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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The local government constitutes the most critical level of government in the move for sustainable national development. 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. In the light of this, in 1976, the nationwide local government reform was initiated where the local governments were saddled with more functions, responsibilities and finances. However, this development has led to wide disparity in what should be expected of the local government and what is actually happening in the local government in terms of socio-economic service delivery for national development which is the central focus of this paper. The aim of this paper is to discuss the challenges confronting the local government in carrying out its functions as a level of government as well as highlight the prospects for local government as an engine of national development. This paper has adopted a conceptual approach through the use of secondary sources of data to analyse the objective. It is discovered in this paper that the local government has lost its footing in the developmental process due to unwarranted encroachment into the administration, finance and operations of the local government by the state governments. Therefore, it is recommended in this paper that for local government to be vibrant and perform up to expectation, a constitutional amendment must be made to cede the local government away as an appendage of the state government.

Keywords: Local Government, National Development, Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

The local government constitutes the most critical level of government in the move for a sustainable national development. 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 (Adeline, 2014; Otoghile and Edigin, 2011). More than 70% of Nigerians reside in the rural areas where there is acute shortage of social infrastructure and economic needs. In the light of this in 1976, the local government nationwide reform was initiated where the local governments were saddled with more functions, responsibilities and finances to correct the anomaly of rural areas challenges. As a tier of government, the local government retains its

position as the closest level of government to the people to cater for the development of the local areas (Fajonyomi and Olu-Owolabi, 2013). Also, the local government has the responsibility to provide the local population with basic social and economic amenities as well as form a training ground for democracy and participation. Therefore, the development of rural areas or local governments will automatically transform into the development of the country.

However, the local government is faced with several challenges which have undermined the essence of a level of government which derived its mandate from the constitution in the pursuance of its developmental objective (Eze and Muanya, 2013; Odigbo, 2013; Odigbo and Osuagwu, 1998). These challenges root from what increasingly looks like deliberate efforts to stem the advancement of development from the local government level in the country. It has therefore inhibit the local governments in the performance of their constitutionally assigned roles of shaping development from the grassroots (Idike, 2014). It is therefore, the focus of this paper to discuss the challenges facing the local government in national development and the prospects of a vibrant local government in national development using a conceptual approach with the aid of secondary sources of data.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Conceptualizing Local Government

Local government as a concept has been conceptualized by various scholars. The concept has been centered on the transfer of political powers to local areas by involving the inhabitants in the provision of basic needs. Ikelegbe (2005) defines local government as “a segment of a constituent state or origin of a nation state”, established by law to provide public services and regulate public affairs within its jurisdiction. Fajobi, (2010) defines local government “as a unit of government to maintain law and order based on range of social amenities and to encourage cooperation and participation of people at the grassroots to improve their living conditions”. The 1976 Nigerian local government reform guidelines 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 institutional and financial powers 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 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 maximised. (Emphasis mine).

United Nations Development Programme (2009) defined local government as a unit of government covering the range of governance issues that exist at the local level including decentralization of policies and processes, the role and inter-relationships of different actors and institutions, local democracy and local government performance.

For the purpose of this paper, different issues raised from the definitions above are extracted to form a broad conceptualization of local government as follows:

- a) The local government is a political authority with elected officials which has the political powers to take decisions
- b) The local government is a subdivision of the central government established by the law
- c) The local government is a unit of government closest to the people to provide basic social and economic amenities.
- d) The local government is an entity that has substantial autonomy to make laws, rules and regulations. Also the autonomy to formulate and execute programmes and policies
- e) The local government is expected to facilitate the existence of democratic self-government close to the local government levels of the society, and to encourage initiatives for leadership potentials
- f) The local government is expected to mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of members of the public
- g) The local government is expected to provide a two-way channel of communication between the local communities and central government.

