

Local Government Administration as an Instrument for National Development: A Catalyst for Development

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Abstract

This study adopted the descriptive survey method of research to examine the effect of local government administration and national development in Nigeria. The study employed conceptual, theoretical and empirical review. The study found that local government administration has significant positive effect on national development in Nigeria. The study concluded that the application of modern administration system whose human resources practice would properly align to local government system the use of international best practice would improve local government administration and national development in Nigeria resulting in the global service. This will place Nigerians as a global player. The study therefore, recommended among others that local government administration should invest in human capital in the form of training for self sustainability development and local government administration should be highly observed for best practice in modern administration in the local government system.

Keywords: Local Government Administration, Instrument, National Development, Catalyst, Development

Introduction

Man as a social animal is preoccupied with the onerous and challenging task of enhancing the material conditions of the people living within the contour of his environment. From the Stone Age through the Middle Ages to the present dispensation, man, as the engine of growth, development and social transmutation is engrossed with how to improve his environmental conditions for harmonious coalescence, and productive self-reproduction. This is particularly the primary task of the political man.

As a corollary to the above, Ejiofor (2007:2) remarked as follows: Groups and schools of thought have grappled with the objectives of the political man in different ways and have defined their causes and effects on society in their own ways. The results of their efforts are a cluster of - varying structures, institutions and political ideas, which have made all the difference between communities of men or political systems.

Thus, when weighed on the scale, man's behavior outweighs non-human ingredients in the shaping of the political system and is ultimately, the chief decisive factor in that system. The analysis above explains differential development and transformation being recorded by different societies. It also captures the intent and propensity of the various reforms carried out in Nigeria's local government system. These reforms primarily aim at strengthening the capacity of the local government system to carry out effective and sustainable development of the rural communities.

Basically, the history of development of local government system points to the fact that local government passed through two major administrative phases — from deconcentration to devolution of authority. While the colonial and pre — 1976 era witnessed largely the former, the post 1976 local government administration is characterized by devolution of authority aimed at situating the system as third tier in the hierarchy of governments.

Indeed the relevance of the local government system in the development of the grassroots cannot be underestimated. As a functional and integral part of governance in Nigeria, section 7(3) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides as follows: It shall be the duty of a local government council within the state to participate in economic planning and development of the area referred to in subsection (2) of this section and to this end an economic planning board shall be established by a law enacted by the House of Assembly of the state.

Thus, part III, Fourth Schedule (Section 7) of the 1999 Constitution enunciated the following as functions of a local government council:

- a) the consideration and the making of recommendations to a state commission on economic planning or any similar body on
 - i. the economic development of the state, particularly in so far as the areas of authority of the Council and of the State are affected, and
 - ii. proposals made by the said commission or body;
- b) collection of rates, radio and television licenses;
- c) establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds and homes for the destitute or infirm;
- d) licensing of bicycles, trucks (other than mechanically propelled trucks), canoes, wheel barrows and carts;

- e) establishment, maintenance and regulation -of slaughter houses, slaughter slabs, - market, motor parks and public conveniences;
 - f) construction and maintenance of roads, streets, street lightings, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces, or such public facilities as may be prescribed from time to time by the House of Assembly of a State;
 - g) naming of roads and streets and numbering of houses;
 - h) provision and maintenance of public conveniences, sewage and refuse disposal;
 - i) Registration of all births, deaths and marriage;
 - j) assessment of privately owned houses or tenements for the purpose of levying such rates as may be prescribed by the House of Assembly of a State; and
 - k) Control and regulation of
 - l) out-door advertising and hoarding,
 - iii. movement and keeping of pets of all description, cii) shops and kiosks.
 - iv. restaurants, bakeries and other places for sale of food to the public,
 - v. laundries, and
 - vi. licensing, regulation and control of the sale of liquor.
2. The functions of a local government council shall include participation of such council in the Government of a state as respects the following matters
- a) the provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education;
 - b) the development of agriculture and natural resources, other than the exploitation of minerals;
 - c) the provision and maintenance of health services and
 - d) such other functions as may be conferred on a local government council by the House of Assembly of the State.

