



Carib.J.Sci.Tech

LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA

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Keywords: Local governance,
Service delivery, Nigeria

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under **Caribbean Journal of
Science and Technology**

ISSN 0799-3757

<http://caribjstech.com/>

Abstracts

Governance at the local level plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness and provision of public goods to the vast rural population. Available facts show that more than seventy percent of population in Nigeria live in rural areas, where local government is constitutionally empowered to provide social and public services such as roads, water supply, schools, electricity, health clinics etc. This work therefore, assessed the impact/effectiveness of local government on the provision of public goods in Nigeria. The study adopted a historical and descriptive approach in data collection as well as basic needs approach as its theoretical foundation. The study therefore revealed that elected leaders at the local level have not been responsive to the basic needs of the people due to bad leadership, lack of accountability and transparency. The study also revealed that, lack of funds occasioned by low budgetary allocation, restricted revenue sources available to local government and inability to effectively utilise its internal sources of revenue generation had impacted negatively on the provision of public goods at local level. Based on this, the study has recommended that leadership at the local level should be committed to the course of good governance and such leaders must be elected by the people and not imposed by the higher authority. Also, the financial grip of local government by state governments should be severed to enable government at local level meet her basic need provisions.

Introduction

Around the world, developing and developed countries altogether have observed that decentralized service delivery can result in quicker benefits than with centralized systems. In many countries, central or national government ministries responsible for service delivery have created field offices and delegated more decisions and resources to their local staff which is commonly referred to as deconcentration. In principle, a well-deconcentrated government system is mostly able to increase the amount of resources available for public services and can allocate these resources across the national scene in accordance with where local needs are greatest. But while deconcentrated units are potentially able to adopt more efficient management practices and link more closely with local stakeholders, they are unable to achieve the same degree of responsiveness and downward accountability that is possible in a public sector where public services are delivered by elected local governments.

The most acceptable form of decentralization is through devolution, in which elected local governments are empowered, either by the authority of general competence in certain policy areas, or by the transfer of specific delivery function through a constitutional arrangement. Therefore, the global trend has been toward the development of elected forms of local government that have, in addition to their vertical accountability, a strong public service delivery role and direct accountability to its citizens. The weight of public service responsibilities and the degree of autonomy acquired by local government varied greatly from country to country. Local government are well-suited and need to be more empowered to ensure effective service delivery. No wonder in recent decades, national governments have increasingly shared the responsibility for service provision with local governments, in a variety of intergovernmental public arrangements that are aim to increase the accountability and responsiveness of service delivery. In Nigeria local government is constitutionally empowered to provide effective service delivery of public goods to the vast rural population. This work therefore, is to assess the impact/effectiveness of such provisions by local governance in Nigeria.

The Study Location

Nigeria is situated on the Gulf of Guinea in West Africa between latitudes 4° and 14° north and longitudes 3° and 14° east (see Fig. 1). Its neighbours are Benin, Niger, Cameroon and Chad Republics. There are 36 states in Nigeria, including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. The country operates federal system of government. Before its independence on October 1, 1960, the territory now known as The Federal Republic of Nigeria was under the British colonial rule. Today, the country has grown tremendously to a population size of about 152,217,341 people. Nigeria is an heterogeneous society with multiple cultural, ethnic and lingual diversities. A significant size of the population of the country is employed in the public sector. About 70% of the population lives in rural areas where local government is primarily responsible for the provision of social and public services (Ekpe, Daniel & Ekpe, 2013).

Conceptual Clarification

Local governance plays an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of service on public goods at the local level. It promotes decentralization or the deconcentration of the centre. This is vital because the modern central government is becoming overburdened, overloaded, over-bureaucratized and under-responsive. Local governance helps in overcoming these problem especially reducing administrative obstacles in service delivery. Supporting the essence of service provision such as local roads, water supply, health services, and schools for local needs, Adamolekun *et al.* 1988: 2 poignantly observes:

The division of responsibilities for public services is generally built on the broad concept that some services need to be established to provide a common national standard for all (for example, health and defence) and that these should therefore be controlled by the central government; that others are best provided in the broader sub-divisions of the (nation) rather than at the centre (for instance, regional state planning for economic development); and that others again are best administered in accordance to local needs and therefore should be decentralised down to local level.