From the above issues raised, we can therefore adopt the broad functions of the local government and the rationale behind the existence of local government. The rationales can be further classified into what Ola (1984) mentioned as the three basic schools of thought for the existence of local government. These schools of thought include;

- a) Democratic participatory school,
- b) The efficient-service school
- c) The developmental school.

a) Democratic- Participatory School

One of the justifications for the existence of local government is that local governments are instruments of democracy. That the local government should be a training ground for political education, and to encourage and facilitate mass political participation at the local level (Horst, Caroline, Dalbir and Suresh, 2008). Thus, the degree of democratization at the local government level affects the prospects of enhanced central government democratic governance. A major proponent of this school of thought Ani et al (2013) holds the view that the local government involves a philosophical commitment to democratic participation in the politics and governing process at the grassroots. Active participation in local democracy allows for a closer government-citizen relationship and facilitating the involvement of minorities and disadvantaged groups (Nico, 2008).

b) The Efficient Service School

The second school of thought is the efficient service delivery school which argued that the local government is not only a ground for mass participation and training of local politicians, rather it should be a level of government to efficiently deliver local public goods and services. It should be noted here that one function that can't be withered

away is that “local government exist to provide services in accordance with the needs and wishes of its local inhabitants” (Tindal, 1977). The local services ranges from the provision of local roads, primary education, primary health care, sanitation and maintenance of law and order among others as may be provided in the constitution. Proponents of this school of thought such as Kafle and Karkee (2003) noted that the core argument in favour of efficient service delivery school stem from the existence of local government as the closest level of government to the people, where some governmental services and programmes are better delivered through the local government. Also, another argument in favour of this school of thought is that certain services are better decentralized for effective delivery such as registration of births, deaths and marriages, wealth ranking, radio and television licenses (Bolatito and Ibrahim, 2014). Further to this, the local government is in the best position to garner local energy and support base to carry out certain functions such as local hunter and vigilantes are been used as local security to complement the effort of the central police force, local aid groups such as the boys scout are engaged in an event of local disaster management such as fire outbreak or building collapse (Uhunmwuango and Aibeye, 2013).

c) The Developmental School.

The third school of thought is the Development School. This school of thought is a combination of the two schools earlier discussed because development entails provision of essential services effectively and as well actively engaging the local population in democratic participation. The thrust of this school is that local government serves as the agent of development to the local populace most especially in the developing countries. The improvement of the quality of life and standard of living of the local population becomes a responsibility of the local government (Adeyemo, 2011). It is also the responsibility of the local government to partner the central government in nation building and development through mobilization of local resources for development purposes. The local government been the closest level of government to the people, it poses to be in the best position of been aware and acquainted with the needs of the local population (Saalah, et al, 2011). Therefore, if all the local governments adhere to the developmental principles and practice, the entire nation would be built with an even national development.

2.1.2 Development

There is no universally acceptable definition of the concept of development. It means different things to different people. Joseph (1999) defines development as “transformation of society, a movement from traditional relations, traditional way of thinking, and traditional method of production to modern ways”. Chambers (1997) defines development as the transformation of the lives of citizens through the provision of better quality of life. From the two definitions above, development entails the transformation from a state that is worse off to a state that is better off. Equally, Todaro and Smith (2006) define development as “both a physical reality and a state of mind in which society has secured the means of obtaining a better life”. This definition

elaborated further on the first two definitions that the transformation of the people can either be materialistic such as improved infrastructure and wealth creation or immaterial such as self-esteem and human capital potentials with the ultimate goal of achieving a better life for the citizenry.

Development from the perspectives of the definitions above rallied around the increase in the availability of basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing and security. Also, it emphasizes things beyond personal and individual needs such as increase in national income, respect of cultural values improvement in the educational and health institutions. The ultimate aim of development is the freedom from servitude, ignorance, and abject poverty. Therefore, the concept of development involves the societal acquisition of the combination of social, economic, human and institutional processes as a means to acquire better living condition.

Diejomaoh (2008) specifies what constitutes development as follows:

- a) Accelerated economic growth and wealth creation and not just poverty eradication
- b) Macro-economic economic stability, liberalization of markets and prices, and private sector led growth
- c) Reaping the gains from the irreversible process of globalisation, which must be made fair for all.
- d) Pursuing the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.
- e) Implementing the Decent Work Agenda. With emphasis laid on workers' rights, decent employment for all, social protection for all, and enhanced social dialogue.
- f) The prospects for success in achieving the development goals above, depend on the practice of good governance – democracy, respect for human rights; rule of law, transparency and accountability and the fight against corruption in Government, the private sector, and all sectors of human endeavor and society

