



Local Government Administration as a Vital Sustainable Structure of Grass Root Development and Nation-Building in Nigeria

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Abstract

The article "Local Government Administration as a Vital Sustainable Structure of Grass Root Development and Nation-Building in Nigeria" reveals that local government has immense functions that makes it very significant in a democratic system, unfortunately the various political gladiators at the helm of affairs under the military and civilian has made local government activities dysfunctional in Nigeria. Thus, the local government as a structure or third tier of governments remains an undisputed vital structure that bring governance closer to the people at the grassroots by providing basic social amenities that will make life more meaningful to the populace. The article justifies the importance of local government by efficiency services theory of local government, democratic school of local government and accountability and control theory of local government the major encumbrances constraining the activities of local government are been constrain by financial and administrative lack of financial autonomy, deliberate creation of poverty and the menace of lingering corruption in the system. Local government has achieved has certain functions that conspicuously makes it a vital structure vital sustainable structure of grass root development and nation-building in Nigeria; such functions ranges from urbanization & community development, availability of labour, project initiation, commercialization of agriculture, modernization of technology, administrative efficiency and political education. The article concludes that that the activities of local government is an important inventive structuration in nation building and development in modern democracy through the various innovations and functions. The third-tier of government is democratic in is orientation by inculcating the principles, tenets and ethos in the polity by achieving democratic prospect whimsically and capriciously.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, theoretical scholars from different field of study and political scientist have undertaken study of Local Government from different perspective. But the major current that runs through literatures have showned that Local Government is a government at the grassroots meant to cater for the needs of the people at the Local level or precincts. As a matter of quintessence, a local government is a government meant for meeting particular or peculiar needs of the people at the grassroots as enunciated by Appadorai, (1975:287)

"government by popularly elected bodies charged with administration and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place".

In supportive of this proposition, Leke Oke (2001:167) noted that the official handbook on the reformed on Local government system in Nigeria in 1976 perceived Local government as:

"Government at Local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the substantial control over Local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct

the provision of services and 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 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 conditioned at maximized" (FRN, 1976:1).

American Scholar, Whitaker, Jr. (1970:77) argued that "no obstacle to analysis would arise were there universally accepted functions and purposes of modern democratic local, government but of course, there are none" In another vein, wraith (1964:27) said that "it is useful to think of the formative stages of Local Government in these terms for they suggest two things which need constantly to be borne in mind". In expatiating further firstly in wraith opinion, local government is an organism' that is something that cannot be contain for ever or even for very long in a particular set of statutes, rules and regulations, but which is constantly adapting itself to new circumstances, and secondly, that it is related to habits, mode of life and surroundings summarily, wraith is explicitly saying that local government differs from on country to another or from one states to another or even within one country (Olori 2004; 1-2).

Oladosu (1986) examines the term local government from the angle of its essential features, which includes the local government being often characterized by the provision of opportunity for the local community to determine their own political, economic and social destiny; by actively participating in the making and execution of decisions that affects them in their everyday lives i.e. managing their own affairs in a way they see it. When this is done, the local government will be serving to awaken in the Citizens political consciousness and thus instigating the participatory inadequacies of national or state government; from the above statement of Oladosu one can induce or summarize that:

- A local government is the third – tier of government in a federal setup or a second tier in a unitary system of government.
- A local government is created by the statutory instrument of government of a country.
- In a local government, government functions are decentralized on the basis of geographical location to avoid concentration of power at the centre.
- A local government affairs are managed by the local people or through their elected representatives.
- Local government is concerned with the regulation and administration of affairs at the local level to ensure justice and fulfillment for the people.
- In a local government, the management officials such as the chairman, his deputy, councilors, etc are elected by the people and accordingly accountable to them.
- These elected representatives discussed above are accountable to the electorate at the local council.
- The elected representatives have executive freedom with their sphere of activities assigned to them.

