqualified, incompetent and unskilled personnel at that level of government. One of the reasons advanced for this is that because local governments belong to the third-tier of government, they do not have serious administrative or technical responsibilities and therefore require little or no competent and highly qualified employees. They are also not able to attract and retain highly qualified competent and efficient manpower as a result of their rural locations, small area of jurisdiction and their capacity to pay specialists. Today, with the progress of human society, particularly in developing countries of the world, the needs of man are constantly increasing. Modern governments, both at the central and local levels perform many more functions than ever dreamed of in the past. Even at the local community level, several new functions like housing, healthcare, maintenance of parks and libraries, local transport, electricity, water supply, sewage disposal, planned development of the towns among others are now being performed by the local government. Therefore the local government is today much more important in the daily life of the citizen than the state or central government (Sharma et al, 2012). In view of the enormous responsibilities, assigned to local governments by the

country's Constitution and the critical nature of these responsibilities to rural and national development, there is the need to improve greatly, the professionalization of the local government bureaucracy for greater competence and productivity. This is the position of this paper. In order to address this issue, the paper is divided into four parts. The first part examines the concept of human resource capacity while the second part highlights the importance of human resource capacity in local government administration. The third part is the description of the challenges and prospects of human resource capacity building in local government administration while the conclusion is the fourth part.

### **The Concept of Human Resources Capacity and Theoretical Framework**

Generally, human resource capacity development is an important aspect of human resource management. Human resource management is the development and utilization of personnel for the effective achievement of individual, community, national and international goals and objectives (Kinggundu, 2000). For any organization to achieve its aim with minimum efforts and frictions, it must have a workforce that is skilled, qualified, efficient, experienced and competent. The workforce of any organization otherwise known as human resource comprises of the personnel, staff, workers or employees of that organization. They are men and women who work in an organization. They are as well important and unique in an organization. In fact, of all the resources of an organization, the human resource is the most important. This is because unlike other factors of production, they can think, react to situations, recognize justice and injustice and can be trained. They also coordinate and put all other factors of production such as land, machinery, raw materials, time and capital

into productive use. Other factors of production are indeed worthless without the involvement of this factor (Sharma et al, 2012).

Because the human resource is the main instrument for the attainment of the objectives of an organization, every aspect of an organization's activities is determined by the competence, motivation and the general effectiveness of its human resource. The critical role of the strength and capacity of human resource of an organization can therefore not be over stressed. Capacity refers to the ability of an instrument or machine to produce the intended results (Olowu, 2000). Human resource capacity here connotes the full utilization of the potentials and ability of workers for maximum productivity or output. In other words, human resources is about ensuring that an organization has a sufficient number of qualified personnel in the right place at the right time. This could be through entry qualification, skill acquisition, training and retraining, staff development which is capable of bringing out the best out of employees and ensure that they are well equipped to give off their maximum performance on duty. Qualified and competent employees are usually confident and able to take on higher responsibilities. They are usually motivated.

The theoretical frame work that underpins this paper is the theory of public choice. According to Birth (1993), who propounded the theory, it is concerned with how to assess the efficiency of the system for providing public services in which individual citizen, viewed as a consumer of public goods and services, regards the society as the collection of consumers who are rational and egoistic, whose aim is to increase their individual satisfactions at minimum cost. The public interest is thus defined, in a utilitarian fashion, as "the maximization of individual satisfactions". A fundamental tenet of public

choice theory as Birth aptly point out, is that "services are better provided on a local than on a regional basis because consumers tend to favor neighborhood police force, school boards, rubbish collection and so forth.