As indicated above, the responsibilities assigned to local government councils are enormous. However, the revenue accruing from the Federation Account monthly, if properly managed, will go a long way in enhancing sustainable development at the rural communities. Herein lies the relevance of prudent management of human and material resources. Indeed, the key to national development lies in good governance, transparent leadership and public accountability especially at the grassroots level. It is crucial to remark that development is man-centered; it is integrative and driven by human commitment, vision, ingenuity and prudence. In this paper, we shall explore the synergy between transparency in management of revenue accruing to the local government councils and sustainable national development. The paper is divided into sections as follows: introduction, theoretical perspective,

Theoretical Perspective

There are profundities of scholarly writings on local government administration. Most of these intellectual expositions anchor their analysis on Eurocentric /descriptive theoretical frameworks such as systems analysis, structural-functional analysis, human relations school etc. These “analytic frameworks” merely give a bird’s eye view of the internal process that underlies the character of the local government councils.

Our concern in this paper is to unfold the interplay of forces that truncate efficient, prudent and transparent management of the resources accruing to the local government councils and hence enunciate plausible and practical ways out of this unfortunate situation. Thus, we shall predicate our analysis within the contour of some basic propositions emanating from Marxian analysis of social production of material values as espoused in the Marxian political economy paradigm. As aptly noted by Nikitin (1983:16-26):

- i. Political economy studies the basis of the development of society. It is therefore the science of the development of socio-production, i.e, economic relations between people. It clarifies the laws governing production, distribution, exchange and consumption of the material wealth in human society at various stages of its development.
- ii. The method of political economy is that of dialectical materialism which presupposes, first, investigation of the production relations in the process of their emergence and development.
- iii. People produce material wealth jointly- in groups, socially, rather than on their own.
- iv. People’s relations to the means of production determine their position and place in production and the mode of the distribution of the products of labour.

In line with the above, we state as follows:

The primary need of man is food and the way man go about satisfying this need is largely dependent on his innate production potentials and the structure of his personality.

- i. A society which encourages and rewards production ingenuities manifests high level of production capacities and over time institutionalizes competition and excellence arising from increasing cultural secularization and social atomization
- ii. As a direct off-shoot of the preceding proposition, the prevailing economic conditions improve the

- structure of personality from pleasure principle to high need achievement.
- iii. However, societies that manifest low level of cultural secularization thrive on primordial proclivities. Most of the citizens operate at pleasure principle and hence emphasize consumption and distribution rather than production
 - iv. Such a society chums out leaders whose existence is largely dependent on unproductive traditional political jobbers who make a living by carting away public wealth.
 - v. In addition, in a situation where there is low production and much consumption, the leadership thrives on reckless and unregulated importation of foreign commodities and hence institutionalizes the polity as a consumer nation.
 - vi. Again, this blind and chaotic crave to consume, vitiates man's capacity and capability to reason beyond appropriation. Over time, struggle for public offices conduce to struggle to appropriate.
 - vii. More fundamental is the institutionalization of "supportive prebendal warlords", whose parasitic instinct and penchant for primitive accumulation drain the public wealth, truncate development plans and entrench politics of settlement and allocation.

The above particularly explains the lot of most local government councils developing states. Sharing the money is now the norm as the political gladiators invest on political godsons to recreate wealth. Thus most local government leaderships, given the culture of the political landscape in Nigeria are satisfied with sharing of monthly allocations. No strategic planning is done and what is perceived as development are mere artifacts that further stultify sustainable human development. In the midst of these, transparency in governance becomes a wishful thinking.

Development Explained

The term development is generally used to describe the process of economic and social transformation within countries. It is thus associated, essentially by liberal and neo-liberal scholarship as a synonym to improvement in Gross National Product as well as Gross Domestic Product. Never the less, developing economies were encouraged to maintain at least a 6% annual growth in GNP so as to eradicate unemployment, poverty and general debilitating factors associated with underdevelopment.

However, the above assumption was seriously challenged particularly in the 1970s when most Less Developed Countries recorded annual GDP growth of 6% and above and yet remained stagnated and submerged by poverty, unemployment, low standard of living, hyper-inflation, malnourishment, political instability and low-need achievement.

Thenceforth emphasis shifted from mere growth in GNP to pursuit of development based on: growth with redistribution approach and basic needs approach.