Fig . 1: Nigeria - The Study Location

The above observation shows that communities are activated by problems of local concern. Local governance is justified by the need and the convenience for local concerns and sensitivities to be addressed by local peoples who shares a community of interest to the exclusion of individuals or group of individuals, who are not involved in such local concerns. Therefore, Mills (1975) observes that the very object of having a local representation is in order that those who have any interest in common which they do not share with the general body of their countrymen may manage that joint interest by themselves. Akindele (2004) sees local government institution as a mechanism for mobilizationally integrating the grassroots for the management and governance of local affairs, satisfaction of the needs of the local people through effective service delivery and efficient and effective mobilization of human and material resources for effective and efficient service delivery. This represents the view of the majority of Nigerians who are of the opinion that local governance is best placed to engage with local communities in Nigeria to understand their needs, priorities and preferences in order to make well-informed choice about how resources should be spent in the best interest of local people. Local councils are also best placed to manage the difficult trade-offs which inevitably have to be made when making choices about local services. Explaining these choices to the public is crucial to achieving well-being and

local satisfaction. But, when accountability is blurred, clear explanation becomes difficult, as local people may be uncertain as to who is responsible for addressing this local social problems.

Eminue, (1999) sees local governance as a veritable instrument most strategically placed for stimulating grassroots development and bringing about rural transformation. He commented further that not only Nigeria, but third world countries as a whole have also come to appreciate the fact that the only meaningful and sustainable form of development is that which is (endogenous) i.e. development which emanates from the will and desires of the people rather than one imposed from outside (exogenous) and that the more superior developmental approach is the “bottom-up” rather than the “top-down” or directive approach.

In the light of the above, in Nigeria political structure local governance or local government is the third-tier of government, after the state government at the state level and the federal government at the national level. Local government is, therefore governance at the grassroot and is, consequently, very much in contact with the local communities. Therefore, given this structural set up, local governance by implication, both in theory and practice is in a position to play a strong role in the enhancement of service delivery in its domain, (Ibok, 2012).

Theoretical Foundation

The study is predicated on the basic need approach. This is one of the major approaches to the measurement of absolute poverty in developing countries especially among the rural poor. The basic need was introduced by the International Labour Organization’s World employment Conference in 1976. The conference proposed the satisfaction of basic human needs as the overriding objectives of national and international development policy. It attempts to define the absolute minimum resources necessary for long-term physical well-being, usually in terms of consumption goods/service delivery. This approach was endorsed by governments, workers and employers association from all over the world. A traditional list of such needs include; food, water, shelter, sanitation, education, public transport, health care etc. (Denton, 1990, Richard, 1976).

The fact remains that, while for the realization of these priorities development concepts are necessary, one observed a return to micro-economics with its focus on specific problems at the local levels. Obviously, all politics are local and in the end all problems have to be solved locally. So the aim of this approach is to raise productivity/service delivery by providing basic needs to the rural poor. It is also argued that direct provision of basic human needs by local government in the form of education, health and other basic needs leads to higher level of production and well-being of the rural people. This theory is therefore suitable because Nigerian government just like other countries of the world recognised the need to establish local government as a third tier arrangements saddled with functional responsibility supported by financial capability for effective service delivery at the local level.

Local Governance and Service Delivery in Nigeria

In African states, there is a serious crisis because of their poor performance records. This poor performance is glaring in the area of non-delivery of public goods and services such as education, health, pipe-borne water, telecommunication and other infrastructural facilities. Since states are ineffectual, incompetent and overloaded, attention has been shifted to embrace local governance as a way out.

In Nigeria, government after government have tried to grapple with the problem of making local governments effective, efficient, development-oriented, people-focused, and result oriented. This was actualised via local government reforms of 1976 coupled with other administrative reforms. Under the reforms, local governments are constitutionally recognised as third tier of government in Nigeria as well as official beneficiaries from the Federation Accounts. The effect of the reforms was that it led to the increase in local government powers, enhanced status, financial resources, potential for self-sustenance at grassroots levels and a new approach to local government activity involving local participation in decision-making and effective service delivery (Ibok, and Tom, 2010 and Ekpe, 2006).

For local government to effectively provide essential services at the grassroot, enabling environment most especially funds must be available to carry out its assigned responsibilities. In Nigeria, aside from other common problems, non provision of enough funds to local government has hindered effective performance by the local council. It is a popular fact that the expansion, development and improvement of existing services and the introduction of new services are necessary for the continued existence

of local government. But without enough funds to finance existing and new projects and to buy new equipment and maintain old ones, local governance will be inhibited in its efforts to provide a better and more extensive/effective services for local population.

An in-dept examination of local government performance in its service delivery reveals that its expenditure has constantly surpassed the potential for revenue sources arising from a great chasm between their needs and their fiscal capacity. This has largely been due to mismatch nature of their revenue rights and fiscal jurisdiction with the duties and functions constitutionally allocated to them. Suffice to say that local governance has failed in its effective service delivery due to a number of reasons which merit our consideration.