### **The Importance of Improving Human Resource, Capacity in Local Government Administration.**

The present local government system in Nigeria is a creation of the comprehensive and massive reform of 1976 local government reform which introduced a uniform system of local government throughout the country. This reform was a major departure from the previous practice of local government administration in the country. The reform was aimed at giving local governments a definite role in the country by making them a functional third –tier of government. The reform specified functions of local government and these were later enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 7(1) of the forth schedule of the constitution specified that;

*The system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, the government of every state shall, subject to section 8 of this constitution, ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils (Constitution of Nigeria 1999).*

The reform therefore gave local governments a pride of place as a third –tier of governments with assumed parallel roles, responsibilities and relationship with the state and Federal Governments (Centre for Democratic Studies, 1990).

Over the years, national development has been canvassed to take off from the

grassroots as the local government is widely known as a vital instrument for rural transformation and machinery for effective delivery of socio-economic services to the people (Otoghlie and Edigun, 2011) Local governments are therefore expected to provide the local population with basic social and economic amenities for national development. The current interest in local government administration in Nigeria is due to the realization that a stable political system cannot be established in the absence of an effective and efficient local government that is nearest to the people and is therefore most suitable for the people of a particular community to organize and solve the problems of their immediate environments (Centre for Democratic Studies, 1990).

In view of the pride of place that the reform and the country's constitution bestowed on local governments, they have enormous responsibilities to carry in their position as the closest to the people at the grass-root level to touch the everyday lives of the people at that level of government. Some of the functions and responsibilities of local government are contained in the fourth schedule section. 7 paragraph 2 of the 1999 constitution. These are:

1. The provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education.
2. The development of agriculture and natural resources other than the exploitation of minerals.
3. The provision and maintenance of primary health care services.
4. Such other functions as may be conferred on a local government council by the house of assembly of the state.

In the light of the functions and responsibilities of local governments listed above and others, it is clear that local governments occupy a very

critical and crucial position as agents of socio-economic development of the rural areas which are expected to lead to national development. It is pertinent to note that local governments will not be able to perform these functions and responsibilities adequately if their personnel or human resource are not properly and adequately skilled, efficient, qualified, experienced and competent in the performance of their duties. The human resource at the local government level must possess the required qualifications and competence needed for standard performance. Local governments should of necessity aspire to be on a similar level of improved performance with both the state and federal government employees.

Local governments in Nigeria must of necessity possess the required skilled and competent personnel to plan and implement projects and programmes of development at that level of government. Competent personnel will also be required to prudently manage the meager financial and other resources available to the local governments. It is only skilled workers who are capable of carrying out development programmes efficiently and effectively enough to ensure service delivery to the people at the grassroots thereby touching their life positively because of their closeness to the people at that level of government. Indeed, local governments need to recognize the fact that as a third-tier of government, and the one closest to the people, whatever happens or does not happen at their level is easily noticed and has significant impact on the people. In a developing country like Nigeria with a very large illiterate population, the concept of government to many people, terminates at the level of local government because the other higher levels of government are too remote for them to appreciate (Centre For Democratic Studies, 1990).

In view of the importance of local government and their human resources, the constitution of the country also made provision for the monitoring of the appointments, posting, promotions and discipline of local government unified staff on salary grade level 07 and above by the various state governments through their local government service commissions. The mandate of the Local Government Service Commission is restricted to local government service personnel. Its functions are assigned under sections 91, 93, 94, and 95 of the local government (amended) Act No 6 of 2010. Some of the statutory functions of the commission as provided by law are:

1. Appointment, promotion, discipline, retirement and transfer of Local government unified staff (GL 07 and above) as well as transfer of staff in and out of the Local Government service to state /Federal Services
2. The commission delegated its power to the junior staff management committee (JSMC) of each local government council for officers on GL-O1 on all matters relating to appointments, posting, promotion and discipline. The local government councils are, however, required to obtain approval of the commission with regard to the delegation of the power.
3. The commission is responsible for setting up of uniform guidelines for appointments, posting, promotions and discipline of staff as provided by section 22 of the laws establishing the commission.
4. To monitor the performance of local government in the areas of appointment, discipline and promotion of local government employees on salary grade level O1-06 and to ensure that the guidelines are not circumvented.