Campbell (1965:11) perceived local government as intra-foreign geographical entities within a foreign nation. Thus, local government is a legal independent unit that has separate legal existence as a corporate body. Local governments are not mere offshoots of the central Authority. Odenigwe (1971:19) in a seminar presented on divisional administration held at the Institute of Administration, Enugu stated that the relationship between the state government and local government provided a system of chain of command and direction. It enabled the state to awaken the enthusiasm of the local leadership to channel the effort of the people to genuine activities for the good of the community. Ola (1984:8) summarized local government as follows:

- A sub-division of the nation.
- It can impose taxes and incur expenses.
- Finally, it comprises elected members who run it.

From the above analysis stated by Professor Ola, one can

conclude that local government is recognized as a third-tier of government with the official duty elected by the people of the area rather than by appointment or the vote by local notables.

JUSTIFICATION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHMENT

The existence of local government is justified on so many grounds basically for political expediency and Administrative convenience. The aforesaid-mentioned proposition is based on the fact that every public service should be administered on by the smallest possible unit. Ladipo Adamolekun (1983:59-64) has put forward the justification as political participation; Adamolekun is of the opinion that the citizens are free to elect from among themselves those who are to run the affairs of local government. In a nutshell, Adamolekun based the justification of local government on efficient service delivery. Gboyega of the University of Ibadan argued that Local government is justified on the ground of the inability of the central Authority to singularly cope with the contemporary complex problems in many polities. Gboyega (1987:3) succinctly espounded that local government:

“is a counter-vailing power to other governmental levels, and a power sharing device which helps to localize and confirm problems that may arise out of the government process”

In essence decentralization is informed by the need for efficient performance is a cogent motive for the establishment of local government. Decentralization enable government to be more responsive to the plight of the people particularly at the grassroot level in terms of making quick response to their advertised needs and prevailing problems. It is therefore the belief that no central administration in countries as large a Nigeria, India, South Africa, United States, China and Russia, to mention but a few, can satisfactorily conduct administration purely through the public servant based at the headquarters in the capital cities (Ajayi, 2000 :3).

THEORIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Theoretically, scholars have put forward propositors and submissions on the need of local government. There are 3 theories explicitly sufficient for the discussion in this chapter, they are efficient services theory, and accountability and control theory (Ajayi; 2000:5).

The Efficiency Services Theory of Local Government

The efficiency services theorist believe that local government occupies the best position for the efficient performance of certain functions. Because of the nearness of the council to the people and the smallness of the population, there is efficiency in the provision of services to the people at the grassroot. The operations of the political system which embraces both the input and output, and feedback processes (i.e. circuited and not as complex as the higher levels of governance.

The efficiency services theorist in the opinion of Kunle Ajayi 2000:5 believes that efficiency is best achieved at the local level. It is in consonance with this line of argument that Professor Herrold J. Laski succinctly opened that:

“We cannot realize the full benefit of democratic government unless we begin by the admission that all problems are not central problems, and that the results of problems not central in their incidence require decision at the place, and by the persons, where and whom the incidence is most deeply felt: (Laski, 1982:411).

Democratic School of Local Government

The proponent of democratic school of Local government perceives local government as a training ground for political training and leadership qualities by first contesting as councilors at their local government area: The new dispensation in Nigeria with the introduction of presidentialism to local level, has a wider scope of political “apprenticeship” to the politicians as the local legislatures confer on the legislators experience on the know-how of law-making process. After so many years of acquiring political experience at the local level; these politicians contest politics at the higher levels of state and federal government for this purpose, Lord James Bryce remarked that local government is the best school of democracy and the best guarantee for its success is the practice of local self – government.

Accountability and Control Theory of Local Government

The accountability and control theory of local government is related to the Democracy school of local government. Basic to this school political participation of the citizens in their local affairs through elections, they elect their representatives into the councils. It is the duty of the people to elect whoever they trust and those that have the ability capability and the competence to shoulder the responsibility of the council.

The belief of this school is that it is only when the success of the legitimacy through the act of election is when accountability comes in the representative must be accountable in totality to the people that elected them and they must account for their stewardship and provide for their needs whimsically and capriciously.