Obstacle to Effective Service Delivery by Local Governance in Nigeria

More than 70% of population in Nigeria lives in rural areas where local governments are constitutionally empowered (Section 4 second schedule of the 1999 and 2011 amended constitution of the Federal republic of Nigeria) to provide most social and public services. This entails that governance at the local level plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of public goods provision to the vast rural population (Ibok, 2012). Understandably, the way of governance does affect the efficiency of public goods provision, meaning that over the years certain factors have been identified as hampering effective and efficient service delivery by local governance in Nigeria. These problems are:

- (i) Problem of inadequate finance: Finance is the bedrock of any organization. In local government this is teething. Aside from the fact that statutory allocations and grants from the federal and state governments to councils are inadequate, the problem is exacerbated by the low revenue generation capacity of the council. Associated with this problem is also exacerbated by frequent sundry deductions by the federal and state governments from their monthly allocations. Worst still is failure of most state governments to fulfil their monthly statutory obligations to local government by outright refusal to remit 10% internally generated revenue accrued to the state monthly. In some situations, it has become so bad that many local councils cannot pay staff salaries not to talk about basic need provisions.
- (ii) Absence/undeveloped revenue sources: Where sources of revenue to local council are even viable, poor attitude to work by revenue agents hindered proper collection of revenue notably laziness at their revenue point. Worth mentioning too is insincerity by some council functionaries. Some revenue agents collect revenue without remitting it to council's coffers. While others are in the habit of putting fake claims they never incurred. All these traumatize the already weak financial base of the council (Duru, 2004).
- (iii) Problem of corruption – Corruption has become the order of the day in Nigeria polity. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria local councils. There have been glaring cases of embezzlement and misappropriation of the councils' funds by the official of the council. The most pathetic and painful is the sharing of federal allocation meant for the development of the area by council lords and stalwarts. These unethical conduct has rendered local council financially impotence, hence incapable of providing basic needs to its citizens.
- (iv) Problems of political interference. This has detrimental effects on local governance as most often, public policies of the councils are politicized to serve selfish interests at the expense of general interest of the people. Appointments in the councils are sometimes based on political patronage and partly affiliation thereby creating room for mediocre and non-performance.
- (v) Frequent changes in council leadership. Unstable political leadership in the local council has witnessed arbitrary removal of local government executives. Most pathetic is removal at will the elected officials and replaced them with appointed care-taker committees and sole administrators. This appointee serves the interest of those that appointed them instead of the interest of the local people.
- (vi) Absence of accountability. Accountability is a powerful instrument for effective and efficient administration. It prevents abuse of power on the part of the chief executive and his team. Accountability ensures that the public is satisfied that the government is being run efficiently and effectively. It conjures the image that the governed are not being exploited by those in power. Although there are enough constitutional provisions and administrative guidelines to checkmate government at local level, but such provisions have been jettisoned in all ramifications as the local people no longer have confidants on their leaders because of lack of accountability – especially the common practice of sharing federal allocation meant for the provision of basic need to the people among council executives and their patrons. A situation which has generated agitation among Nigerians, thereby calling for the abrogation of local government which is seen as a conduit pipe for stealing council money by few criminals.

Conclusion

Governance at local level plays a vital role in ensuring effective service delivery and also being accountable to the people. The success of this depends on good governance which flows logically from the concept of governance. It revolves around the responsibility of governments at the local level to meet the needs of the masses as opposed to selected groups of people in the society. Governance becomes good when it is operated in accordance with legal and ethical principles as conceived by society. Good governance promotes equity, transparency, accountability and the rule of law in a manner that is effective, efficient and enduring (Ibok, 2012).

It was believed that with the emergence of democratically governance at the local level the rural people would be in a position to elect their leaders who would be in a position to cater for their needs by ensuring improved service delivery. But the reality on ground proved otherwise. The greatest threats to good governance in our local councils hinges on poor leadership, lack of accountability and corruption. Poor governance which characterised our local governance holds back and distorts effective service delivery with its negative impact on the overall development of the Nigerian society. Since local governance is indispensable to the overall development of the rural areas, it should assume better responsibility in service delivery so that rural people can feel a sense of belonging.

Recommendations

To ensure responsive governance, local government executive must be elected by the people and not superimposed by the ruling party or state governor. The local people should be incorporated in policy formation/implementation of their domain.

To ensure accountability, council officials should be responsible and accountable to the people they claim to represent. State government should be compelled to relinquish their 10% internally generated revenue to the local council to avoid their overdependence on statutory allocation.

State government interference/diversion of federal statutory allocation through state – local government Joint Account should be discouraged.

Local council should effectively utilise their internally generated revenue sources.

There should be monitoring and evaluation unit aim at measuring efficiency and effectiveness.

To stem corruption and embezzlement, all financial transaction of the council must be audited and publicized.

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