5. Keep one percent local government training fund for the training of members of the unified Local Government service.
6. Assume full responsibility for manpower planning, development and training of the Local Government Staff, from the statutory local government Unified staff Training fund.
7. In carrying out the above functions, the commission is assiduously guided by the approved scheme of services for the local government employees in Nigeria as well as the Handbook on local government administration in Nigeria issued by the presidency and other enactments by the state government (Annual Report, 2016).

### **Challenges and Prospects of Improving Human Resource Capacity in Local Governments**

Local Governments in Nigeria have been widely criticized by scholars and practitioners for their failure to ensure prompt and efficient service delivery for the socio-economic development of the rural areas. This has been as a result of the multitude of problems facing them over the years. Some of the age-long challenges of Local Governments include denial of the required political and financial autonomy, inadequate funds, and undue interference by the federal and state governments among others. Another major challenge of local governments and which is the focus of this paper is the dearth of the much-needed skilled, qualified and competent workforce or human resource for the provision of social services to the rural areas. This problem in particular has adversely affected the pride of place which the country's constitution bestowed on local governments since the 1976 Local Government reforms. This problem has been aptly described by Adeyemi (2013) thus:

*The local governments in Nigeria lack the required skilled workers to plan and implement projects and programmes. Many specialists and professionals run away from local government jobs due to low salary and late arrival of the meager pay, leaving plans and execution to unskilled workers who haphazardly carry out developmental programmes. The local government primary schools are left with unqualified teachers while same goes for the primary health care where there are unqualified and insufficient health care givers to cater for the rural poor.*

Local Government personnel are therefore often perceived as inefficient, inexperienced, unqualified and incompetent in the performance of their duties. As noted earlier, one of the reasons adduced for this is that they belong to the third tier level of government which does not have serious administrative or technical responsibilities and therefore require little or no competent and qualified employees. Another is that most of the personnel are appointed on political considerations by politicians and who may not be appointed on merit hence lack the required education or professional qualifications needed for standard performance. It is pertinent to note that local government personnel should aspire to be on a similar level of improved performance with both the state and federal government employees.

One of the major reasons why local governments lack the required skilled and competent employees is finance. State governments always tamper with the revenues accruable to local governments from both federation account and states account of 10% augmentation from the state governments. These, coupled with the inability of local governments to generate sufficient funds through internal sources of revenue

make revenue available to local governments so low that they can barely pay salary of their workers regularly. Indeed, as a result of the present economic recession in the country, many local governments owe their workers several months of salary. Some local governments even pay salaries of their staff based on percentages. Payments of salaries in most local governments are often delayed. These unfavorable conditions have made local government employment highly unattractive to highly qualified applicants. Local Government employees in most cases are in search of greener pastures.

Moreover, the living standard in most rural local governments are poor as a result of lack of social amenities such as electricity, portable water, good roads, medical facilities among others. This situation no doubt keeps skilled and qualified employees away from the rural areas. This has been the age-long problem that has been responsible for rural-urban migration in the country. A large number of local government employees in the rural areas usually reside in urban areas nearest to their place of work, having to travel to their places of work occasionally for duty. This account for low productivity and poor service delivery.

Generally, one of the main problems in the recruitment system of modern civil service is laying down proper qualification to suit the needs of the diverse tasks of administration (Basu, 2012). If employees do not possess the required academic and professional qualifications they will not be skilled and competent for standard performance.

### **Prospects for Improving Human Resource Capacity in the Nigerian Local Governments**

In the face of the challenges identified with proper human resource capacity in local governments in Nigeria there are prospects of

ensuring competent employees at that level of government. One of these prospects is to ensure effective recruitment of staff. This means attracting the proper and suitable type of candidate for particular jobs. Government is not the only employer of labour in the society. It is only one of the many in the open labour market. It offers certain terms and conditions of employment, so do the other employers like bankers, industrialists, universities etc. People join the service where they get better pay and other attractive conditions of service. It needs hardly an emphasis that if the (Local Governments) want to secure and retain a highly qualified personnel, they should offer better terms of employment (Bhagwan et al, 2012). Indeed, the main test of any machinery of recruitment lies in its ability to recruit the right type of persons for the right jobs. The concept of a career civil service assumes that public service recruitment would be based on the principle of merit and equal opportunity for all. The recruitment process should be able to attract the best available talent among the youth to the civil services (Basu, 2012).