Local Government under Colonial Rule

Local government under colonial administration was known as Native authority system. This archetype was informed by the fact that indirect rule introduced by Fredrick Lord Lugard was last effective. In adoption of indirect rule administration Lord Lugard argued that “there was no desire to impose on the (Nigerian) people any theoretically suitable form of government but rather to evolve from their old institution, based on their habits of thought, prestige and custom, the form of rule best suited to them and adapted to meet the new conditions” (Lugard, 1922:219).

Omotoso, F (2000; 17) said that in order to effectively

pursue this policy, the native authority ordinance of 1910 was erected for the establishment of Native authorities first in Northern Nigeria before it was introduced in Southern Nigeria later.

The Native administrative system was composed of four major elements. First, the Resident officer provided direction and control. Second, the Native Authority was usually headed by a traditional Chief who had indigenous political legitimacy, and supported by council of elders. Third, was the Native treasury and fourth, The Native Court which was made up of the representative of the native administration. It is in consonance with this line of thought that Alex Gboyega of the department of Political Science University of Ibadan argues that:

“These structures of the Native administration system were created and sustained on the basis of a body of values and political beliefs which were articulated as the principles of Indirect rule” (Gboyega 1987:14).

Under this arrangement, the native authority is always headed by a traditional ruler and in some cases the Chief might be the sole native authority while it could be Chief-in-councils in some others. Lugard emphasized this point when he surmised that:

“The first step was to endeavour to find a man of influence as Chiefs, and to group under him as many villages or district as possible to teach him to delegate powers and to take an interest in his native treasure to support his authority and to inculcate a sense of responsibility (Sandra et al 1989:65).

Local Government in the First Republic

The Eastern part of Nigeria was the first to initiate major changes the warrant Chief system introduced by the colonialist because of their corrupt practices.

A third – tier local government was reduced into Nigeria i.e. the country council, the district council and the local council. The New Local government system attracted elected representative rather than imposed traditional element. There was introduction of full adult suffrage which replaced limited and indirect election and committee system while the business of the council was being presided over by an elected chairman (Omotoso, 2000:19).

In the Western Region of Nigeria in 1952, Local government law was enacted which made provision for a three-tier structure namely divisional council, district council and local council (Adeyeye; 1992:37) In spite of the various laws put in place by the western region government, local government administration was not as smooth as expected for the local government. The reasons for this were the low calibre of leadership at the council, the descriptive party politics and the curses that engulfed Western Region in 1960's. Agagu argues that the Northern region was not so keen to make changes in its native authorities system. This may be attributed to the fact that indirect rule emanated for

the Region. Though provisions were made for increase in the elective membership in all local government council but much commitment was not shown towards this direction. This has led a reknown professor of political science at the University of Ibadan Alex Gboyega (1987:75) to observe that:

“In the Northern Region, the provision in the law for elected councilors did not lead to elected majorities in all councils or even elected members in all council. By 1966 only about one half of the total of native authorities had elected majorities in their council”.

Local Government under Military Rule

Omotoso (2000:20) noted that the military coups of 1966 brought about certain changes and development in local government administration in all the four regions which were consequently replaced with twelve state structures of Yakubu Gowon and additional seven states added to make nineteen by Murtala Muhammed.

In the Western Region, all former councils were dissolved and their functions were taken over by sole administrators whose functions were both administrative and political in nature. This political arrangement was later abandoned for local advisory council which had about ten unpaid members. District officers served as chairman of the local advisory councils. In Western Region, there was the introduction of council manager system in April 1973. Local government staff was equated with those of civil servants in order to attract better and qualified personnel.

(Oyewo, 1987:7-8) expanded the function of the management of the local government council manager system to include:

- To formulate policies, plan and schemes.
- To make bye-laws relating to its jurisdiction
- To erect local ordinances and regulations, and
- To govern the inhabitants under its jurisdiction.

It is important to note that the council manager system excluded traditional rulers completely from local government administration. Ceremonial heads were appointed to head councils in their domains. In the Eastern part of Nigeria the introduction of country councils, local government and local administration was adopted after; the civil war of 1967-1970.