Several decades of experimenting with the two-pronged approach rather exacerbated the problems and called for total re-examination of the whole issue of development. Meanwhile, Todaro (1992) conceives development as a multi-dimensional process involving the re-organization and re-orientation of the entire economic and social system. Seers (1969:3), for instance, was so pre-occupied with the ingredients of 'development that he appears to have forgotten the primary role of human factor in the process of development. Thus, Cairncross (1961:250) correctly noted that the key to development lies in men's minds, in the institutions in which their thinking finds expression and in the play of opportunities on ideas and institutions. While corroborating the views expressed above, Mabogunje (1981:6) noted that development is essentially a human issue, a concern with the capacity of individuals to realize their inherent potentials and effectively cope with the changing circumstances of their lives.

Nevertheless, Frank (1969), Amin (1973), Rodney (1982), Ake (2001), Gana (1989), Nnoli (1981), etc have in their various writings unleashed a deserved and unmitigated critique of the modernization persuasion. Among other, they noted that the modernization paradigm abstracted from history and concluded by presenting a historical and logically inconsistent analysis. They noted that the modernization theorists, in their quest to twist existing historical material facts, ended up ignoring and/or glossing over the history of the historian. Particularly, Nnoli (1981), Ake (2001) and Rodney (1982) observed that development is multi-faceted and man-centered. In fact Ake (2001) observed that development that commits us to wholesale imitation of others leads to a wholesale repudiation of our state of being. Similarly Nnoli (1981) conceives development as a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and the society interact with their physical, biological and inter-human environments transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large and being transformed in the process.

After a critical interrogation of the above, we re-defined development as man-instigated socio-economic and political transformation of self and entire structure/institutions of a given political system to a comparatively low and/or present level to a more qualitative and/or remarkably-improved form. These transformations have at its wake, improvements of the living conditions and the material standing of the citizenry. It pointedly improves man's potentials and capabilities and subsequently eliminates and/or reduces poverty, penury, inequality, unemployment and generally enhances the condition for human existence and self-reproduction (Okolie, 2001).

In sum, development is innately associated with total transmutation of man and entire social structure from the present form to remarkably improved status (Okolie, 2009:7).

Thus a polity is said to be developing if:

- i. there is improving human capacity to manipulate ecological factors for advancement of material conditions of the citizenry;
- ii. the available human capital including skills are constantly improving;
- iii. there are ample job opportunities where human capital can be expended;
- iv. the available human capital can correspondingly create social capital for societal reproduction;
- v. the available human capital are sufficiently engaged in productive ventures where they can continue to improve their innate capacities;
- vi. the available human capital are sufficient enough to advance remarkable change that is of qualitative nature;
- vii. the visible changes being recorded in the society are created and sustained by the human capital autochthonous to the society;
- viii. the poverty level is considerably low so as not to reduce the orientation of the subsisting human capital to the “problem of the stomach”;
- ix. the level of social atomization, cultural secularization and structure of personality is strikingly high; and
- x. greater number of the population exhibits high capacity for independent action, ingenuity attuned towards making history.

Rational For Local Government

As government at local government exercised through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas, the existence of local government has been justified on some number of grounds. These according to Enemu (2005:318-9) include:

The existence of local government has been justified on the following grounds:

- i. It provides the people a platform to conduct their own affairs in line the local needs, aspirations resources and customs which they alone understand better than any other outsider.
- ii. It provides a framework for mobilizing and sustaining popular zeal and initiative in development.
- iii. Local government serves as a hedge against over-concentration of power at the centre which often leads to tyranny.
- iv. Local government functions as a two-way channel of communication between the local population and the central government. It aggregates local interests and transmits these to the centre and also keeps the local population informed about central policies and programmes.
- v. Local government can serve as an invaluable sociopolitical laboratory for testing new proposals for government organization and sound economic policies. When such policies fail, the cost could be much less than failure at the national level. If however, it is successful, it can be replicated across the country with minimum risk.

Popular grassroots participation in local government either as an official or as a voter is excellent training for voting in national elections and holding national public office. By so doing local government provides an ever-fresh source of good citizens and leaders for the nation and also serves to promote the culture of democracy. The above can only be achieved if the managers of the system are guided by the principles of good governance, ethics, transparency and public accountability.