In view of the above, as much as possible, political considerations should be avoided in the recruitment of local government employees. Public servants should serve the government and not a particular political party. The fortunes of civil servants should not be connected with the rise and fall of political parties. Neutrality in politics is necessary for maintaining the integrity and effecting efficiency of administration (Bhagwan et al 2012).

Training and re-training of local government employees is another important way of ensuring improved human resources capacity in local governments. Training is the systematic imposition of skilled knowledge to all categories of civil servants for their advancement and efficiency in service. It is to help employees grow, not only from the stand point of mechanical efficiency but also

in terms of the broad outlook and perspective which public servants need (Nigro, 1970). Training is necessary to equip civil servants for higher positions and greater responsibilities where specialized knowledge and increased competence may be needed.

Training not only enhances the competence and ability of civil servants but in the process contributes to organizational efficiency and prestige. It also fosters a spirit of *camaraderie* and a sense of duty among the employees. Training helps build integrity and morale in the public servants by developing the requisite mental attitudes to questions of personal and public conduct (Basu, 2012). If the employee receives necessary educational and developmental opportunities necessary to perform his work well, he will not only work with dedication but will aspire to achieve excellence in the job. Training and development is therefore seen by the employee as an expression of management's desire to assist him attain the apogee of self-fulfillment (Ajileye 1992).

The Local Government Service Commissions which are the supervisory bodies for local governments on the issue of the appointments, promotion, posting and discipline of local government unified staff on salary grade level 07 and above should be more effective in the performance of these statutory duties assigned to them by law. The undue interference by state governments should not be extended to the personnel management practices of local governments through the local government service commission of the state governments. This is because it has been observed that the local governments have become subservient to the state governments where they have to wait for directives before they can embark on any project or assignment (Adeyemi, 2013).

It is important to note that local governments in Nigeria do not enjoy any reasonable level of autonomy, both political

and financial. One of the greatest challenges of local governments in Nigeria is lack of autonomy and undue interference in the affairs and running of the local governments by the higher levels of governments, particularly the state governments. This is against the spirit and vision of the 1976 Nigerian local government reform guidelines which defines local government as:

*Government at the local level, exercised through representative council, established by law to exercise specific powers within a defined area. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institution and financial services and to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal governments in their areas, and to ensure, through devolution of these functions to these councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.*

The definition of local government as stated above specifically confers powers over local affairs as well as the staff and institution and financial powers on local governments in Nigeria. It is therefore necessary. For local governments to enjoy full autonomy as

granted by law to enable them perform their functions of service delivery to the people at the grass root level. This will enable them to embark on independent and effective human resource management practices needed to secure and retain skilled, qualified and competent personnel for standard performance.

## CONCLUSION

This paper examined , the dearth of skilled, qualified and competent employees in local government administration in Nigeria .The paper affirms that this constitutes a major challenge to local governments in the effective performance of service delivery to the over 70% of Nigerians who reside at that level of government. The paper identified inefficient personnel management practices resulting into the inability of the local governments to attract and retain qualified personnel among other reasons for the poor human resources capacity in local governments.

In order to ensure adequate improvements in this area, the paper recommends that the local governments service commission which are empowered to oversee the appointments , promotion, transfer, and discipline of certain categories of local government staff should be more efficient and effective in the performance of their duties Stategovernments should reduce to the barest minimum, their interference in the political and financial issues of local governments in order to make them enjoy a reasonable level of autonomy as provided for by the country's constitution.



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