Decentralization as a concept in political science was introduced into the region in order to speed up reconstruction effort after the war. The Northern Region also witnessed a dynamic change in their local government administration and control. Local government authority, local government areas etc replaced automatically the native authority system. There was also the abolition of provincial administrators in some local councils. Local government at this time was not based on popular participation.

In 1976 the federal military government under the auspices of General Olusegun Obasanjo improved on systemizing local government structure in Nigeria. The reform was known as 1976 local government reform put in place by the federal military government. Brigadier Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, the then Chief of staff supreme military headquarters of the regime while commenting on the reforms surmised that:

“The defects of previous local government systems are too well known to deserve further elaboration here. The state governments have continued to encroach upon what normally have been the exclusive preserves of local government lack of adequate funds and appropriate institutions had continued to make local government ineffective and effectual. Moreover, the staffing arrangement system had been inadequate. Excessive politicking had made even the modest progress impossible (FRN; 1976:1).

Another uniquely thing about the local government was that changes were made both in the areas of structuration and administration. It provided for a total of 301 local governments through reforms made local government a constitutently recognized third tier of government Ola (1979:15-24) described the reform as “a revolutionary trend which removed local movement form the exclusive ambit of state governments and attempts to give its own place, a place where it can stand on its own feet”.

Babanginda also introduced a lot changes into local government administration, under his regime new local government were created. The 1988 Civil Service reforms initiated by the regime brought local government administration in line with the operation of the Federal and state level secretary to the local government was made a political appointment and local government conducted on non-party and party bases was introduced.

More importantly the regime introduced presentialism on the local level which gives room for separation of political function in terms of administration.

Sanni Abacha on his own part replaced secretary to local government with career officers and appointed caretaker committees into Local councils instead of elected official he met when he assumed the mantle of leadership.

Local Government in the Second and Fourth Republics

Omotoso (2000:23) espoused that the 1976 local government reforms and agenda provided the basis for local government operations in the second republic. The constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria came into force on October, 1979. Section Seven sub-section one of the constitution states that:

“The system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed; and accordingly, to the government of every state shall ensure the existence under a law which provides

for the establishment structure, composition, finance and functions of such comments (FRN; 1979:13).

For the first time in the history of Nigeria that there was constitutional unification of local government system and agenda.

Amalgams of functions were assigned to local government administration in the seventh schedule of this new motivation brought about by the 1979 constitution. The constitution made provision for local governments have a share in the Federal Account with the state and federal government. In consonance with this aforementioned statement section one forty nine sub-section 2 of the 1979 constitution states that:

“Any account standing to the credit of the Federal Account shall be distributed among the Federal and State Governments, and the local government council in each state, on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly.

Local government faced certain obstacle during this period as there is dissolution of elected local government council and their consequent replacement to avoid vacuum by the nominees of Governors in various states. There was political interference in the local government functions through assistance rendered by local government service commission.

With military struck on December 31, 1983. The fourth Republic was ushered in on May 29, 1999. The 1999 constitutional provision for local government administration bear semblance to that of the 1979 constitution. The problem encountered during this period is on the issue of appointment of local government secretaries among politicians like what operate in both federal and state level or to retain the career officers as secretaries. Certain amendment was made for efficiency and effective running of local government. The 1999 provided for an increment in the local government councils area to 774.

Local Government as an Instrument of Nation – Building and Development

Local government has proved over the years that they are instrument of Nation – building and development that affect the state at large.

Local government has achieved this through:

- Urbanization & Community Development
- Availability of labour
- Project Initiation
- Commercialization of agriculture
- Modernization of technology
- Administrative efficiency
- Political Education

Essentially, the evolution of local government sought to

promote local freedom and autonomy, national unity, efficiency administration and promote grassroot democracy through proper constellation and political education.

- Encourage initiative and leadership potentials through organization of educative workshops & seminars.
- Economic planning and developing moralization development.

Local Government Administration Achievements and Millenium Development Goals: Major Encumbrances

Local governments in Nigeria face a number of challenges which hinder them from contributing meaningfully to the achievement of the MDGs, but three of the major encumbrances has been explicated in the study.