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that development is a concept that is people centered and that the overall goal of what is to be achieved at the end is about the people's wellbeing (Coetzee 2001:126). Also, from the perspective of Korten (1990) development that is people centered is a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilise and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations. This argument would be used in the conceptualization of national development

2.1.3 National Development

The concept of national development is a sustained growth and development of a nation from a state that is undesirable to a more desirable one through development planning mapped and strategized by the collective efforts of government. It comprises the aggregation of all the financial, human and material resources of a nation from the central government to the local government to provide social amenities, quality

education, potable water, infrastructural facilities quality health care etc. (Abimbola & Adesote, 2012). Elugbe (1994) summarized the concept of national development as the growth of the nation in terms of unity, education, economic wellbeing and mass participation in the government. National development is people oriented and its success is evaluated based on the improvement it has had in the lives of the people. It is contained in the Third National Development Plan (1975-1980) that:

True development must mean the development of man, the unfolding and realization of his creative potentials, enabling him to improve his material conditions of living through the use of resources available to him. It is a process by which mans personality is enhanced and it is that enhanced personality-creative, organized and disciplined- which is the moving force behind the socio-economic transformation of any society.

2.1.4 State of Development in Nigeria

Development as earlier mentioned in its conceptualization is best measured by the welfare of the people and not only by increase in the national income and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), rather it transcends to the living standard such as consumption level, poverty, literacy level, employment, maternal and infant mortality, life expectancy, security etc.

Nigeria has an estimated population of 170 million which makes it the most populous country in Africa and account for 18% of the region's population. About 51.7% of the population still resides in the rural areas leaving 48.3% in the urban centers. A proven reserve of 37 billion barrels of crude oil and 187 trillion standard cubic feet of natural gas with substantial reserve of tin, columbite, granite, iron ore etc. (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2008). Due to its vast natural resources, Nigeria is ranked 30th in the world in terms of GDP with an average of 8-9% economic growth (Ayodele, 2008)

Despite the huge resources, corruption, poverty, insecurity, maternal and infant mortality, and unemployment continue to be on the increase. Unemployment rate rose from 12% in 2006 to 24% in 2011 and 33.1% in 2013 (World Bank, 2013). Poverty has been an issue the government has been contending with over the years, however only very little success has been recorded in this regard. Analysis from the Nigerian Economic Report (NER) and the National Bureau of Statistics' (NBS) General Household Survey (GHS) shows that the poverty estimates in Nigeria is believed to be 33.1% in the 2012/2013 survey. While rural poverty stands at 44.9% in the same period (Emejo, 2014).

Another area of serious concern for the country's development is the issue of insecurity of lives and properties of the citizens. The ugly development of boko-haram in the North Eastern part of the country has forced thousands to be widows, orphans, destitute and homeless. Also, it has paralysed the socio-economic activities of the areas affected leading to a serious negative slide on the part of national development.

The average literacy rate is about 38.2% although with variations across the country in term of states, geo-political zones and gender (UNESCO, 2015). This is caused by the government's attitude to education and the state of school infrastructures. Many

schools are in a terrible state due to lack of sufficient and modern infrastructure for teaching and learning. Schools today lack sufficient chairs, tables, and books for learning. Health care and living standards in Nigeria is still in a poor and deplorable condition, access to portable water supply is low and there is prevalent lack of sanitation, all these indices have lowered the life expectancy of an average Nigerian to 47 years (United State Library of Congress, 2008).

2.2 Local Government and National Development in Nigeria

Local governments in Nigeria have long been existing prior to colonial era. They existed in separate colonies, ethnics, tribal affiliations and communities with their own functions, informal laws and heads (Agba, Akwara, and Idu, 2013). There were no uniformities in the system of governance. During the colonial era, native authorities were established to replace the traditional local authorities to put the local government in structure, base and make a formal government system charged with the responsibilities of tax administration, building and maintenance of market stalls, local courts, sanitary inspections, maintenance of burial grounds among others (Ukiwo, 2006; Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010).