Public Administration, transparency and accountability in Local Government Administration

The central issue in public administration as outlined by Nnoli (2003:245) includes:

1. To maintain the incumbent government and thus generating goodwill for it from the majority of the population.
2. Informing the public at large about government programs and what progress is being made to realize them.
3. Provision of employment for the population.
4. Identify all the resources available to government from within its territory and managing the resources adequately.
5. Organizing and provision of social welfare services to the population.
6. Planning of the nation’s economic life in both the short term and long term, - taking care of finances of the society.

Meanwhile, effective actualization of the above is largely dependent on the subsisting level of transparency and accountability exhibited by the council leadership. By transparency, we refer to a state of being accountable. It fundamentally implies openness and fairness. Thus transparency refers to unfettered access by the public, a

timely and reliable information on decisions and performance in the public sector. Indeed, transparency is rooted in demonstrated integrity. It correlates to conscience. Integrity refers to honesty or trustworthiness in the discharge of official duties, serving as an antithesis to corruption or the abuse of office.

Basically, accountability refers to liability to be called on to render an account; the obligation to bear the consequences for failure to perform as expected. As noted by McCandless (2009:1) “accountability is the obligation to demonstrate and take responsibility for performance in the light of commitment and expected outcomes”. It is thus obligation on the part of public official to meet stated performance objectives. Thus taken together, integrity, transparency and accountability in public administration suggest probity, impartiality, fairness, honesty, truthfulness and objective sense of purpose. Indeed, these constitute the founding principles of public administration. It is therefore expected that in local government administration, the leadership must be guided by these principles if the grassroots will contribute significantly to national development. Meanwhile, these concepts are innately tied together and no one can possibly exist independent of the other. Integrity for example, provides the basis for transparency and accountability and transparency without accountability becomes meaningless and mocks the entire public administration. Again accountability depends on transparency or having the necessary information. Moreover, transparency and accountability without integrity may not end up serving the public interest.

The bane of national development is largely the glorification of fraud, indiscipline, banditry and appropriation at the local government level. Hence integrity, transparency and accountability are held more in the breach. An abnormal act becomes a glorified norm and what is adjudged the global best practice as rooted in the principles of responsive, responsible and good governance become abhorred for the following reasons:

- i. Most of the people that found their way into local government administration are unemployed, visionless and dependent surrogates whose primary concern had never transcended looting of public treasury.
- ii. The low level of production and the recycling of unproductive and criminally- minded godfathers vitiate development and positive political culture that nurtures integrity, accountability and transparency in public administration.
- iii. Most of the beneficiaries of “godfathers’ largess” are “the wretched of the earth” whose major preoccupation remains how to satisfy the need of the stomach. Such a group of leaders cannot reason beyond mundane appropriation as they thrive on rapacious and unabashed exploitation and appropriation.
- iv. More so, given the low level of material attainment of some of these leaders, they manifest disparage psychic motor and mental apparatus which leave them on the brink of insanity rooted in unquenchable mass selfishness.

Thus local government administration rather than providing supportive base for sustainable human development, serve as institutions for concocted circulation and recycling of poverty, unemployment, waste and desecration of the sanctity of man.

Conclusion

The study investigates the Synergy between Local government administration and national development in Nigeria. We explored the theoretical and practical meaning of the term development, accountability, transparency and integrity. We noted that there are still room for growth in local government administration as an instrument for social and national development in Nigeria. For this demand that the state government and grassroots (people) should strive to create and improve operation environment for socio-economic and national development for the rural dwellers satisfaction. The study concluded that application of modern administration system whose human resources practice would properly align to local government system the use of international best practice local government administration and national development in Nigeria resulting in the global service. This will place Nigerians as a global player.

Recommendations

1. That local government administrator should invest in human capital in the area of training for self sustainability development.
2. That leadership should be exemplary and public office holders should aim at leaving lasting legacies on the sound of our time.
3. Local government administrators should be highly observed for best practice in modern administration in the local government system.
4. Because of globalization effect the issues of self reliance in development on building capacity for self sustainability for national development.

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