Deliberate creation of poverty

Adedeji (1972) identifies finance as elixir necessary to break what in his terminology is “the vicious circle of poverty of local government” and make local governments relevant in the country’s development process. Although the financial or fiscal position of local governments in Nigeria has improved considerably in recent times due to enhanced allocation from the federation account, this development cannot without major institutional reforms be translated into an effective means for local governments to contribute in any significant sense to local development as identified by (Abubakar, 1993). Abubakar (1993:38) further stated that: since a large chunk of developmental funds for local government come from recurrent budget surpluses, there and that is nothing usually left as running expenses after taking care of recurrent expenditures which incidentally are growing daily for reasons not totally unconnected with the new system of local government being operated in the

Meanwhile, the constitutional provision for ‘State Joint Local Government Account (JAAC) negates direct funding of local government from the Federation Account. Commenting on state government’s interference on the finances of local governments in Nigeria. Onah (2004:15) affirms that state governments do not stop at not remitting the 10 percent statutory allocation; they also tamper with the 20 percent federal allocation made to local government via the state Joint Local Government Account. The resultant effect of the state government’s insurgence on the finances of the local government is that despite enhanced statutory allocation to local governments, most of them are left with little money to execute capital projects that in fact would contribute to poverty alleviation in the rural communities, thereby achieving MDGS becomes a herculean task. Poverty and underdevelopment in the developing countries remain rural phenomena. This fact was emphasized by Satterth Waite (2004:5)

thus: It is perhaps stating the obvious that deprivations faced by “the poor” are experienced locally- inadequate food

intakes, inadequate asset bases, daily challenges to health in poor quality homes, the inadequacies in the provision for water, sanitation and drainage, the difficulties in getting proper health care (including emergency treatment for acute injuries or illness) and in getting children into schools (or in affording to keep them there), the long hours worked, in often dangerous conditions.

Financial and administrative lack of autonomy

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria does not adequately guarantee the autonomy of local government. Section 7(1) of the Constitution provides that: "The system of local government by a democratically elected local government council 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". However, the Constitution contains no explicit provisions guaranteeing the tenure of local government councils as it provided for the President, state governors and the legislatures (both federal and state) (Ezeani, 2003). As a result of this singular omission, the various state legislatures now determine the tenure of its elected councils and the result is the lack of uniformity of tenure across the country of elected local government officials. While a few states graciously grant local governments a 3-year tenure, the majority 63 operate a 2-year tenure, some 2 ½ year, others even less than 2 years. The tenure of 2 years or less is hardly enough time for a council to settle down, plan, execute and monitor programs and projects that can have meaningful impact on the lives of the people in their locality. More worrisome is the unconstitutional and unceremonious termination of the tenure of elected councils by the Governors and legislatures before the expiration of the mandate given by the people during elections and the subsequent replacement of elected councils with Caretaker Committees composed of unelected and selected individuals and political associates which appears very undemocratic in nature because of legitimisation.

Menace of corruption

The issues of corruption local governments in Nigeria have overtime contributed in no small measures to the poor standard of living of the standard of the people in various local government across the country. Lawal and Oladunjoye (2010) argument advanced by the duo is that the problem of corruption exists in almost every local government in Nigeria. To be precise, the following amount could not be accounted for, seven million naira for payment vouchers, one million naira was paid out and the contractors never touched the work. In fact, the Auditors report revealed that a total sum of nine million naira was outstanding as personal advances against local government officials. The state Governors are not exempted from the looting and corruption taking place in the local governments system. Most of the Governors as

we stated earlier have exploited the constitutional provision for the establishment of Joint State and Local Government Account (JSLGA) to control local 66 government funds and use it as they like. It is hardly surprising that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) alleged that 31 out of 36 state Governors have tampered with local government council funds (Ukiwo, 2010)

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the third-tier of government is an important inventive structuration in nation building and development in modern democracy through the various innovations and functions. The third-tier of government is democratic in its orientation by inculcating the principles, tenets and ethos in the polity by achieving democratic prospect whimsically and capriciously.

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