After independence in 1960, there was another system of local government that was modern but were reflections of the regions that existed. The local governments in the Northern region had similar characteristics in terms of administration, control, finance, functions and operations. Same applies to the two other regions in Nigeria i.e. Eastern and Western regions. In this era, local governments were autonomous and act as a powerful organ of government in development from the grassroots (Agagu, 2004). In 1976, local governments were revolutionized and a sort of uniformity in operations and objectives were established across the country which forms the present local government mode of operation, administration, finance and structure as it is applicable today. Local government system was reenergized to greater efficiency in management and service delivery most especially to the local areas (Oviasuyi, Idada & Isiraojie, 2010). This reform was so inclusive that it offered the local government a constitutional role to join the central government in development, service delivery and grassroots participatory democracy. This was a deliberate effort as argued by Odigbo and Osuagwu (2013) to make the local government represents a part of an identified effort at solving perceived problems of rural development and the economic marginalization of the rural poor. To make this effort a worthwhile, the 1999 constitution gives room for the local governments to be politically divided and restructured into 774 units across the country. Therefore, the local government becomes an integral part of national development. The 1976 Reform (1976) points out the following as the primary aims of local government in Nigeria:

1. To make appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiative by developing or delegating such services to local representative bodies.
2. To facilitate and bring the exercise of democratic self- governance close to the local levels of our society and to encourage initiative and leadership potentials.
3. To mobilize human and material resources through the involvement of

members of the public in their local development and;

4. To provide a two way channel of communication between local government, state and Federal or national government.

The constitution, specifically the fourth schedule, section 7, paragraph 2, further assigned some functions in terms of service delivery to the local government as follows:

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 the Assembly of the state. (Constitution Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

However, the local government has underperformed in its statutory roles when compared with other two levels of government i.e. the state the federal governments (Chukwuemeka, Ugwuanyi, Ndubuisi-Okolo and Onuoha, 2014; Fajonyomi and Olu-Owolabi, 2013; Odalonu, 2015). This level of underperformance has undermined the essence of the local government in the provision of basic socio-economic needs such as primary education, primary health care and waste management for the grassroots population (Kyenge 2013). Abdulraheem, Olapipo and Amodu, (2012) noted that Primary health care infrastructure in some rural areas are in decay and not even in existence in some areas. In a study conducted by Adeyemo (2005), it was discovered that there is a lag in the required number of healthcare personnel, transportation challenge, and poor community mobilization for support, inaccessibility to health centers due to bad topography as well as poor management, administration and supervision.

2.3 Challenges facing Local Governments in National Development

a) Lack of Autonomy and Undue Interference

Today, one of the greatest challenges the local government face in the country is the lack of autonomy and undue interference in the affairs of the local governments by the state governments. The call for local government political and financial autonomy has been an age long clamour which has continue to receive a negative response from the State House of Assemblies for ratification in favour of the state governments. These state governments utilize the provision of Section 7 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) which provides that *“The system of local government by democratically elected Local Government 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 function of such council”*. The high level of interference of state government in the affairs of Local government is captured by Khaleed quoted in Adeyemo (2013) as:

There is no state of the federation of Nigeria where one form of illegality or the other is not committed with funds of local government,

through over deduction of primary school teacher's salary, spurious state/local government joint account project, sponsoring of elections, taking over the statutory functions of local government and handling them over to cronies and consultants, non-payments of pensioners and non-utilization of training fund despite the mandatory deduction of stipulated percentages for these purposes... nine states out of the 36 states of the federation have elected representatives running the affairs of their local governments. This is central to the whole problem because it is by planting stooges called caretaker committee, who neither have the mandate of the people nor the moral strength to resist the excruciating control of the state government that perpetuates the rot.

In some instances, some state governors misuse the provision of constitution by dismissing the entire local government executives. For instance, in Anambra State, South East region of Nigeria, the state Governor appointed caretaker committee to man the affairs of local government from 1999 to 2009 (Nkwocha, 2009). Caretakers have limited powers in functions and execution of projects, more so, these caretakers are friends and loyalists of the state governors (Ukonga, 2012). The constitution provides that elections into the local government council should be conducted by the state government which more often than not lacks merit. On most occasions what is obtainable is imposition of candidates that will serve the interest of the state government without allowing the people at the grassroots have a say in the polity.

To this end, this undue interference have rendered the local government as an appendage or rather an extension of the state government making the local government look like a ministry under the state government (Eboh & Diejomaoh, 2010; Ajibulu, 2012). Adeyemi (2013) observed that the local governments have become subservience to the state governments where they have to wait for directives before they can embark on any project or assignment. It therefore, tells on one hand in the operations of the local government thereby rendering it incapacitated to deliver socio-economic goods to the people at the grassroots (Agba, Akwara, & Idu, 2013).

b. Financial Challenge

The major source of revenue accrued to the local government is through the federation account or statutory allocation from the local government. Next to the federation account is the 10% augmentation from the state government and internally generated sources. There is a problem with this arrangement as the fund from the federation account is huge but it doesn't go directly into the coffers of the local government rather it flows through a State-Local Government Joint Account which the state governments has override access to (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014). The State Joint Local Government Account System (SJLGAS) was created by the virtue of section 162 of the 1999 CFRN to facilitate rural development of the local communities through effective supervision of the funds going into the accounts of the local government through from the federation account. According to Agbani and Ugwoke (2014) the SJLGAS has become a means of making unnecessary deductions form the revenues accruing of the local government from the federation account to the accounts of the state government.

In this regard, the state governments even refuse to release the 10% augmentation from their own end. This has resulted in local governments owing its staffs more than 3 months salaries in some states. It also translated into lack of sufficient fund for projects. Primary education and primary health care that are within the purview of the local government lack the basic required equipment and facilities expected (Okoli, 2000).

c. Corruption and Wastage

The local governments have been accused of reckless spending coupled with mismanagement and corruption of the little funds that is left after the state government deductions. As Uhunmwangho & Aibieyi (2013) observed the spending of most local government is not only characterised by waste but also by corruption. According to Obi (1996) the poor state of accountability in the local government studied was as a result of interwoven tragedy emanating from the Nigeria factor, weak accounting control mechanism lack of prosecution of offenders, dishonesty and absence of adequately maintained financial records, conflict in role perception by the chairmen and many others. Although, corruption is present in all the levels of government in the country but the Local Governments chairmen have been known for just driving in to collect their share of the allocation and go back to the state capital where they reside without course for accountability and transparency (Ukiwo (2006).

d. Insufficient Skilled Workers

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 of arrival of the meagre 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 (Adegbam, 2013).

2.4 Prospects for Local Government in National Development

This paper is of the strong opinion that it is important to carry out a constitutional reform which will reposition the local governments back on the path of a self-reliant level of government with both fiscal and administrative autonomy. This will shut out the undue interference from the state government and give the local government chance to decide its fate in planning and implementation of policies and programmes. Also, it will afford the local government more substantial revenue to improve the current poor welfare state of its staff that has been trampled upon by the state governments.

Secondly as part of the constitutional reform, elections into the local government should be done independent of the state government. The people at the grassroots should be afforded the golden opportunity to elect a representative of their choice to make. This will further foster a high degree of community mobilization and participation in the works and affairs of the local government and promote development from the grassroots.

Thirdly, the anti-corruption crusade of the federal government should be extended to

the local government level as well. Local governments must be mandated to publish their accounts and make it available to the anticorruption agencies for scrutiny and verification. This will ensure probity, transparency and accountability in the system of local government administration.

Fourthly, for effective planning and implementation of projects, the local government must be upgraded in terms of capacity building through training and retraining of its staffs in the New Public Management approach to public administration. It is very important for local governments to advance in same terms with the federal and state governments through the use of improved mechanism of administration such as e-governance to ensure even and sustainable development. This will ensure an effective and efficient mode of service delivery at the long run.

4.0 Conclusion

This paper has discussed the roles of local governments in national development by highlighting the challenges they face and the prospects. The local government is at the center of national development by virtue of their existence as the lowest level of government and the government closest to the people and development is people centered as earlier discussed. This paper has conceptualized the local government from three different schools of thought, firstly, as a center for mobilization, participation and democracy, secondly, as machineries for the delivery of effective and efficient services and lastly as the level of government to promote development from the grassroots. These three core schools are essential ingredients for the sustenance of national development from the grassroots. However, with the prevailing level of underdevelopment in the critical and mundane roles of the local government in nation building, it is safe to say that the local government has lost its footing and place in the process of national development due to the challenges highlighted in this paper. The challenges are lack of autonomy and undue interference, financial challenges, shortage of skilled personnel as well as corruption and wastage.

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